



HM Courts &
Tribunals Service



Vulnerability Action Plan

October 2023 update

How we are going to make coming to court or
a tribunal better for vulnerable people



EasyRead version



HM Courts &
Tribunals Service

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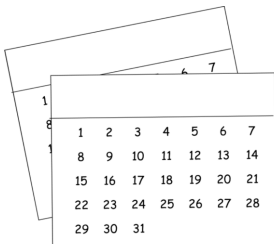
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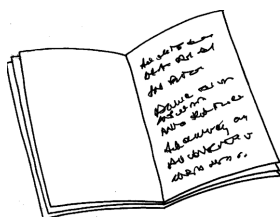
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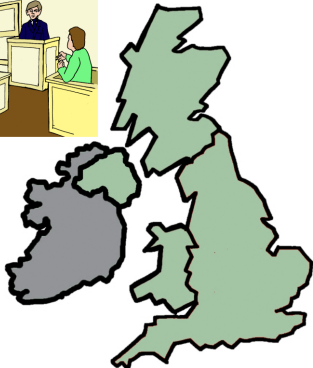
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About HMCTS

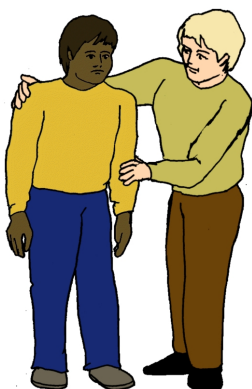


HMCTS stands for His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service.

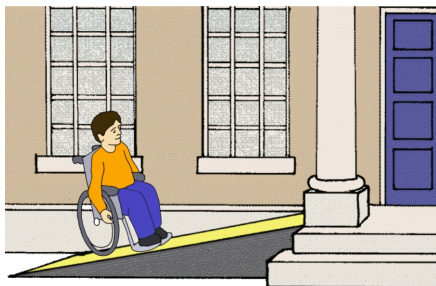
We run courts in England and Wales and tribunals in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to give people and businesses access to justice.



We know that coming to court can feel scary for **vulnerable people**.



We say people are **vulnerable** when they have a difficulty and need extra support. This could be a disability, mental health condition or an experience which has made someone feel unsafe.



We want our courts and tribunals to be **accessible** and feel safe for **vulnerable** people.



When something is **accessible** everyone can use it.

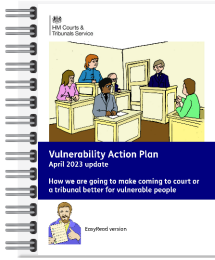


Our **Vulnerability Action Plan** tells you how we will make coming to courts and tribunals better for vulnerable people.



We promise to listen to **vulnerable** people and the services that help vulnerable people so we can give you help when you need it.

April 2023						
Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	
10	11	12	13	14	15	
17	18	19	20	21	22	
24	25	26	27	28	29	



We last told you about our plan in April 2023. This is our October 2023 news.

We will keep our Vulnerability Action Plan up to date by:



- talking with vulnerable people and services that help them



- looking at new laws that the government makes to see how they affect vulnerable people



- looking at government plans such as national disability strategy



- looking at government plans such as the National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People, and Adults, and the Ministry of Justice Neurodiversity Action Plan.

Our priority areas



There are three important things we said we will do. We call them our three **priority areas**.



Priority 1: giving the right support to vulnerable people using the court and tribunal services.

This support includes **signposting** or telling them about other places to get information and help.



Priority 2: collecting information about how what we are doing affects our vulnerable users.

This information is called evidence.



Priority 3: making services accessible for vulnerable users.

When something is **accessible** everyone can use it.

What we have already done in our three priority areas since April 2023



Priority 1: giving the right support to vulnerable people using the court and tribunal services.

This support includes **signposting** or telling people where they can get information and help.



- We gave our staff training and tools to:
 - understand the needs of our users
 - **signpost** users to other places for help that we could not provide.



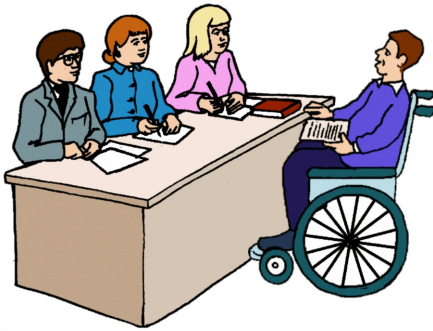
- We worked with We Are Group to set up a **national digital support service** in England, Wales and Scotland.



The **national digital support service** helps **vulnerable** people with **online** and court matters.

Online means using the internet.

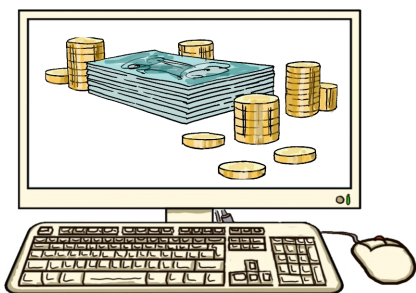
Such as:



- the **Social Security and Child Support Tribunal**. You can ask the tribunal for help if you are unhappy with a decision about social security benefits and child support maintenance



- the **Single Justice Service**, where a magistrate can quickly and fairly deal with a minor offence such as using a television without a licence



- making a **civil money claim online**. Making a civil money claim online means using the internet to ask a court to make a decision on money you think you are owed



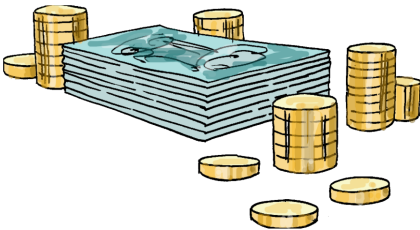
- **probate**

Probate is about dealing with the money and property of someone who has died



- **divorce**

Divorce means to officially end a marriage



- help with fees to use our online service.



The digital support service will help people who do not have the technology or skills to do things online.



- We helped our staff learn how to **safeguard** our users who are **vulnerable** or at risk of harm and neglect.

Safeguarding is protecting the rights of adults at risk and children. This helps them live in safety, free from abuse and neglect.



- We started a **webchat** service for people going to the Employment Tribunal in Scotland.

Webchat means you talk to someone using **online** messaging.

Online means using the internet.



We checked how **webchat** worked and found we need to make it more accessible.



- Our National **Domestic Abuse** Action Plan is helping people work through the court process.

Domestic abuse is when your adult family member tries to hurt or control you.



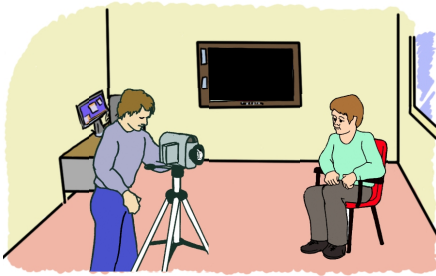
- We have checked ways of improving family **private law** applications.



Private law cases do not involve the local authority.



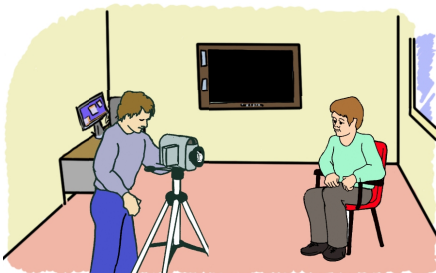
- The **Liaison and Diversion** service spots people who have mental disorders, a learning disability, or other vulnerabilities when they first come into the criminal justice system. We have helped the NHS give health care to these people.



- If the court says it is okay, **vulnerable victims and witnesses** can **pre-record** their evidence and the **cross-examination** before the trial.



Vulnerable victims and witnesses include children and people with a mental disorder, learning disability or physical disability.



Pre-record means you answer questions outside of the courtroom before the hearing and someone makes a video or sound recording to play in court.



Cross-examination means a legal representative asks you more questions to check you have been telling the truth.



- The **Specialist Sexual Violence Support** or **SSVS** has improved the facilities and IT for victims of rape and serious sexual abuse in 3 courts (Snaresbrook, Leeds, and Newcastle).



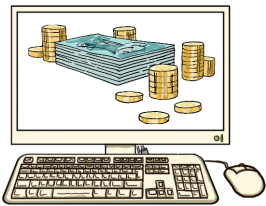
Priority 2: collecting information about how what we are doing affects our vulnerable users.

This information is called evidence.

- We are still looking at improving the way vulnerable people get access to justice when using:



- Social Security and Child Support services



- making a Civil Money Claim on the internet



- applying for a divorce



- applying for Probate.

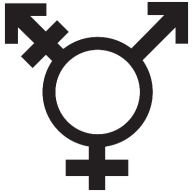


- We are collecting information about users with **protected characteristics** so their needs can be better supported.

It is against the law to discriminate against anyone because of:



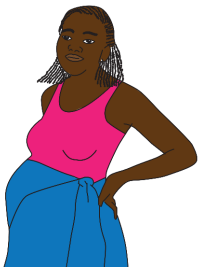
— age



— gender reassignment



— being married or in a civil partnership



— being pregnant or on maternity leave



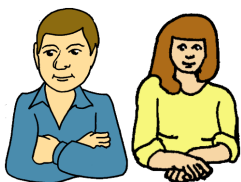
— disability



— race



— religion or belief



— sex



— sexual orientation.

These are called **protected characteristics**.

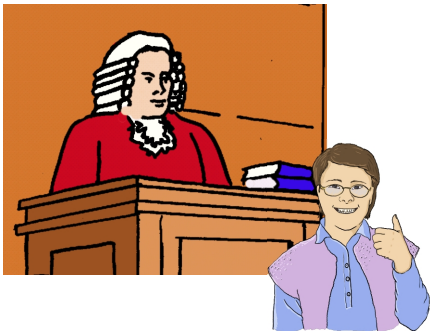


Priority 3: making services accessible for vulnerable users.



- We have started the **Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme** in all our courts, tribunals and offices.

People can wear a lanyard with the sunflower symbol to show our staff they may need extra help.



- Our staff in the Royal Courts of Justice now know how to make our services more accessible.



- We still take part in the Unwanted Prisoner Contact Working Group. The Unwanted Prisoner Contact service helps you if a prisoner is trying to contact you and you do not want them to.



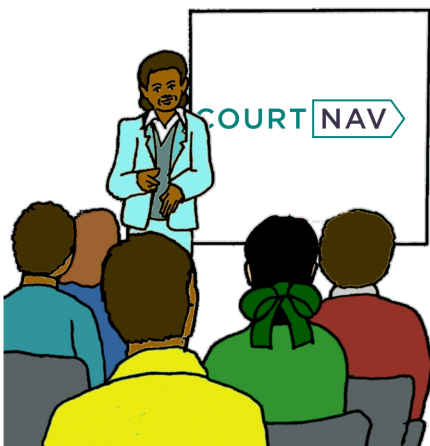
- We have **video hearings** available in more courts and tribunals.

Video hearings mean people can take part in a hearing across the internet if the court says it is okay.



- We have made our online information about getting a **divorce** easier to understand.

Divorce is when you officially end a marriage.



- We have trained our staff how to help you use the **online** tool called Courtnav.

Online means using the internet.



You can use Courtnav if you apply for a **non-molestation or occupation order**.

A **non-molestation or occupation order** protects people from abuse or harassment.



- We have added alerts to some of our IT systems which tell our staff a person may have a need in court such as **reasonable adjustments** or Welsh language.

Reasonable adjustments means making our service accessible to people with disabilities. This can be having a person help you with your mobility or communication needs.

What we plan to do next



(We have said when we will do things in brackets)

Priority 1: giving the right support to vulnerable people using the court and tribunal services. This support includes signposting or telling them about other places to get information and help.



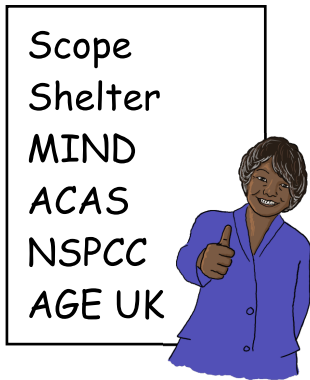
- We will build the **national digital support service** in England, Wales and Scotland.



There will be help across the whole application process.



We will bring in new services so we can help more people.



We will make a list and give it to our users to tell them about others who can help them when they need it.



We will check with users how the service works for them so we can improve it.

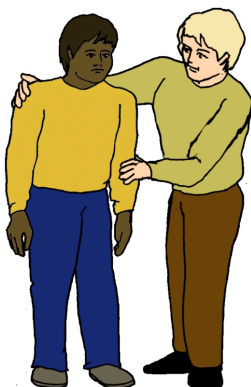
(Ongoing)



- We will teach our staff how to help our users who are dealing with **trauma**.

Trauma is the emotional pain you feel after something upsetting happens to you.

(Summer 2024)



- We will keep working to **safeguard** our users who are **vulnerable** or at risk of harm and neglect.

(Ongoing)



- We will bring in changes to the way we help people who cannot pay the fees to go to a court or a tribunal. We are making the changes after asking people to tell us their thoughts in March this year.

(Spring 2024)



- Help staff finish training about domestic abuse.

(Winter 2023)



- We will keep looking at ways we can improve how family members work through **private law cases**.



Private law cases do not involve the local authority.

(Summer 2024)



- We will offer a **webchat** service for people going to the Employment Tribunal in England and Wales.

Webchat means you talk to someone using **online** messaging.

Online means using the internet.

(Summer 2024)



- We will work with **interpreters** to get the best out of the **Video Hearing Service**.

Interpreters change what someone is saying into another language.

Video hearing means people can take part in a hearing across the internet if the court says it is okay.

(Ongoing)



- We will test a counselling service that will help jurors who may be upset after a case dealing with crime.

(Summer 2024)



- We will keep working with the NHS so people who have mental disorders, a learning disability, or other vulnerabilities do better and do not re-offend.

(Ongoing)



- We will keep helping the Ministry of Justice test the **Specialist Sexual Violence Support** or **SSVS** so the staff know how to help people who are dealing with trauma.

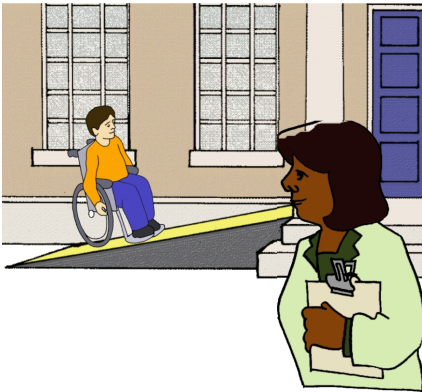
This will make things better for adult victims of rape and serious sexual abuse in court.

(Summer 2024)



Priority 2: collecting information about how what we are doing affects our vulnerable users.

This information is called evidence.



- We are still looking at how vulnerable people get access to justice across our services. We want to find and remove any **barriers**.

Barriers are things that can stop people with disabilities from doing things.

(Ongoing)



- We will keep collecting information about users with **protected characteristics** so we can help them better.

(Ongoing)



- We will look at the training on domestic abuse awareness for our Court Security Officers.

(Ongoing)



- We will look at the way we train Court Ushers to help victims of domestic abuse.

(Spring 2024)



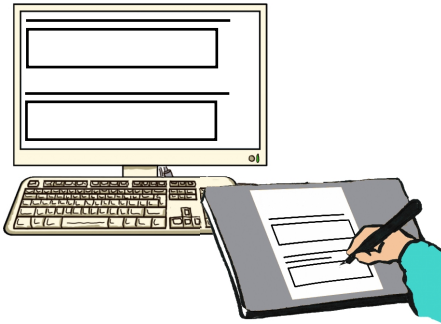
- We will work with the Prison and Probation Service to check they know about **non-molestation orders**.

A **non-molestation order** protects people from abuse by an offender.

(Ongoing)

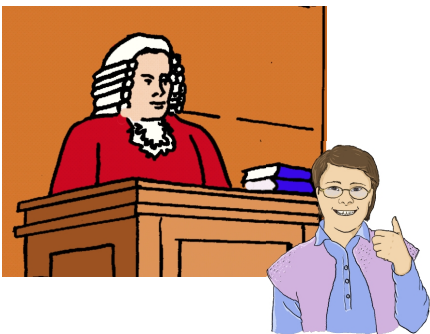


Priority 3: making services accessible for vulnerable users.



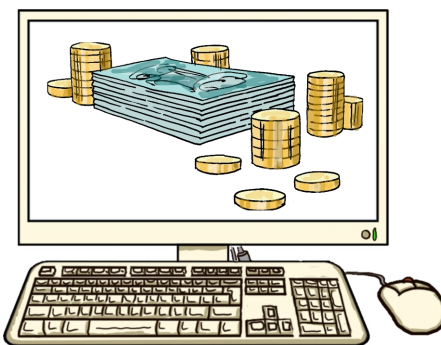
- We will keep checking our forms are easy to use. We will make sure you can get any online forms as paper forms too.

(Ongoing)



- We will keep looking for ways to make the Royal Courts of Justice more accessible for all users with disabilities.

(Ongoing)



- We will check the **automated payment line** is accessible to everyone.

The **automated payment line** lets you pay for fines online.

(Ongoing)

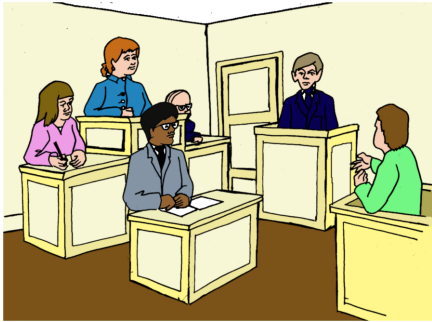


- We will make it easier for you to add information when applying for a divorce online.

Online means using the internet.

(Autumn 2024)

Looking to the future



We are making courts and tribunals work better for people who use them and for people working in them. This is called **reform**.



The Ministry of Justice is checking what makes the legal system difficult for vulnerable adults. They will look at ways to help vulnerable people access justice.



We will keep talking with external stakeholders and partners to get feedback and understand issues.



We will continue to publish our plan on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

What the words mean

Accessible: when something is accessible everyone can use it.

Barriers: things that can stop people with disabilities from doing things.

Cross-examination: a legal representative asks you more questions to check you have been telling the truth.

Digital support: means help to use technology.

Divorce: to officially end a marriage.

Domestic abuse: when your adult family member tries to hurt or control you.

Evidence: collecting information.

Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme: tells people that the person wearing the sunflower may need extra help.

HMCTS: stands for His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service. We run courts in England and Wales and tribunals in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to give people and businesses access to justice.

Interpreter: a person who changes what someone is saying into another language.

Liaison and Diversion service: spots people who have mental disorders, a learning disability, or other vulnerabilities when they first come into the criminal justice system.

Making a civil money claim online: using the internet to ask a court to make a decision on money you think you are owed.

National digital support service: helps people who find it hard to get online and need help.

Non-molestation or occupation order: protects people from abuse or harassment.

Online: using the internet.

Policy: a set of rules.

Pre-record: you answer questions outside of the courtroom before the hearing and someone makes a video or sound recording to play in court.

Priority areas: important things we want to do.

Private law cases: cases that do not involve the local authority.

Probate: dealing with the money and property of someone who has died.

Protected characteristics: a law about discriminating against a person because of their age, gender, marital status, being pregnant, disability, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

Reasonable adjustments: making our service accessible to people with disabilities. This can be having a person help you with your mobility or communication needs.

Reform: making courts and tribunals work better for people who use them and for people working in them.

Safeguarding: protecting vulnerable people.

Specialist Sexual Violence Support or SSVS: will make things easier in court for victims of rape and serious sexual abuse.

Signposting: telling people about other places to get information and help.

Single Justice Service: where a magistrate can quickly and fairly deal with a minor offence such as using a television without a licence.

Social security and child support are run by the government.

Social security: means government payments to help people who are retired or disabled.

Child support: means parents have to provide money for their child after divorce or separation.

Trauma: the emotional pain you feel after something upsetting happens to you.

Video hearings: people can take part in a hearing across the internet if the court says it is okay.

Vulnerable: when people have a difficulty and need extra support. This could be a disability, mental health condition or an experience which has made someone feel unsafe.

Vulnerability Action Plan: how we are going to make coming to court better for vulnerable people.

Webchat: you talk to someone using online messaging.

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