



# HM Prison & Probation Service

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**To: Governors**

## **REVIEW OF SAFETY AND RISK ASSESSMENT PROCESSES FOR VIDEO CALLS AND HEARINGS**

Video calls have been a great success, helping prisoners to stay in touch with loved ones and to attend court and other meetings. But it is vital to remember that video calls are just as likely as physical attendance to increase the risk of harm to self or others by prisoners. Video offers many benefits, but it can be harder to engage through a video screen. This may make it harder to focus on what is said, and on receiving and retaining information.

### **Court and other official appearances by video**

Individuals may receive unfavourable or unexpected outcomes or be otherwise adversely affected by video calls. As set out in [PSI 07/2015](#) and [PSO 3050](#), similar health screening arrangements must apply before and after video appearances, just as they would for a physical court appearance. The same risk assessments for self-harm or suicide also apply.

### **Video calls to families**

Video allows prisoners to see their home, which may trigger difficult emotions and raise the risk of harm. Staff must monitor prisoners during video calls and should be alert to anything during or after the call that may change the prisoner's level of risk to themselves or others.

### **Reviewing safety procedures**

Following a recommendation from a PPO investigation into a death in custody, I wrote to you all in March 2021, asking you to review your local video court processes to ensure:

- A proper risk assessment must be made in each case, using all relevant information.
- Where indicated, a health screening must take place, especially if the prisoner receives bad news, or an unexpected outcome, or where staff have concerns.
- Staff must talk to prisoners and assess risk based on background information and individual presentation.
- Staff must escalate concerns and record information received and action taken, including opening an ACCT if needed.
- Risk assessments must be informed by the official account of what took place in court (such as a revised warrant), and the individual's account of events and their reaction.
- Risk assessments are vital for legal visits, parole hearings, social visits, or any other meetings, such as with the local authority, that involve difficult or unexpected news.

### **Refusing offers of support**

- If a prisoner insists they are fine after a call, and they do not wish to talk immediately afterwards, staff should monitor the individual and make continued offers of support.
- Staff should record reluctance to engage on NOMIS, along with all further attempts to engage. It is vital to hand over to wing staff on the day of the call and to record that handover in the wing observation book.

- If the prisoner is subject to ACCT procedures, this information needs to be included in their ACCT document and NOMIS, and consideration given as to whether a case review is needed.

### **Change of circumstances or an unexpected event**

Staff must talk to a prisoner straight after a video call to assess whether anything could affect their safety risk. As well as taking necessary actions, staff must record discussions and interventions on NOMIS and wing observation books, and notify wing colleagues.

Examples of things that may affect prisoner safety are listed below. This is not an exhaustive list as people react differently to difficult or unexpected news. Watch out for:

- sentencing hearings, especially if resulting in a long or unexpected sentence
- postponement or delay to remand or sentencing hearings
- refusal of bail, especially if the prisoner was expecting bail
- Proceeds of Crime Act hearings if prisoners lose home, savings, or business
- Family Court or local authority meetings where prisoners lose access to their children
- local authority meetings that result in loss of home and/or belongings
- news of a bereavement or illness
- other information relating to children's education, welfare or placement

### **Resources**

The safety self-assessment tool has useful prompts when conducting your review. They are in the [first night and early days section](#). (Scroll down to the video part.) Attached, please find a safety briefing and wall charts that can be used to raise staff awareness. If you have any questions, please contact the [safety team](#).

Video calls for social or official purposes bring huge benefits. But it is vital that we manage safety risks just as if someone had returned from a physical meeting or hearing. I am grateful for your continuing support in managing these risks effectively.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "P. Copple". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**PHIL COPPLE**

Director General – Prisons