

Secure video calls to help prisoners maintain family ties

- HMP Berwyn and HMYOI Wetherby among first 10 to benefit
- All calls recorded and restricted to 4 callers

Secure video calls will be introduced to prisons and young offender institutions (YOIs) across England and Wales to maintain vital family contact for prisoners and young offenders during the coronavirus pandemic.

Following a successful trial at HMP Berwyn, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is installing the technology at 10 institutions with a wider rollout in the coming weeks.

The measure is part of wider action to preserve family ties after social visits in prisons and YOIs were suspended, to comply with the government's guidance on controlling the spread of coronavirus and protecting life.

The new technology builds on the [2017 Lord Farmer review](#) which found that close bonds between prisoners and family members can significantly reduce their risk of reoffending.

Safeguards are in place to prevent misuse with all participants vetted in advance and calls monitored by prison staff. The calls will be time-limited and restrictions have been built into the software to ensure safe use.

Prisons and Probation Minister Lucy Frazer QC MP, said:

Prisoners have seen drastic changes to their daily routines to protect local health services and save lives.

A part of that has been the loss of social visits – something we know plays a huge role in prisoners' wellbeing and rehabilitation.

It is therefore right that we take proportionate steps to keep them in touch with their families by other means during the current pandemic.

Nick Leader, Governor of HMP Berwyn, which is one of the first jails to benefit from the use family video calls, said:

The introduction of video calls has shown that even in times of adversity it is possible to develop new and innovative ways of supporting those in our care.

This technology will support resettlement planning and is a positive step to improve relations with staff and reduce the strain

introduced by some of the current, but necessary, restrictions.

The introduction of video calls reflects the government's recognition of the importance of maintaining family ties, particularly at women's prisons, young offender institutions and jails without in-cell telephones. In March, ministers acted quickly to introduce [900 secure phone handsets](#) which have been rolled out across the prison estate.

The first institutions to begin video calls are: HMPs Berwyn, Bronzefield, Downview, Eastwood Park, Garth, High Down, Hull, Wayland, Werrington and Wetherby. In line with recommendations from the Lord Farmer review, work was already underway to explore the use of video calls, and we are assessing their potential wider use in future.

Video calls will be provided through secure laptops in a designated room in each institution. Time-limited calls will be made either by prisoners making a call request to their designated contact or by families who can request a time slot through a mobile app or directly with the establishment.

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, the government has already taken unprecedented action, including the [temporary release of risk-assessed prisoners](#) within two months of their release date and the [installation of hundreds of temporary accommodation units](#) across the estate.

[Modelling from Public Health England](#) suggests the measures are showing early signs of effectiveness, with a reduction in the rate of infection in prisons.