

The Jersey Probation Service and the response to COVID-19

Following government advice all face to face contact with clients has been suspended unless there are concerns about serious harm in which case our home visiting policy is applied.

All Probation Officers are able to work from home and have been instructed to make contact with all clients, including the parents of clients where those clients are children. Clients are reminded about the laws in relation to COVID-19, are asked about how this is affecting them and their families as well as being encouraged to adopt strategies to reduce risk of reoffending. A range of worksheets and wellbeing information is sent to clients via encrypted e-mail.

Clients who have a history of domestic abuse are contacted at least once a week. The Service has invested in mobile phones for all officers and we use Starleaf video conferencing which can be used in clients' homes as well as the prison.

Safeguarding is a primary concern and, although Probation Officers do not usually work weekends they have been on call to deal with incidents of self-harm and domestic abuse.

Managers maintain contact with Probation Officers using starleaf and supervision sessions have continued. Prison visiting has been stopped but we are able to contact prisoners via video. We are about to work with prison colleagues in identifying and assessing prisoners who would be appropriate for early release.

We have had to suspend our community service scheme during the crisis but staff have been deployed working with food banks to provide food for the most vulnerable.

Home visiting guidance for Probation Officers during COVID-19

Purpose and background

The guidance aims to:

- Help Probation Officers keep themselves safe and well, and reduce risks of infection during home visits
- Enable Probation Officers to fulfil their duties during the crisis without undue risk
- Minimise the risk of infection to others by Probation Officers entering homes

Minimise use of visits, use technology

The guidance is based on the principle that Probation Officers will only undertake home visits in exceptional circumstances and where managers agree that risk assessments make a visit appropriate.

The Service should require Probation Officers to make home visits only:

- When risk assessment deems it absolutely necessary to prevent significant harm and/or
- When risks of infection to staff and people visited have been mitigated in accordance with this guidance and government protocols

For the purposes of this guidance the JMAPP definition of “significant harm “ is used and refers to “an event which is life-threatening and/or traumatic, from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible.”

All practitioners should optimise use of digital technologies and telephone contacts wherever possible to maintain contact, assess and review.

Using the guidance

This guidance provides a professional risk assessment framework to prepare for a face to face home visit during Covid-19. It has been based on advice from BASW and the Jersey government.

Please use the guidance to:

- Guide and inform your practice
- Request appropriate support and guidance from managers
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Planning a visit

Identify if the purpose of the visit is essential at this time

- Check with your manager that your proposed home visit is necessary for assessing and mitigating the risk of significant harm due to other non- contact methods being inappropriate.

For multi-professional visits

Liaise with other agencies (potentially) involved in the visit (e.g. police or health colleagues).

If this visit will be multi-professional, use this guidance and the principles within it to plan:

- *a ‘team’ approach to the visit*
- *who will do what and who will be in what proximity to the person/family*
- *what Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) each might use to ensure all members of the multi-professional group are protected throughout and know what each other are doing*
- *ensure social work ethics and values of respect, appropriate communication and rapport with the household are upheld in multi-professional visits*

Identify how the purpose of the visit could be achieved while maintaining recommended physical distance of 2 metres.

- Identify whether the purpose of the visit could be achieved without going into the property.
- Identify whether the purpose of the visit could be achieved by another practitioner who has to make an essential visit.
- Consider the most appropriate person to undertake any visit that is essential.
- Minimise physical proximity by asking what aspects of the visit could be achieved remotely.

Contact the person that you are visiting (or their family member/carer if appropriate) to seek information about the environment, available space and their health status to help you manage the risk.

This will usually be by a telephone call, but other digital communications may be appropriate according to local protocols and the situation.

When you cannot contact/speak to the household before the visit

There will be occasions when you are required to make a visit and prior contact to gather information from the person or family is not possible (for a variety of reasons).

If that is the case, you (and other professionals involved) should treat the situation as a Covid-19 high risk situation (for practitioners and/or people visited) and take protective infection-prevention precautions as necessary according to government health advice

When you contact the person/family before the visit:

- *Explain about coronavirus and why special precautions are needed at this time: to protect them, to protect visiting professionals and protect the community*
- *Explain why you need to make a home visit. The subsequent conversation might provide reassurance and make it unnecessary.*
 - *Provide information in a form they can understand and check their understanding*
 - *Answer their questions and reassure as appropriate*
 - *Repeat the call another time if necessary to help their understanding*
 - *Involve family/carers as appropriate to assist and determine if questions can legitimately be answered by another on behalf of the person*
- Ask about their health status,
 - Do they or anyone in the household have confirmed Covid-19?
 - Do they or anyone in the household have any Covid-19 symptoms? (a dry persistent cough; raised temperature; sore throat; loss of smell and taste or other symptoms)
 - Are they or anyone in the household in a higher risk group/shielding (e.g. have cancer or an immune-suppressing condition)?
 - Are they or anyone else in the household in self isolation due to exposure to COVID-19?
- Explain about social distancing and why it will be needed during the visit.
 - Seek their agreement to maintain distance and explain the benefits for them
 - Explore whether technology could be used instead of a visit to achieve its aims and reduce risk to the person and the social worker
- Seek the person's (or relevant carer's/family member's view) on how to minimise risk.
 - If there are known risks of infection or higher risks to health that indicate the person should not have visitors, seek advice from your line manager.
 - If the person or family is likely not to comply with social distancing, consider whether other colleagues should be involved, the use of PPE and whether the visit can be undertaken safely.
- Ensure the person or their family/carer understands (as much as possible) the purpose of the visit and the plan for the visit.
- Consider sending information to them in advance including in easy read or other formats if required.

At this point, weigh up the benefits and risk of doing/not doing a visit.

Seek advice and endorsement of your approach from your line manager as needed.

If the visit needs to go ahead, create a detailed risk plan including:

- Identify and minimise who will be present in the room/household
- Plan entry and use of space in the home – or remain at the doorstep - to maintain social distancing throughout
- Identify and secure Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) if indicated: i.e. hand sanitiser, gloves, masks, protective clothing.
- Plan how you will carry out the purpose of the visit whilst minimising the risks of infection.
- The risks and safety of transport such as infection risks of public transport and sharing cars with colleagues or others. Travelling alone in cars is safest.

Review the plan with your team manager to ensure it is practical and ethical, and that risks are reasonably managed.

Personal, Protective Equipment (PPE)

The Probation Officer should wear gloves and an approved face mask during the home visit. A face mask should also be offered to the client and other people at the address.

Social distancing should be observed at all times.

2. Immediately before the visit

Identify the equipment you will need during the visit so that you can easily find this.

- Identify any protective equipment that is recommended by government health, for example use of hand gel, gloves, face mask and make sure that you have access to this.
- Make sure you know how to use PPE to make it effective and avoid unintended risks
- If you intend to use PPE that obstructs your face, explain why you are using it to the person/family before you arrive if possible, or upon arrival if necessary
- Ensure that you have a way of disposing of any protective equipment after the visit in line with government health guidance.
- Ensure that you have a way of washing your hands prior to and immediately after the visit, for example using hand sanitiser that is easy to access.

Ensure you follow the lone working policy and use the Safer Lives devices.

- Ensure that your line manager is aware of your whereabouts and contact arrangements if you are late returning.

Review the plan with your line manager or health and safety representative to ensure it is practical and ethical, and that risks are reasonably managed.

3. During the visit

Before going into the home, check your information.

- Confirm who is in the house and the health status of the person you are visiting and any other household members.
- Speak to the person you are planning to visit to remind them to follow government health guidance to minimise risk.
- Explain the risk mitigation approach you are taking and why, and explain it is to protect them and you

Follow government health guidance during the visit.

- Ensure that you have a way of washing your hands prior to and immediately after the visit, for example using hand sanitiser that is easy to access.
- During the visit, minimise the surfaces that you touch, do not put your personal items down on any surfaces, try not to touch your face, ask for the room to be ventilated (e.g. through an open window and door), keep 2 metres or more away from other people and follow any other government health guidance about minimising infection. Check government health guidance.

Keep the visit focused and as concise as possible. If you consider that the risks are not proportionate or being managed, explain why you need to end the visit and how you will plan to follow up.

4. After the visit

Follow government health guidance immediately after the visit.

- Sanitise any equipment that you have brought out of the home in line with government health guidance, for example by using disinfectant wipes including phones, laptops etc.
- Dispose of any protective equipment in line with government health guidance.
- Wash your hands in line with government health guidance before touching other items, for example using hand sanitiser.
- Wash your hands before going into another building for 20 seconds with soap in line with government health guidance or sanitise them. Check government health guidance.
- At the end of the day, remove and wash clothes that may have been exposed to the virus.

Inform your manager of any concerns or risks that you have identified.

5. Follow up to the visit

Report back to your line manager about the visit.

- Managers will should ensure there is an option for an immediate debrief. Share any learning that can support practice and the department.

Record the visit.

- Include any amendments to practice that were necessary due to the pandemic.
- Record any information that is needed to support practice and the department.
- Make sure you provide any relevant guidance for others who may be visiting or planning a face to face meeting at a future date.

Seek support for any professional or personal concerns.