Ministry of Justice

Restriction Zones factsheet

This factsheet is intended to help victim support organisations to provide information and support to victims regarding Restriction Zones.

We recognise that release from prison can be an anxious time for victims who may have concerns about encountering an offender in the community. Restriction Zones are designed to reduce the likelihood of unwanted contact with offenders on probation, giving them confidence in their movements.

What are Restriction Zones and why are we introducing them?

Licence conditions are the rules people must follow when they are on licence after release from prison. Being 'on licence' means following these conditions until a certain date. Licence conditions are written on a licence document and are explained to the offender when they are released. There are standard licence conditions which apply to everyone and will be on every licence document. An offender may have additional licence conditions if their Probation Practitioner considers it necessary and proportionate to do this.

If these conditions are not followed, enforcement action could be taken, including recall to prison.

We take action to restrict offenders' movements currently through an additional licence condition known as an Exclusion Zone. These are areas which offenders cannot enter. Exclusion Zones are widely used by Probation.

We are now expanding the range of tools Probation have to manage risk and protect victims. That's why, through the Sentencing Act 2026, we are introducing a new additional licence condition which will restrict an offender on licence's movements to a defined geographic area for a certain period of time, known as a 'Restriction Zone'.

A Restriction Zone requires an offender on probation to remain within a set area instead of excluding them from a set area (an Exclusion Zone). Restriction Zones require a map to enforce, which will set out the area the offender on probation cannot leave. In most cases, this map will be shared with the victim.

The Probation Practitioner is responsible for designing any Restriction Zone, using information provided by the victim through their Victim Liaison Officer (VLO) and other relevant information to assess risk. To determine the size of the zone, the Probation Practitioner must balance the need to restrict the offenders' movements with the need to ensure access to services that reduce the risk that the offender commits another crime such as drug treatment or employment.

Where the needs of the offender comes into conflict with the needs of a victim, the probation practitioner will consider the issues carefully. Where those needs are equal (for example both requiring access to the same location for the same purpose) then the victim is the priority, and the offender must be denied access.

Restriction Zones can be applied at the point of release from prison or at any point during the licence period.

Accommodation arrangements

We recognise that particular challenges can arise where victims and offenders live close to one another. Before any offender is released, the Probation Service will carefully review their accommodation arrangements, licence conditions and wider risk management plan. This includes assessing whether a proposed address is suitable and whether it could increase risks to the victim or the public. If risks cannot be managed appropriately, alternative arrangements will be considered. For offenders who present the highest risks, accommodation in Approved Premises may form part of the risk management arrangements.

Accommodation arrangements do not sit in isolation and are considered alongside wider risk management measures, including licence conditions, victim-related concerns, and where appropriate, restriction zones. Where an offender is subject to a residence requirement, including a requirement to stay at Approved Premises, this can operate alongside a restriction zone. Offenders who breach their licence conditions, or who risk increases, may be recalled to prison.

Who decides whether a Restriction Zone is imposed and how can victims make representations?

Victim safety, wellbeing and safeguarding must be the primary considerations when proposing, reviewing or varying a Restriction Zone. Victim Liaison Officers (VLOs) will explain licence conditions to victims during the initial appointment and at pre-release stage, including the need for them to be necessary and proportionate. Requests from victims eligible for and opted into the Victim Contact Scheme for Restriction Zones should be made through their VLO.

Victims can make representations through their VLO, who will share this with the offender's Probation Practitioner. Practitioners will consider any requests for a Restriction Zone alongside the risks posed by the offender. As with other licence conditions, they will then propose their recommendations to the formal decision-maker, which will either be the Prison Governor or the Parole Board, depending on the offender's sentence.

Specific guidance on Restriction Zones has been issued to VLOs alongside the overarching guidance for Probation. VLOs can support victims to make representations and explain when and how restriction zones can be applied. They will also explain the threshold for a Restriction Zone in comparison to an Exclusion Zone.

If a Restriction Zone is put in place, the victim's VLO will only contact them if the RZ could change – for example, if the zone is being varied, or if it is being considered for removal. Victims will not be notified of the outcome of every internal probation review of risk – to do so could be retraumatising.

We understand that victims may be concerned if a Restriction Zone is not approved. While there is no formal appeals process for decisions not to grant a Restriction Zone, victims can raise concerns through the normal complaints process if they have concerns with the decision-making. Their VLO can discuss their concerns and direct them to this process. Victims can access it here: https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-prison-and-probation-service/about/complaints-procedure

Any risk-related information or concerns raised by the victim will be shared with the Probation Practitioner.

Where do we expect restriction zones to be used?

We will start implementation from 1 October. The legislation will enable Restriction Zones to be applied to licence cases, subject to criteria set out in this factsheet. Those cases are not limited to new prison releases so they could be applied to any case on licence from 1 October. Victim Liaison Officers will be able to discuss Restriction Zones with victims prior to 1 October, providing the release date is on or after 1 October and the eligibility criteria has been met.

Eligibility criteria

While no particular cases have been excluded, we have sent advice to our probation officers on the types of cases most likely to be eligible. Restriction zones are highly novel, and so setting out criteria and focussing on where we have an established route to engage victims in the early phases of implementation is key to successfully embedding the measure.

Offenders convicted of the following offences, and inchoate versions of these offences (i.e. attempting or conspiring to commit) are most likely to be considered, although this may not always be the case and this list is not exhaustive:

Violent and sexual offences:

- Murder
- Manslaughter
- Rape
- Rape of a child
- Sexual assault

Offences with known links to DA-related offending:

- Controlling or coercive behaviour
- Stalking involving fear of violence or serious alarm or distress
- Wounding with intent to cause grievous bodily harm
- Attempting to choke, suffocate or strangle in order to commit or assist in committing an indictable offence

In most cases, Restriction Zones will be considered where a victim is eligible for and opted into the VCS, allowing their views to inform the design of the zone. While victims do not always need to be opted into the VCS for a Restriction Zone to be considered, this is expected to occur only in limited circumstances where Probation considers a Restriction Zone necessary for wider risk-management or public-protection purposes, such as safeguarding children or managing risks of predatory sexual offending, provided the eligibility criteria are met.

We will bring more victims of crimes like wider stalking offences and harassment into scope by the end of the year.

Restriction Zones may be considered where the below criteria are met:

- Offender is assessed by Probation as posing the highest risk of serious harm and the highest risk of all and serious reoffending, in the majority of cases. Probation assesses risk of harm and reoffending using evidence-based tools, practitioner judgement, and up to date information about an offender's circumstances, and this assessment is reviewed regularly to ensure it remains accurate. Probation also has discretion to consider all cases that meet the criteria below.
- Their offence is Victim Contact Scheme (VCS) eligible, and/or they have committed a serious sexual or violent offence under Schedule 15 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003, and are subject to a custodial sentence of 12 months or more; and
- Other additional licence conditions, including Exclusion Zones, have been assessed and found to be insufficient. For example, this may be the case where the offender

has made threats towards the victim or their family, or where there are multiple victims living in different areas.

Where a Restriction Zone is not available or appropriate, Probation will consider other measures to manage risk and protect victims. Victims can make representations for these measures, such as exclusion zones, through the Victim Contact Scheme.

How is a Restriction Zone monitored and enforced?

Effective monitoring and enforcement will be central to victims' confidence in restriction zones. The majority of offenders subject to a Restriction Zone will also be subject to Electronic Monitoring for the duration of the Restriction Zone. In rare cases, Electronic Monitoring may not be safe or practical. If that happens, a restriction zone can still be added to a licence where it is still the best way to manage risk. In these cases, monitoring will rely on other methods, such as regular supervision, information-sharing between agencies including the police, and action being taken if the offender breaches the Restriction Zone.

Restriction Zones are enforced in line with established licence enforcement processes. A breach of any licence condition, including a restriction zone requirement, may result in recall to prison where the offender's risk is assessed as no longer manageable in the community.

Where the Electronic Monitoring Service (EMS) has been informed that an Electronic Monitoring condition has been imposed, EMS will notify Probation Practitioners and regional electronic monitoring mailboxes within contractual timescales of any violations of the condition. The information provided to the Probation Practitioner will include a map of the GPS trail for the period of the violation. The Probation Practitioner will then assess whether the violation constitutes a breach, and take appropriate action which can include written warnings or recall to custody where appropriate.

Will victims be informed of breaches?

Whenever the offender breaches the restriction zone, the Probation Service will consider whether the breach constitutes such an increase in the offender's risk that it justifies recalling them to custody.

Where a decision is taken to recall the offender, victims will be informed that the offender has breached the restriction zone and has been recalled to custody.

Where the decision is not to recall the offender, victims will not be notified of the restriction zone breach, because the Probation Service has concluded that the breach has no bearing on the offender's underlying risk.

Thereby, victims can be reassured that the Probation Practitioner will carefully consider each breach, assess the risks involved, and take appropriate action where necessary.

How can offenders make representations about Restrictions Zones?

The Probation Practitioner will explain why the Restriction Zone has been designed in this way, what will happen if it is breached, and how and when it will operate. People on probation, including those released by the Parole Board, can discuss their Restriction Zone with their Probation Practitioner.

Why are Restriction Zones reviewed?

Restriction Zones require intensive assessment, monitoring and ongoing management. We recognise that a review of a Restriction Zone, and the possibility of it changing, may feel unsettling for victims. Reviews are important to ensure that the zone continues to provide appropriate protection and reflects any changes in the victim's circumstances. For example, if the victim moves home, the zone may need to be redrawn.

Restriction Zones will be reviewed every three months to ensure that they remain necessary to manage the identified risks and consider any changes in the victim's circumstances. A mandatory review will also take place at 12 months. Victims do not need to wait for a scheduled review to report a change in their circumstances. They can contact their VLO at any time so this can be considered by the Probation Practitioner.

Victims will be notified if a review results in changes to the zone. Where appropriate, they will also be informed about any agreed access routes or exemptions outside the zone. These may be permitted only for specific, pre-approved and evidenced activities, such as attending a medical appointment, and must take account of the victim's needs, the risk management plan, and the practitioner's professional judgement.

When does a restriction zone end?

As with other licence conditions, a Restriction Zone will end when the risks it was put in place to manage have reduced and it is no longer necessary for it to remain in place. This assessment will include input from victims via their VLO. We recognise that this will be an anxious time for victims. Before a Restriction Zone is removed, victims will be notified by their VLO and given time to discuss and make representations for alternative licence conditions, such as Exclusion Zones. Probation must consider any representations, and any agreed measures must be implemented before the Restriction Zone is removed. A victim will be notified of the outcome by their Victim Liaison Officer.

Other restrictive measures

To help protect victims and their families, the Sentencing Act 2026 will give Probation the power to apply new restrictive licence conditions. These will prohibit offenders from:

- Driving
- Attending public events
- Entering drinking establishments including pubs, clubs and bars

These will be applied as additional licence conditions and can be applied regardless of the offence committed.

The courts will also be able to apply these prohibitions as community requirements for Community Orders and Suspended Sentence Orders.

Electronic Monitoring

To support the implementation of the Sentencing Act, the Government is introducing a presumption that prison leavers released under the progression model will be tagged on release as part of intensive supervision within the model. Probation staff will retain discretion to apply their professional judgement and not impose Electronic Monitoring where it is inappropriate or likely to increase risk, but post-custody tagging will significantly expand from where it is now. Further to this, all rape and certain child sex offences excluded from the Progression Model will be subject to 12 months trail monitoring on release.

Additionally, we will complete the national roll out of our **Domestic Abuse Perpetrators on Licence (DAPOL)** pilot, expanding from eight probation regions to all 12, tagging prison leavers at risk of committing domestic abuse and imposing exclusion zones, location monitoring, and curfews. This will be in place across England and Wales for October, in line with the first tranche of releases under the Progression Model.

We are also expanding our **Acquisitive Crime GPS tagging scheme** to all 43 police force areas by the end of this Parliament. The scheme uses GPS electronic monitoring to manage offenders convicted of acquisitive crimes such as burglary, robbery and theft.

We will be publishing further guidance on these measures in due course.