Restriction Zones fact sheet

This factsheet is intended to support organisations to provide information and support to people on probation regarding Restriction Zones.

Restriction Zones are designed to manage risk in the community, and reduce the likelihood of unwanted contact between victims and people on probation.

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 person when they are released. There are standard licence conditions which apply to everyone and will be on every licence document. A person 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 people on probation's movements currently through an additional licence condition known as an Exclusion Zone. These are areas which people cannot enter. Exclusion Zones are widely used by Probation.

We now want to expand 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 a person on licence's movements to a defined geographic area for a certain period of time, known as a 'Restriction Zone'.

A Restriction Zone requires a person 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 person on probation cannot leave. In most cases, this map will be shared with the victim. However, the victim will not be given any information that could identify where the person on probation lives, works, or might regularly visit, and it will not be shared when this could increase the risk of harm to the person on probation.

The use of a Restriction Zone must support public protection, prevention of re offending, encourage successful reintegration into the community and provide opportunities for rehabilitation. Practitioners must balance risk management with allowing the individual to live a reasonable and practicable life within the zone. Therefore, just because an individual is eligible it does not mean that a Restriction Zone is the most appropriate risk management tool.

Probation will consider how a Restriction Zone may impact rehabilitative outcomes or adversely impact on the wellbeing of the individual and whether these impacts can be

mitigated. Practitioners will consider the person's ability to access education, employment, healthcare, accommodation, and other essential day-to-day services and considerations. Any impact on protected characterisations under the Equality Act 2010 must also be considered.

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 person's movements with the need to ensure access to services that support rehabilitation.

A balanced approach must also be taken wherever the needs of the person on probation come into conflict with the needs of a victim. Where those needs are equal, for example, both requiring access to the same location for the same purpose, then the victims' rights are the priority, and the person on probation must be denied access. The zone must ensure that the person on probation can access essential services and things that support rehabilitation – including accommodation, employment, education, and health services. Probation Practitioners must also consider caring responsibilities and access to places of worship.

As Restriction Zones heavily restrict a person on probation's movements, Probation must ensure they are necessary and proportionate to manage risk. They must be reviewed regularly and must be removed when the Probation Practitioner assesses the risks posed by the person on licence can be managed using other measures.

Restriction Zones can be applied at the point of release from prison or at any point during the licence period. This is a novel policy and new operational practice for probation so the initial roll-out of Restriction Zones will focus on the highest risk sexual and violent cases, before exploring how they could apply to other cohorts. We will learn quickly from how these operate in practice, continually evaluating and refining our approach to eligibility, enforcement and proportionality.

How can people on probation 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, how and when it will operate, and what support is available to help individuals comply with their licence conditions. Early engagement with the person on probation will be critical, particularly if they are still in custody, to ensure they can provide information about their needs which may affect the geography of the zone and that they understand the requirements. People on probation, including those released by the Parole Board, can discuss their Restriction Zone with their Probation Practitioner. While there is no formal appeals process, offenders can access the local complaints scheme or seek legal advice if they have any concerns with the imposition of a restriction zone.

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

Victim Liaison Ofificers (VLOs) will explain licence conditions to victims, 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 will provide information to their VLO, who will provide this to the person on probation's Probation Practitioner. Practitioners will consider any requests for a Restriction Zone, or changes to a zone, and will consider this alongside the person on probation's risk. 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 individual'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.

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.

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

- Murder
- Manslaughter
- Rape
- Rape of a child
- Sexual assault
- Controlling or coercive behaviour
- Stalking involving fear of violence or serious alarm or distress
- Wounding with intent to cause grievous bodily harm

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.

Eligibility criteria

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

- Person on probation 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 the individual'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 person on probation 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 through the Victim Contact Scheme.

How is a Restriction Zone monitored and enforced?

The majority of individuals 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, but only in exceptional circumstances 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 individual 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 person on probation's risk is assessed as no longer manageable in the community. We recognise that particular challenges can arise where victims and people on probation live close to one another. Before any individual 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 risk cannot be managed appropriately, alternative arrangements will be considered. For those who present the highest risks, accommodation in Approved Premises may form part of the risk management arrangement.

How often are Restriction Zones reviewed?

Restriction Zones require intensive assessment, monitoring and ongoing management. Probation Practitioners must ensure a Restriction Zone is only used when it is necessary and proportionate to the management of risk. Their professional judgement is central to these decisions, based on risk assessment rather than fixed criteria.

As a Restriction Zone places significant limits on an individual's freedom, practitioners should routinely consider whether it remains appropriate. It should be reviewed **every three months** to decide whether it is still necessary and proportionate to manage the risk. A mandatory review will also take place at 12 months.

Access routes and exemptions outside of the Restriction Zone may be allowed for specific pre-approved and evidenced activities that cannot take place within the zone, such as attending a medical appointment. Any access route or exemption must take account of the victim's needs, the risk management plan, and the practitioner's professional judgement. Where appropriate, victims will be notified of any agreed access route or exemption.

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 and proportionate for it to remain in place. 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. Victims will be notified of the outcome by their VLO.

Other restrictive measures

The Sentencing Act 2026 will give Probation the power to apply new restrictive licence conditions. These will prohibit individuals from:

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

These will be applied as additional licence conditions – meaning they must be necessary and proportionate to manage risk – 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 individuals convicted of acquisitive crimes such as burglary, robbery and theft.

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