



HM Courts & Tribunals Service

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Private and Confidential

Mr Edward Jones
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24th May 2024

Dear Mr Jones,

Complaint regarding security searches at Stratford Magistrates' Court

As discussed at our recent meeting with you and colleagues, we have now reviewed our risk assessment for Stratford Magistrates' Court, taking into consideration the latest risk information as well as the issues you raised. We take the security of our courts very seriously, including the safety of all users. We recognise your concerns and are conscious of the needs of all professionals working within our buildings.

We are satisfied that Enhanced Searching is no longer required for all those entering the courthouse and that we can limit these measures to those attending and entering courtrooms dealing with protester cases. For such cases there is still a requirement for Enhanced Searches to identify any prohibited items with particular focus on identifying smaller items which could be used to disrupt and/or record proceedings/incidents.

I can now confirm that changes we will be putting in place with regards to the entry into the courthouse, with effect from 28 May 2024.

The changes are:

- Enhanced Searches will no longer take place at the front doors of Stratford Magistrates' Court and instead will take place at the courtroom door of those courtrooms hearing protester cases.
- The exceptions to this Enhanced Searching are those who are members of the Professional User Access Scheme (PUAS)

- Members of the PUAS will, in line with the usual operation of the scheme and on production of their PUAS pass only be required to undergo a bag search at the front door and the magnetic arch and wandling if selected using the Randomiser.
- Members of the PUAS will be subject to a second verification of their identity at the courtroom door, again using the QR Reader. The Randomiser will not be used at the courtroom door and there will be no further search.
- The measures are regularly reviewed, and we will use information from the police as part of our consideration of further changes to the local risk assessment.
- If the local risk assessment reviews at any stage leads to the decision there is a need to have enhanced searches at the front entrance again or it must continue, the PUAS members can be exempted from the enhanced search. This is supported by a recent amendment to our Security & Safety Operating Procedure no. 4b that provided clarification that PUAS members are exempted from manual person searches (Enhanced) unless there is a specific risk-based requirement.
- All other visitors who are not members of the PUAS will go through the standard search process which consists of a bag search, going through the magnetic arch and wandling. Should they be attending a courtroom in which a protestor case is being heard they will be required to undergo an Enhanced Search which will take place at the courtroom door. Such searches will always be carried out by security guards of the same gender.

We hope that these changes will both maintain the safety and security we require and provide a better experience for all court users. To make this a success, it would assist if you could remind your members of the prohibited items within our Safety and Security guidance, such as blades, tools, alcohol, sharps, liquids, glass bottles. The category of "Other" refers to items that are confiscated only when the Court and Tribunal Security Officer has a valid reason to believe that they are dangerous or suspicious.

Members of the PUAS will continue to be searched using the one in ten randomisers, whilst we collect information on how often a professional court user attends court and a prohibited item is located during a one in ten search. To assist and help our security team, and to allow them to see sufficiently inside the bags, we ask that enough items should be removed from the bags to allow security to see clearly to the bottom, and within pockets.

During the first week of the revised local risk assessment, an operational manager will be available on the public concourse by the main entrance between 1pm and 2pm. They will be available to receive any feedback on the revised changes to the local risk assessment, or any other issues or concerns you or your members may have. We also intend to hold a Court User meeting following the first few weeks of this new process to address any concerns. We also plan to arrange regular meetings with you.

I hope that the review of the local risk assessment, gives some reassurance about our commitment to addressing the concerns you raised.

Investigations into the specific complaints is continuing, and we will respond to these separately.

Yours sincerely

Alison Aedy

Alison Aedy
Cluster Manager (London Magistrates' Courts)
HM Courts and Tribunals