Dear Colleagues,

**\*\* This email relates to the phased closure of Virtual Remand Hearings across the Metropolitan Police Service \*\***

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) has continued to support the criminal justice process across London as part of the COVID Response Plan in delivering Virtual Remand Hearings (VRH) from 23 suites into 9 Magistrates Courts. The MPS is fully in support of using technology to improve how we work together, provide a better service and to support victims. We want to continue to explore future initiatives in how we can utilise technology better. There clearly are elements of VRH that have assisted all of us during an extremely challenging time and helped to improve safety in courts across London. However, many of you will be aware that the roll out of VRH by the MPS has come at a significant cost in terms of finance and resources. It has also impacted on our cell capacity, especially early on in the week where a backlog of those waiting for VRH has increased over the weekend. In addition to running VRH, there has been capital expenditure to support the process, including smart phones, Bluetooth speakers/headsets, and a partial roll out programme of internet improvements.

***In light of these challenges the MPS faces with VRH - and after much thought and discussion with partners; it is clear that the current situation is not sustainable for us, and therefore, as of 8th December 2020 we will begin to close our VRH suites over a 3 week period.***

The National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) have supported our position and Deputy Chief Constable Tony Blaker has made a recommendation that each police service in England and Wales sets a withdrawal date.

Remote consultations and virtual attendance of third parties in interview will continue to be an option to aid investigations and reduce detention times. We will also provide a virtual court service for those prisoners who are COVID confirmed/suspected.

***The status of the remaining six suites who were part of the original virtual courts programme (pre-COVID) will be considered over the next 2 weeks after speaking with partners and considering impact.***

The phased VRH closure plan for London courts is below and there will be daily impact assessments and conference calls with partners to ensure these courts stand down from VRH in the smoothest way possible.

Week beginning 7th December.

8/12/20     Willesden

9/12/20     Westminster

10/12/20   Barkingside

Week beginning 14th December

15/12/20   Highbury

16/12/20   Thames

17/12/20   Wimbledon

Week beginning 21st December

22/12/20   Bromley

23/12/20   Croydon

24/12/20   Uxbridge

***The operational lead for VRH in the MPS remains as Superintendent Phil Palmer – please direct any feedback to Phil or myself.***

I hope you will understand the reasons behind our decision and we look forward to working with you as we move away from the current VRH arrangements.

Kind regards,

Ivan

**Ivan Balhatchet** | MO9
OCU Commander – Met Detention

*National Policing Lead – Eradicating Honour-Based Abuse, Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation*