

LADY CHIEF JUSTICE'S OFFICE

**GUIDANCE ON PHYSICAL (IN-PERSON), REMOTE & HYBRID
ATTENDANCE**

20 October 2025

This guidance replaces the guidance dated 6 November 2023.

General

This guidance reflects the recognition that there are matters where the interests of justice determine that physical attendance is necessary unless otherwise directed. It must be remembered that even when business is being conducted remotely it is still a court hearing. Those attending remotely must respect the integrity and formality of the court and behave as they would be expected to if physically in court. This guide outlines how to prepare for, and participate in, a remote hearing¹.

Legal representatives, participants in proceedings and members of the public should attend court in person unless a judge has decided they can attend remotely applying the interests of justice test in that individual case.

Persons attending court remotely **MUST** turn their camera on unless directed otherwise by the judge.

The following general guidance applies across all court tiers.

In person attendance

- The courts are open to all including the public.
- Full hearings require in person attendance of all counsel, solicitors and witnesses unless permission is granted for remote attendance.
- If solicitors request not to attend counsel, that should only be when counsel have been fully briefed and access is available for counsel to take instructions.
- Prosecution and defence counsel should attend all bail applications in the High Court.
- Counsel, solicitors and defendants should attend at plea and sentencing hearings before the Crown Court or in any other court where there is a risk of imprisonment or a community-based order which requires consent.
- Counsel, solicitors and defendants should attend at arraignment hearings before the Crown Court.
- Where personal litigants are involved in any case, opposing counsel and solicitor should always attend in person.

¹ The NICTS Justice Video Platform (JVP) is being rolled out to replace Sightlink for external participants to attend hearings remotely.

- Where a litigant has a vulnerability, learning disability or requires special measures counsel and solicitor should always attend in person.
- Most substantive family hearings will require in person attendance of counsel and solicitors. Reviews and directions hearings may be held remotely at the direction of the judge.
- Civil cases which require assessments of credibility will require in person attendance.
- Requests for remote attendance or access in the magistrates' courts should be made using Form REM or via email and sending it to the relevant court office no later than 2pm on the day prior to the hearing date except for overnight and emergency/short notice cases where the legal representative has only just been instructed (unless the local magistrate has indicated that the request can be submitted by email to the court office). Practitioners should set out why the interests of justice test would be met by remote attendance in the individual case.

Remote use and attendance

The digital technology introduced into courts in recent years has presented a platform for wider reforms to improve access to justice. Its use for certain types or stages of cases or where certain types of evidence is to be given has recognised benefits and it is essential that these are retained while maintaining the integrity and structure of the court. Matters which will generally be suitable for remote attendance include:

- Short or uncontroversial procedural business, such as mentions, reviews, directions, interlocutory applications, and case management hearings;
- The attendance of defendants and police officers at first appearances and bail applications (High Court and magistrates' courts). Defendants' first appearances on 28-day charge sheet should, however, be in person (unless the defendant is in prison);
- Where evidence may be given effectively from an appropriate remote evidence centre (RECs);
- Where PSNI officers are giving evidence, in appropriate cases at appropriate stages of proceedings;
- Where the parties are abroad. Whether the evidence can be given remotely is a matter within the jurisdiction of the NI court;
- Initial and ex parte applications for non-molestation/occupation orders at the direction of the judge in the individual case.

While some remote evidence may be given by professionals, such as health professionals, emergency medical staff, social workers, psychiatrists, psychologists, forensic scientists, police call centre staff etc that will be a matter for the judge in each case and will depend on the nature, complexity and significance of the witness's evidence.

When a witness is giving their evidence at a hearing as a result of a special measures application, they must do this by way of live link (this is a direct live link to the witness room/REC). Due to the technical and security requirements of the system, the JVP link to the court will not be available to other users while the live link evidence is taking place. This includes members of the legal profession and media representatives. If you are linked through to the court using the JVP and a witness is called to give evidence via live link, you will be disconnected or moved to the waiting lobby until the witness has finished giving their evidence. Any user who wishes to hear the evidence of a witness using live link, should make arrangements to attend the court in person.

Remote attendance etiquette

It is essential that those attending court remotely respect the integrity and formality of a court and that they behave, as they would be expected to if physically in court. The taking of photographs or filming of the remote proceedings is a criminal offence.

Guidance on how to participate in a remote hearing can be found at Annex A and should be carefully read before any remote attendance.

ANNEX A

Remote Court Hearings – A Guide for Court Users

Preparation for the remote hearing

- Legal representatives, participants in proceedings and members of the public should attend court in person unless the judge has determined in advance that you can attend remotely. An application for this purpose can be made by your legal representative, or by you if you are not legally represented, providing the reasons why you cannot attend in person. This can be done orally, by email to the court office² or by completing and submitting the REM form.³
- Ensure you have **any discussions** with your legal representative or others involved in the case **in advance** of the hearing date / time, and that you have a **copy of all papers which might be referred to**.
- The court will provide you with **joining instructions** relating to your remote hearing in advance. Ensure you have downloaded any software needed to connect to the court. If possible, you should **test this** in advance of the hearing and contact the court office and your solicitor if you encounter any problems.
- Ensure that your device is fully charged, or connected to power, to avoid a breakdown in connection during the hearing. You will be required to enter your name and any relevant court reference before you can join the hearing which will be shown on your camera / video image – this should be your proper name, so the Judge knows who you are.
- Make arrangements to join the hearing from a quiet and private space indoors where you will be free from interruptions. When giving evidence you must be alone (or tell the Judge if you are with your solicitor, or other person in a support role) and ensure that there is no one to prompt you with the answers that you give under examination (either in person or by any other means).
- If you are to give evidence and wish to take an oath, you should ensure you have to hand a bible / religious book. You may otherwise choose to ‘affirm’.
- You should **use earphones or headphones with a microphone** if you have them to keep the remote hearing confidential and improve the sound quality.
- You should **find the mute function** on your device and on the system being used for the hearing (NICTS use Webex for remote court hearings) so you know how

² A list of all court office email addresses can be found at this [link](#).

³ [Form to apply to appear remotely \(Form REM\)](#)

to switch the sound on when you need to speak (and off afterwards). This should always be set to mute (sound off) until you are invited to speak. You should not address the court unless you are asked to do so.

- You should **find the camera function** on your device and on the system being used for the hearing (Webex) so you know how to switch this on. You **must** turn your camera on unless it has been directed in advance by the judge that you are not required to be visible.
- You should dress appropriately for a remote hearing, as if you were attending court in person.

The remote hearing

- **Follow the instructions to join the hearing at least ten minutes** before the listed start time. This is to give the court clerk enough time to identify you and ensure that you join the hearing in time..
- Your camera should be turned **on** at all times unless told otherwise. You should sit with the light in front of you so your face is not in shadow.
- You will be **visible to the court** throughout the hearing therefore you should ensure that the background visible on the screen is appropriate for a court hearing and that your face can be clearly seen. You should not move away from the screen during the hearing without the Judge's permission.
- You should ensure that you will **not be interrupted or distracted** during the hearing.
- The usual **restrictions** in a courtroom still apply - you **should not eat, drink, smoke / vape, use a mobile telephone etc.**
- The **language and forms of address** used will be the same as apply in the courtroom. You should however **remain seated** throughout unless asked to do otherwise.
- You should '**mute**' (turn-off) the **microphone** on your device at all times **except** when the Judge asks you to speak. You should only speak when invited to by the Judge and must not talk or interrupt when someone else is speaking.
- Where you wish to speak or make an intervention, you should make this known by **raising your hand** and waiting for permission before speaking.
- You **must not record the hearing** by audio or video recording or take a 'screenshot' or 'screengrab' of the video image of the court on screen. It is a

criminal offence and a contempt of court for you to record the hearing without permission, which could result in possible imprisonment or other penalty.

You should not leave the hearing once you have given your evidence, until the judge grants permission to do so.