

## CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19): UPDATE

6 September 2021

This update sets out the position for those attending court or participating in legal proceedings from the start of the new legal year on 6 September 2021. The details will be kept under review in the light of any further guidance by the Executive and Public Health Agency.

### Attending court

There will be **no change** to the current covid arrangements in court or NICTS buildings at the start of the new legal year. Everyone attending a court or a NICTS building must continue to follow the guidance on social distancing (2 metres between seated positions or 1 metre where mitigations such as glass partitions are in place). Attendees must wear face coverings in designated spaces and should follow the PHA guidance on hand hygiene until further notice. Covid mitigations, such as screens and partitions will remain in place. These measures ensure that the administration of justice continues to be delivered safely. NICTS has published [guidance](#) for court and tribunal users.

Courts are open for face to face hearings however legal representatives and those involved in proceedings should only attend in person when required by the judge. Judges will make a decision as to whether physical attendance is required based on the individual circumstances of the case. Judges may also timetable or schedule hearings in order to manage footfall in courtrooms and public areas. While social distancing measures continue to be a requirement, there will be a role/requirement for hybrid and remote hearings in order to manage footfall in courtrooms and public areas.

Legal representatives should continue to collaboratively complete and lodge the [relevant forms](#) within the prescribed timeframes in advance of a substantive hearing or where required by the Judge or Master so that appropriate arrangements can be made by court staff to manage the numbers present in courtrooms and court buildings. Only those persons who are required by the court to attend may be admitted to the courtroom. In addition, only participants in hearings should attend the court building, with supporters and family members encouraged not to attend.

The court office will inform the parties of the date, time and type of hearing and the details of any callover which may be arranged in advance of the hearing. Practitioners are reminded to check ICOS and/or Public Court Lists Online to confirm the Sightlink details and should take note of the [Practice Direction and guidance on Remote Hearings](#). If a matter is unable to proceed on its allocated date, or the action has been settled, the relevant court office must be advised as soon as possible.

The Waterfront International Convention Centre (“ICC”) will not be available to NICTS after 3 September 2021 for waiting and consultation for civil and family proceedings in the Royal Courts of Justice and Laganside Court. It is therefore important for parties and legal representatives to schedule consultations to take place before arriving at the court. Where consultations are required during a hearing facilities may be made available on request. Strict limits on capacity will be applied to the consultation facilities, the majority of which will only safely accommodate two individuals. Rooms will be cleaned at regular intervals.

### **Crown Courts**

From 11 October 2021, trials may be listed in Coleraine Court 2 and Craigavon Court. This means that there will be 15 courts in which Crown Court jury trials can be heard:

- Laganside Courts (Courts 11-15);
- Antrim (Courts 1 and 2);
- Coleraine (Courts 1 and 2 for Londonderry Crown Court<sup>1</sup>);
- Craigavon (Courts 1 and 2);
- Dungannon (Courts 1 and 2); and
- Newry (Courts 1 and 2).

Socially distant multi-defendant trials can currently be listed in Courts 11, 12 and 13 in Laganside Courts. From 4 October 2021 they may also be listed in Antrim Court 1, Coleraine Court 2, Craigavon Court 1 and Dungannon Court 1.

### **Magistrates’ Courts – Criminal Contests**

Additional contest days have been scheduled from September 2021 to address the backlog of contests resulting from the lockdowns in 2020/21. The additional contest days are:

- Antrim/Ballymena – 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday and 5<sup>th</sup> Wednesday;
- Belfast – Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday each week;
- Craigavon – 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Thursday. There is also a new court on the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday each month to deal with first appearance summonses only.
- Newtownards – every Monday;
- Downpatrick – every Wednesday;
- Londonderry Court 2 – 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday;
- Magherafelt (sitting in Londonderry) – 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a temporary arrangement to meet Public Health requirements while facilitating jury trials