

Office of the Lord Chief Justice

Covid-19: Update: 3 August 2020

The following update provides information about the latest phase of the gradual and incremental recovery of court business. We continue to work with NICTS on the re-opening of courthouses whilst complying with the Executive and Public Health Agency guidance. This phase is a further step towards the full recovery of business and it will be advanced with the extension of the court estate.

Courts will continue to undertake as much business as possible **remotely** in this next stage of recovery. Members of the public and legal representatives should **not** attend court unless specifically required. Urgent matters, agreed matters or matters where approval is required should continue to be dealt with as set out in the Guidance for Courts (5 June 2020). This new way of working has been a positive step forward and one to be encouraged. It also ensures that 'in court time' is used effectively.

NICTS has carried out risk assessments to determine the number of people who can be present in court whilst complying with the Executive and Public Health Agency guidance. Where attendance at a court building is required, individuals should consult the NICTS guidance on security, social distancing and cleaning of court buildings before attending. Key points to note are:

- You must comply with all signage and directions;
- Masks and gloves may be worn;
- No water or drinking vessels will be provided. Court users may bring their own water.

Hearings

Attendance at court for substantive hearings by **County Court Judges, District Judges and District Judges (Magistrates' Courts)** should only be where it is pre-arranged and a judge has directed accordingly¹. In these circumstances, legal representatives and/or a party to the proceedings should collaboratively complete Form [HR1](#) and lodge it with the relevant court office as directed by the judge or, in any event, no later than 4.00 pm four working days in advance of the hearing. They should detail the number of persons who will be involved whether remotely or physically. This is necessary to ensure that footfall and social distancing can be managed. Where a case is listed and an allocated time is determined, those involved will only be permitted access to the court building during the relevant period.

Where a substantive hearing has been listed and the matter does not need to proceed (ie where the matter has been agreed) legal representatives and/or a party to the proceedings should collaboratively complete Form [CCCI1](#) or [MCCI1](#) as appropriate and lodge it with the relevant court office no later than 4.00 pm four working days in advance of the date for hearing.

No hard copy documentation will be accepted by the court if a party attempts to hand it in during the course of the hearing. Late submission of documents without some extenuating reason may mean they will not be considered.

Bail

In relation to applications for bail at all tiers it is important that time limits are complied with and information is provided in sufficient time to allow the application to be considered.

¹ This does not apply to substantive hearings in the High Court and Court of Appeal where the arrangements currently in place for these tiers will continue.

Crown Court

Jury trials will resume in Laganside Courts in week commencing 17 August 2020. Arrangements for trials in other Crown Court venues are being planned for mid-September and further details will be issued. The Crown Courts continue to deal with arraignments, pleas and sentencing and case management. Reviews for High Court Judge Crown Court cases have been listed on 4 and 18 September.

County Court and District Judge Courts

In relation to both Crown Court and County Court and District Judge courts please see the attached [list of venues and allocated business](#). Further details will be issued. In the interim business will continue in line with current arrangements.

Coroners

Coroners' inquests and hearings will be listed in Court 3 in Laganside Courts and other courts as necessary. Preliminary hearings will be facilitated remotely where possible. Attendance at court for substantive hearings should only be where it is pre-arranged and a Coroner has directed accordingly. Further detail on the arrangements for inquests will be confirmed shortly.

Magistrates' Courts

The listing of magistrates' courts business (adult criminal, departmental, youth, family proceedings and domestic proceedings courts) will extend out of the current court hubs as outlined below. A [detailed schedule](#) of the business being listed at each court venue has been published on the website. Practitioners should adopt the usual practice of accessing court lists online to check their cases. From 3 August 2020, unless otherwise directed by the judge, any cases should be adjourned to the venue allocated for that business area.

The listing arrangements are broadly as follows:

Date	Courthouse	Court Business
10 August	Laganside (Court 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each Friday: criminal contests
	Laganside (Court 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belfast criminal, Departmental and Youth • Substance Misuse Court
	Laganside (Court 8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belfast Family Proceedings Court (FPC) and Domestic
	Laganside (Court 9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belfast Criminal - Videolink at 9.15 am, summons, plea & sentence
	Laganside (Court 10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belfast Criminal - charge sheet cases
	Antrim (Court 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antrim Criminal, Departmental, Youth, Domestic and FPC • Ballymena Criminal, Departmental, Youth, Domestic and FPC
	Newtownards (Court 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ards and Downpatrick FPC and Domestic • Ards and Downpatrick Youth
	Newtownards (Court 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ards Criminal, Departmental
	Downpatrick (Court 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downpatrick Criminal, Departmental and Domestic
	Lisburn (Court 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lisburn Criminal and Departmental • Craigavon Criminal and Departmental
	Craigavon (Court 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lisburn FPC, Domestic and Youth • Craigavon FPC, Domestic and Youth (including Armagh Youth) • Newry, Armagh & Banbridge FPC and Domestic • Criminal contests
	Newry (Court 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newry, Armagh & Banbridge Criminal and Departmental • Newry Youth (including Banbridge Youth)

24 August 2020	Ballymena (Court 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coleraine Criminal, Departmental, Youth, Domestic and FPC (including Limavady Youth, Domestic and FPC) • Limavady Criminal and Departmental
	Londonderry (Court 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Londonderry Criminal and Departmental • Londonderry and Magherafelt Youth
	Londonderry (Court 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Londonderry and Magherafelt FPC • Londonderry Domestic • Magherafelt Criminal, Departmental and Domestic
	Omagh (Court 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dungannon Criminal and Departmental • Omagh Criminal and Departmental
	Omagh (Court 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enniskillen Criminal, Departmental, Domestic and Youth • Strabane Criminal and Departmental
	Dungannon (Court 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dungannon FPC • Dungannon Domestic and Youth (including Magherafelt Youth) • Omagh FPC, Domestic and Youth • Strabane Domestic and Youth

A review of **criminal contests** is to be undertaken to prioritise cases which might involve, for example, a vulnerable person. This process will commence immediately and legal representatives should complete Form [HR1](#) by 24 August 2020. In the interim the dates allocated for criminal contests and additional listing may be used to address outstanding business across each jurisdiction.

Weekend and public holiday courts will continue to be based in the court hubs (Laganside, Lisburn, Londonderry and Dungannon) until the end of September when this arrangement will be reviewed.