

## COVID-19 GUIDANCE

### MAGISTRATES' COURTS: CONTEST HEARINGS

17 December 2020

#### THIS GUIDANCE WILL COME INTO EFFECT ON MONDAY 21 DECEMBER 2020

Court managers need to make appropriate arrangements to manage footfall in courtrooms and public areas of the court building and ensure that the overall numbers attending do not exceed the published Covid-19 guidance and the risk assessments carried out by NICTS for court buildings.

Form HR1 is being used for this purpose across most court tiers. We have, however, listened to feedback about the complexity of the form. A new form HR2 has therefore been developed which is specific to the needs of **listing contests in criminal cases in the Magistrates' Court**.

The following procedure is to be followed in all cases:

- On a plea of not guilty, the case will be adjourned for three weeks to fix a date and obtain witness availability;
- Within two working days of a plea of not guilty, the defence will complete the HR2 form and email it directly to the PPS via the following addresses with "FAO Directing Officer - HR2 Form" in the title of the email:

Belfast & Eastern Region	Belfast Chambers	<a href="mailto:B&amp;ECourtSupport@ppsni.gov.uk">B&amp;ECourtSupport@ppsni.gov.uk</a>
Western & Southern Region	Foyle Chambers	<a href="mailto:CourtSupportFoyle@ppsni.gov.uk">CourtSupportFoyle@ppsni.gov.uk</a>
	Omagh Chambers	<a href="mailto:OmaghCourtSupport@ppsni.gov.uk">OmaghCourtSupport@ppsni.gov.uk</a>
	Newry Chambers	<a href="mailto:PPSNewryCourtSupport@ppsni.gov.uk">PPSNewryCourtSupport@ppsni.gov.uk</a>

- The PPS will confirm receipt of the HR2 form to the defence and will advise them of the name of the Directing Officer to which the form has been forwarded.
- The PPS will lodge the completed HR2 form (including witness availability) with the relevant court office three working days before the next listing of the case.

For cases listed in Laganside Courts, the form should be emailed to [BelfastCase.Progression@courtsni.gov.uk](mailto:BelfastCase.Progression@courtsni.gov.uk). For all other Magistrates' Courts the form should be emailed to the court office (email addresses for court offices can be found here).

**This approach has been agreed by the judiciary and the legal profession and must be used.** The court office will inform parties of the date and time of the hearing (including Sightlink details where applicable). If a contest is unable to proceed on its allocated date the relevant court office must be advised as soon as possible.