



02/06

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TELEPHONE HEARINGS WILL LEAD TO SPEEDIER JUSTICE IN COUNTY COURTS

No travelling to or waiting around in court, and improved access to justice will result from the wider use of telephone hearings in county courts. It will also free up more courtrooms to hear other cases more quickly.

Now, many more preliminary hearings will be by telephone, although full hearings will still be in court. Once introduced in courts most allocation hearings, listing hearings, case management hearings and interim applications (see Notes) expected to last no more than one hour will automatically be conducted by telephone conference. Any other application may also be conducted by telephone if the court and all parties agree. Previously telephone hearings could be requested, but the aim is to make them the norm.

The hearings will allow access to the court for people unable to get there in person, and save litigants and their legal representatives time and money, as they won't have to travel. It will also result in a more efficient use of both judicial and court accommodation.

The nation-wide roll-out of telephone hearings which begins next week follows successful pilot schemes in Newcastle Combined Court Centre and at Luton and Bedford county courts.

Cathy Ashton DCA Minister with responsibility for civil law policy, said:

“The removal of time spent travelling to or waiting at court will be a huge benefit to those who have difficulty in attending court, for example through caring responsibilities or disability. It will free up courtrooms to hear other cases. It should also encourage people to agree the next steps and resolve issues more quickly. Telephone hearings will save everyone involved in the process time and money – it shows how the courts are responding to the needs of the people we serve.”

The nation-wide rollout will operate on a regional basis. The provisional timetable is as follows:

- 3 April – North East Region
- 1 May – North West Region
- 1 June – Wales and Chester Region:
- 3 July – South West Region
- 1 August – Midlands Region
- 1 September – South East Region
- 2 October – London Region

A list of participating courts for court users will be provided on the HMCS website, which will be continually updated and maintained.

Telephone hearings will not be conducted in cases where all of the parties are without legal representation; where more than four parties want to make representations at the hearing; or where the hearing could result in the final determination of the whole or part of the proceedings.

NOTES

1. Parties can apply for a hearing not to take place by telephone by letter and no later than seven days before the hearing.

2. Allocation hearing: Where one party files an Allocation Questionnaire but another party does not, the court may order an allocation hearing is listed and that all or any parties must attend
3. Listing hearing: where the court considers that a hearing is necessary to decide what directions to give in order to complete preparations for trial
4. Case management hearing: a hearing or conference in relation to the court's directions and timetable to trial
5. Interim applications: applications to the court in relation to the conduct of the case which (in the context of telephone hearings) could not result in the final determination of the whole or part of the proceedings