

Courts Charter - The Crown Court

This leaflet sets out the standard of service you can expect from any Crown Court in England and Wales. We have set these standards after talking to people who have used the court. We aim to provide an excellent, courteous service and when you come to court you can expect fair and equal treatment, no matter what your age, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability, gender or religious beliefs.

This Charter is about the administration of the court and not the decisions made by judges. Appeal procedures against decisions of the court are available to the prosecution and defence. Please note that court staff are unable to give legal advice to customers.

If you are coming to court

When you are first asked to come to court, we, the prosecution or the defence will provide:

- a map of how to get to court;
- details of public transport and any car parks near the court;
- details of the times the court is open;
- information on the availability of refreshments, telephones, separate waiting areas etc;
- the contact details of the Customer Service or appropriate Court Officer.

Before the date of your hearing you can

- ask to visit a court room;
- ask us to arrange seats in the court room or public gallery (if we can) for anyone who comes to your hearing with you.

If you have a disability and need help at your court hearing, please speak to the Customer Service Officer who will tell you how we can help you.

Please note that smoking is strictly prohibited in any part of our buildings.

The court building is normally open from 9am on days when there are hearings. The public counter or enquiry point is open from 10am to 4pm although locally some may be open for longer than this national minimum standard.

When you come to court you will find:

- courteous, polite, helpful staff wearing identity badges;
- clear signs to help you find your way around;
- information leaflets on display and a list of cases to be heard that day;
- a notice giving details of the Customer Service Officer or Court Manager who will be pleased to help you with any special needs, suggestions or complaints.

When you go to the public counter or enquiry point we will:

- respect your privacy;
- talk to you out of the hearing of other members of the public, if you prefer;
- use simple clear language and ensure all technical terms are explained;
- attend to your enquiry within 10 minutes or explain the delay if you have to wait longer.

You can contact us by phone Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm and we will:

- answer the phone promptly and helpfully;
- give the name of the person you are speaking to;
- give you a clear and helpful answer.

When you write to the court, and we need to reply, we will:

- write to you or phone you within 10 working days of receiving your letter;
- tell you who is writing and provide a phone number to contact them if you wish.

Being a juror

If we ask you to be a juror we will:

- send you a jury summons at least 4 weeks before we need you;
- tell you how to apply to have your jury service deferred or to apply to be excused.

We will also send you:

- a booklet (Your Guide to Jury Service) about your duties as a juror;
- a leaflet explaining the allowances you can claim;
- a leaflet with a map of how to get to court, details of public transport and any car parks near the court;
- details of the times the court is open;
- information on the availability of refreshments, telephones, separate waiting areas etc;
- details on how to contact the court.

When you arrive at court we will:

- show you to a separate waiting area;
- show you a video giving you more details about being a juror;
- make sure one of our staff is available to answer your questions;
- respect your privacy and talk to you in private if you prefer;
- tell you how many days you can expect to sit as a juror.

How we use your time

Although we only summons the number of jurors we need, changes in circumstances mean that you may not be called upon as a juror in a trial for every day of your jury service. Nevertheless we aim to use your time as efficiently as possible.

While you are waiting to sit on a trial we will:

- tell you at least every hour when you're likely to be needed in court;
- let you go as soon as possible if your services are not needed.

We will also:

- let you return to work on days, or part days, if you aren't needed (if your employer agrees);
- give you a special phone number to call (in our larger Crown Court centres) to find out if you need to come to court that day;
- explain how (in our smaller courts) we make sure you know when you need to come into court.

When you are selected for a jury, you will have to swear an oath or make an affirmation (declaration) when you go into the courtroom. We will display the words of the most common oaths and the affirmation in the jury waiting area for you to read in advance.

Court hearings

Hearings are arranged as quickly as possible, but whilst we aim to keep delays to a minimum, many things can affect how soon a case will be given a date for hearing.

Although we cannot guarantee when your case will be heard we aim to:

- have the first hearing within 7 weeks from when we receive your case;
- start most trials within 16 weeks of when we receive the case.

If you are a witness

If the date of your case is delayed you can ask us to:

- explain the delay, or tell you who can explain it to you;
- tell you when your case is likely to be heard.

If we have to change the date of your hearing, we will let the prosecution or defence who called you as a witness, know as soon as possible.

Waiting at court

You shouldn't have to wait more than 2 hours from the time you are asked to attend to when you are called to give evidence. However, delays are sometimes unavoidable, for example if the case before yours takes longer than planned.

If you have to wait we will ensure that:

- you are told regularly how much longer you may have to wait and the reason for the delay;
- you are told as quickly as possible, through the people who called you as a witness, if your case cannot be heard that day.

For witnesses we will also seek to:

- provide separate waiting areas where possible;
- consider arrangements for you to wait apart from other parties if there isn't a separate area. Please ask the court staff if you would prefer this.

Our service for child and vulnerable / intimidated adult witnesses

We know that giving evidence in court can be very difficult and stressful for a child or vulnerable / intimidated adult witness so we will:

- arrange to have any case involving a child or vulnerable / intimidated adult witness heard as soon as possible;
- ensure the Witness Service or other support agency meets children and their companions or vulnerable / intimidated adults when they come to court and takes them to a private waiting area away from the defendant;
- explain how we do things in court and answer any questions.

The judge may let such witnesses give evidence using a Video Link. If they do, we can arrange for the witness to see the room and how the equipment works before the trial. If you want to know whether a Video Link may be used, please ask the solicitors involved in your case. Applications for such "special measures" are made formally in advance of the trial.

Witness Service

The Witness Service is run by the independent charity, Victim Support, and helps victims, prosecution and defence witnesses and their families before, during and after the hearing. Trained volunteers in every crown court centre give free and confidential support and practical information about how we do things in court. They will not offer an opinion on the case or discuss the crime. They will normally get in touch with you before the court hearing to offer their help.

The help they offer includes:

- arranging a visit to court before the hearing;
- arranging for someone to go into the court room with you if you have to give evidence;
- giving you the chance to talk over the case after it's ended and advising where to get more help or information.

If you would like help, or if you'd like to volunteer for the Witness Service, you can contact them at:

Victim Support National Office,
Cranmer House,
39 Brixton Road,
London SW9 6DZ

Telephone: 020 7735 9166
email: contact@victimsupport.org.uk
website: www.victimsupport.org.uk

Travel expenses and allowances

If you are a juror or a defence witness of fact you can claim travel expenses and allowances.

If you are a prosecution witness you should get your claim form from the prosecuting authority. They will:

- explain what expenses and allowances you can claim;
- give you a reply-paid envelope in which to return your completed form.

If you are a witness, you may be able to claim your expenses and allowances immediately after you have given evidence. We will:

- tell you if you can do this;
- if you cannot, we will tell you why not.

We will pay witness expenses within 5 days of receipt and jurors expenses within 5 days of the conclusion of their service or within 5 days of the conclusion of the first 2 weeks of service.

If you are a defendant found not guilty at your trial, and the judge agrees, you may be able to claim travel expenses, normally with the assistance of your solicitor. However, you won't be able to claim for loss of earnings. We will:

- give you a claim form and help you fill it in;
- send you the money within 5 working days from when we receive your claim form.

If you are a defendant

If you are on bail, and you require it, we will send you or your solicitor a copy of this charter.

If you don't have a solicitor and require an interpreter for the court hearing please inform the Listings Officer at the court as soon as you know your hearing date. If you cannot hear very well and you need help at your court hearing, or if you have any other special needs, please speak to the Customer Service or Listings Officer who will tell you how we can help you.

We try to arrange hearings as quickly as possible. We are trying to reduce delays, but many things can affect how soon we can arrange trials, so we cannot guarantee when your case will be heard. We do give priority to trials for defendants in custody.

If you have been committed from the magistrates' court to the crown court to be sentenced we aim to sentence you within 10 weeks from when we receive your case.

Appeals

If you are appealing against a decision in the magistrates' court, we aim to:

- deal with the appeal within 14 weeks of receiving it;
- if it takes longer than 14 weeks, we will tell you the reason for the delay if you ask us.

At court you will probably come into contact with people from the Police, National Probation Service and Crown Prosecution Service. Although we aren't responsible for the services they provide, you can get information about them from the court.

Crown Prosecution Service

This organisation decides if crimes investigated by the police should go to court. If they do, the CPS is responsible for the prosecution case.

You can contact them at:

Crown Prosecution Service,
50 Ludgate Hill,
London EC4M 7EX

Telephone: 020 7796 8000
email: enquires@cps.gsi.gov.uk
website: www.cps.gov.uk

Authorities such as the HM Revenue and Customs can also bring prosecutions. Please ask our staff for more details.

National Probation Service

National Probation Directorate,
1st Floor, Abell House,
John Islip Street,
London SW1P 4LH

email: npd.publicenquiry@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk
website: www.probation.homeoffice.gov.uk

Criminal Defence Service

You may be able to get legal aid to help pay your legal fees for representation. You can find out by contacting:

The Legal Services Commission,
85 Grays Inn Road,
London WC1X 8TX

Telephone: 020 7759 0000
email addresses for regional offices are on their website: www.legalservices.gov.uk

Community Legal Service

CLS Direct, a free government funded service, will provide information on where you can obtain the type of legal advice you need.

Telephone: 0845 345 4345
website: www.clsdirect.org.uk

Listening to you

We welcome your comments and suggestions on how we could improve our service to you. We do this by:

- inviting you to fill in comment cards;
- carrying out local surveys;
- paying attention to all comments, complaints and suggestions;
- displaying information about our performance;
- displaying details in court waiting areas of complaints and suggestions and what we have done to make improvements as a result of your feedback;
- displaying results of local surveys and changes we have made because of them.

If you have a complaint, please tell us as soon as possible and we will do our best to sort out the problem there and then. If you are still not happy, you can speak to the Customer Service Officer or the Court Manager. If you prefer, you can write to the Court Manager of the court in question.

We aim to resolve and respond to the complaint, giving you a full answer within 5 working days of receipt.

A leaflet called “I want to complain – what should I do” is also available in every court. For more information please ask one of the court staff or visit our website at:

www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk

We welcome suggestions and compliments too.

Whilst we can investigate complaints about how a judge behaved in court we cannot investigate anything to do with their judgment, their assessment of a case or overturn any of their decisions.

Information about how to make a complaint about the personal conduct of judges is available on the web:

www.judicialcomplaints.gov.uk

Such complaints may be sent in writing to:

Office for Judicial Complaints (OJC),
4th Floor, Clive House,
70 Petty France,
London SW1H 9HD

Telephone: 020 7189 2937

Fax: 020 7189 2936

Your letter should include the name of the judge and court, your case number and hearing date together with the specific details of the conduct about which you are complaining.

Although we cannot look into complaints about solicitors, barristers or any other organisation, you may find the following addresses useful:

Solicitors

Consumer Complaints Service,
The Law Society,
Victoria Court, 8 Dormer Place,
Leamington Spa,
Warwickshire CV32 5AE
Helpline: 0845 608 6565
Textphone: 0845 601 1682
Fax: 01926 431435
email: enquiries@lawsociety.org.uk
website: www.oss.lawsociety.org.uk

Barristers

If you would like a complaint form please write to:

The Complaints Department,
The General Council of the Bar,
Northumberland House,
289-293 High Holborn,
London WC1V 7HZ
Telephone: 020 7242 0082
Fax: 020 7611 1342
email: complaints@barcouncil.org.uk
website: www.barcouncil.org.uk

Police

Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC),
90 High Holborn,
London WC1V 6BH
Telephone: 08453 002 002
email: enquires@ipcc.gsi.gov.uk
website: www.ipcc.gov.uk