

Media Release

For Immediate Use

Trade Unions and Legal Professionals unite in their concerns over safety at Courts

Representatives of various legal professional bodies (including the Criminal Bar Association) and trade unions are calling for an immediate review of safety arrangements across the HMCTS estate amidst rising concerns that courts are unsafe and fail to implement measures to ensure that all buildings are Covid-19 secure. These calls come as a result of rising concern over escalating levels of transmission of Covid-19 in courts and tribunals buildings and the failure of HMCTS to take timely and appropriate action to improve safety arrangements. Confirmation of over 600 positive cases amongst professional court users since 24th November across the HMCTS estate, evidences the alarming extent of the crisis emerging in the justice sector.

In a statement issued jointly by unions of court staff and the legal professional bodies it says that if HMCTS continue to fail to take remedial action to ensure that transmission levels are significantly reduced and professional, lay and public court users remain safe then further action will be necessary. That remedial action must include the rapid introduction of lateral flow testing at every court and for every prisoner brought to court to ensure that all court users are tested negative before they enter buildings. All of those signatory organisations of this statement agree that the new Covid-19 variant is transmitting at a rate up to 70% higher than the first lockdown and that the priority must therefore be the safety and wellbeing of all court users, their families and their communities. Despite HMCTS continuing to give assurances that they are implementing all available measures the evidence and repeated concerns raised demonstrate that these measures are inadequate. The recurrent claims that courts and tribunals are safe and covid-19 secure bear no resemblance to the reality of the conditions in most buildings across the estate.

The unions and the legal professional organisations have said, "Our calls for safety for all court users are realistic and achievable and must be met as a matter of strict urgency. We expect HMCTS to rectify the current situation by taking the appropriate actions necessary to ensure the safety of all who attend court. Failure to do so will result in potential political, legal and industrial responses from some of the signatory organisations of this statement."