



15 October 2021

Dear Colleague

AUTUMN UPDATE ON CRIMINAL COURTS IN ENGLAND & WALES

I have written to you periodically over the past 18 months to keep you informed of the steps we've taken to respond to and recover from the impact of the pandemic on our criminal courts.

As we emerge from the summer period – in which I hope you have been able to take some time for a well-deserved break – it felt timely to update you on the progress that's been made, and the work that is still to do, in returning the criminal courts to pre-pandemic levels.

Working shoulder to shoulder with those who use, work in and are impacted by the courts system has continued to underpin everything we do. I know that you will have played a key role in keeping the wheels of justice turning throughout these challenging times, and I cannot understate my thanks to you for the time, insight and commitment that you have given this year.

There is, of course, still a long way to go to recover completely, and – as much as we all want it to – this will not happen overnight. But many green shoots of improvement are starting to emerge as shown in the [latest national quarterly statistics up to the end of June 2021](#).

- In the Magistrates' Court, outstanding cases decreased by 8% compared to the previous quarter and 14% against the peak seen in summer 2020.
- Crown Court receipts and disposals have stabilised close to pre-COVID levels, but receipts remain above disposals. Outstanding cases continued to rise but at a slower rate, up 1% on the previous quarter (since publication of official statistics, our latest published MI is indicating a small reduction in outstanding Crown Court cases since this peak, which is encouraging.)
- Crown case disposals continued to increase each quarter since last summer, up 3% on the previous quarter and returning to pre-COVID levels.
- In the most recent quarter there were 5,388 trials listed in the Crown Court, representing a 28% increase on the previous quarter with volumes returning to pre-COVID levels.

These improvements are being underpinned by other recent achievements. They include opening new Nightingale courts in London and Leeds, that form part of the 32 extra Crown courtrooms across England and Wales that we're extending until the end of March 2022. The new Manchester super courtroom got underway with its first large multi-hander trial this month, with another facility at Loughborough due to start taking on trials later this Autumn. And with the relaxing of social distancing requirements we've been able to make more courtrooms available for jury trials across the Crown Court estate, to name but a few.

This is all part of our plan to recover as quickly and safely as possible and I've outlined this work in a more detailed update annexed to this letter.

Our work to reform courts and tribunals systems has also continued throughout the pandemic. Many, such as remote hearings, were indeed accelerated to meet the new challenges we faced. And our efforts to make justice more accessible continue.

The new ministerial team at the Ministry of Justice has made it clear that, along with the independent judiciary, reform and recovery in our courts is a priority for the department. Their clear support for our plans gives me further confidence that we will continue on an upward trajectory over the autumn and winter months to come.

We've learned a lot from the past 18 months and are using these experiences as the framework for safely returning our courts to a normal way of operating, as well as to contingency plan for a range of scenarios during the months ahead. This will enable us to stand ready to change our operating model with agility and pace, should circumstances require.

While I certainly do not take it for granted, I am immensely grateful to you for your ongoing support in working with us, shaping our plans, representing the voices of your organisation, and ultimately making an invaluable difference to our recovery so far. I look forward to this continuing over the weeks and months to come.

I hope you find the attached update helpful and would be grateful if you could share amongst your colleagues and members. It details the progress we've made, acknowledges the years of work ahead of us, and reiterates the importance of our continued modernisation to underpin and achieve recovery of the criminal courts.

Yours sincerely



Kevin Sadler CBE
Acting Chief Executive, HM Courts & Tribunals Service

Enc. Update on criminal courts in England & Wales: Autumn 2021