

Coronavirus recovery in Her Majesty's Court and Tribunal Service

It comes as Her Majesty's Court and Tribunal Service (HMCTS) publishes a recovery plan that charts the progress made during the emergency and sets out the road to recovery.

In March, [almost half of all courts](#) were closed and [jury trials were paused](#) to minimise social interaction between court users. Since then, court staff, legal professionals, and the judiciary have collaborated to prioritise cases and keep the justice system running throughout the lockdown.

Up to [90% of hearings](#) in this period involved remote access. Video technology has been bolstered across all courts, and – using public health advice – measures have been put in place to safely [resume jury trials](#) in [26 courts](#) since June.

This has meant that, throughout the lockdown, domestic abuse victims could obtain protection orders, children could be safeguarded, and dangerous suspects have not been released from jail as their remand expired.

The success of these measures means we can begin to ramp up the work of the courts – building on what we have achieved. The recovery plan, [published today](#), sets out our approach to get back up to speed.

The Lord Chancellor, Robert Buckland QC MP, said:

The Prime Minister was right when he said that the whole country needs to prepare for an extended period of managing the threat of the virus and this demands a new perspective on the way we deliver justice.

His spending commitment yesterday shows just how serious we are taking this as a government. We have set aside £142 million to improve more than 100 courts across the country, give 750 more court rooms remote capability.

This will more than double the maintenance budget meaning that, combined with the £48 million already set aside this year, it will be the biggest single investment in the courts and tribunals estate in over a decade.

This will create jobs, increase capacity, and improve the court estate – building on the developments we have made throughout the pandemic to deliver a more efficient and effective court service.

Our courts have been recognised globally for their response to this unprecedented crisis, and those who have worked so hard to deliver this should take pride in how far we have come in a short amount of

time.

We should be proud of this but there is work to be done to get back on track. While the number of outstanding cases is not extraordinary, the context and the rate of increase is. Beyond this week's investment, I am looking at several options to ensure that our courts can continue to run.

I have already identified 10 additional sites for so-called Nightingale courts to allow for better social distancing; we are looking at whether courts will need to stay open for longer to increase the number of cases that can be heard safely on any given day; the standard of video technology continues to improve, with new tech being rolled out across all courts from this week; and I am exploring means of getting jury trials moving at pace once more.

We will of course continue to deliver our manifesto commitments – to keep the country safe from terrorism and to support all victims of crime. But I think it is important to recognise that we are at a crossroads here too.

Coronavirus will continue to have short-term implications and parts of the justice system will operate differently for some time but, in many ways, the world will never be the same.

Our challenge now must be to learn lessons from our response and address the immediate implications, while at the same time seizing any opportunities that may exist in a reality that looks very different than it did just a few months ago.

It is possible to make this recovery a renewal for justice in our country. Getting it right could mean a system that not only emerges intact from this crisis, but is fundamentally more efficient, more dynamic and more resilient – a smarter system for a different future, which is good news for all who use our courts.