

Flexible operating hours pilots conclude at Manchester and Brentford

News story

Pilots are now being independently evaluated after testing civil and family hearings at different times.



A pilot scheme to test whether more flexible operating hours can be used for court hearings has come to an end ahead of an independent evaluation process.

Courts traditionally sit between 10am and 4pm, but from September 2019 to March 2020, Manchester Civil Justice Centre and Brentford County Court operated outside of these traditional hours.

The aim of the pilot in civil and family cases was to test the impact of using court and tribunal hearing rooms more intensively, and how a wider range of hours offers the potential to improve access to justice. During the six-month pilot a range of cases were heard, including family financial dispute resolution, road traffic accident, small claims and rent possessions.

To assess the pilots, HMCTS has appointed IFF Research and Frontier Economics to provide an independent evaluation. The evaluation will include feedback from members of the public, court staff and the judiciary on their experiences. Their findings will be published in a report later in the year.

Huw Evans, HMCTS service manager for the flexible operating hours pilot, said:

Flexible operating hours have been piloted as part of HMCTS's £1 billion investment in reforming our courts and tribunals system, which aims to ensure our justice system is just, proportionate and accessible.

We're grateful to court users, our staff, the judiciary, local legal professionals and other organisations who have taken part in the pilot and given their feedback.

Any decision about the use of flexible operating hours in the future will only be made after careful consideration of the independent evaluation and the effects, costs and benefits of flexible operating hours across the justice system.

The independent evaluation report is due later this year. Once available, the report will be published on GOV.UK.

- Manchester has been testing late sittings (4.30pm to 7pm) involving civil and family work
- Brentford has been testing early (8am to 10.30am) and late sittings (4.30pm to 7pm) involving civil work only

More information about [HMCTS' flexible operating hours pilot](#) and the wider [HMCTS reform programme](#) is on GOV.UK.

Published 6 May 2020