

# More courts to speed up justice

- Further temporary court rooms set up across the country in hotels and conference centres
- First 'super courtroom' in Manchester to hear complex cases, such as gang trials
- 4000% increase in remote hearings – keeping justice moving in the pandemic

Manchester Hilton hotel, and event spaces in London and Birmingham are among the next 14 venues to be confirmed and will be transformed into so-called 'Nightingale courts' – helping to reduce delays and deliver speedier justice for victims while also providing a financial boost to the venues.

The sites will hear mostly non-custodial Crown Court cases, with the total number of Nightingale courtrooms set up across the country to enable more socially distanced trials increasing to 60 by the end of March 2021.

Ministers have also confirmed today that a 'super courtroom' will be created at Manchester Crown Court, Crown Square to deal with so-called 'multi-hander' cases, which typically require more space as they involve multiple defendants being tried together – such as gang murder trials.

The Lord Chancellor, Robert Buckland, said:

We have achieved an immense amount in our battle to keep justice moving during the pandemic – restarting jury trials before anyone else, turbo-charging the rollout of video technology, bringing magistrates' backlogs down, and opening more courtrooms for jury trials.

These new courts are the latest step in that effort, and I am determined to minimise delays and ensure justice is served for victims, defendants and the public.

That is why we are investing hundreds of millions to drive this recovery further, deliver swifter justice and support victims.

The move forms part of a £113m investment to alleviate pressures on courts and tribunals, including recruiting 1,600 extra staff, further technology, and on-site safety precautions such as plexiglass screens. This is on top of the £142m being spent to speed up technological improvements and modernise courtrooms. The impact of these measures is already being seen:

- England and Wales is believed to be the first comparable major jurisdiction in the world to resume jury trials, with hundreds now being listed each week
- Outstanding cases in the magistrates' courts have fallen by over 50,000

since the peak last summer

- The number of cases resolved in the Crown Courts reached pre-pandemic levels in December 2020, with more courtrooms for jury trials now open than before the pandemic
- More than 20,000 hearings using remote technology are taking place each week – compared to around 550 in March 2020 – a 4000% rise.

The decision to keep courts and tribunals open during the pandemic has had a tangible impact on people's lives. Over 9,000 court orders were issued to protect children from female genital mutilation, forced marriage, and domestic abuse between April and September 2020.

Meanwhile, a major £40m investment announced last month will go towards specialist help for vulnerable victims – funding helplines and the recruitment of more counsellors. This comes as an extra £337m was confirmed in the recent Spending Review to deliver swifter justice and support victims in 2021/22, while £76m will further increase capacity in family courts and tribunals.

Caroline Bull, CEO of CCT Venues, London, said:

We are delighted to be supporting the work of HM Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS) through the provision of space for two temporary Nightingale courtrooms at our CCT Venues-Barbican location. Although the majority of our traditional business is corporate meetings and events, this has been severely curtailed during the pandemic, so supporting this important project has created a win-win situation.

This contract is great for the morale of our team and frankly also for saving jobs. Contributing to such worthwhile projects helps us to feel connected and valuable at a time when many are not so fortunate.

Dominic James, Venues Director, etc venues who operate Maple House, said:

Our relationship with HM Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS) goes back to the middle of 2020; working in partnership with HMCTS at our Prospero House venue in London, which was the first Nightingale Court to mobilise in early August 2020.

It is testimony to our Maple House venue in Birmingham that it also been selected, to further assist the Ministry of Justice to reduce the backlog of trials, whilst our core business of providing inspiring space for events, meetings and conferences is suppressed.

## **Notes to editors:**

1. The confirmed Nightingale Court locations are:

- Aldersgate House (Barbican), London – 2 additional hearing spaces
  - Maple House, Birmingham – 3 additional hearing spaces
  - Manchester Hilton Deansgate – 2 additional hearing spaces
  - Croydon – 2 additional hearing spaces
  - Wolverhampton – 2 additional hearing spaces for Crown
  - Liverpool 1 additional hearing space
  - Chichester – 2 additional hearing spaces for Crown
2. Courts continue to prioritise cases of the utmost seriousness, where the safety of the public and individuals is a concern. This includes the judiciary prioritising hearings involving vulnerable victims and witnesses and urgent applications for matters such as domestic violence.
  3. The ‘super courtroom’ to be created at Manchester Crown Court to deal with ‘multi-hander’ cases, will be a modification to the existing building at Crown Square.
  4. We have invested £113m into a range of measures to boost recovery and ensure justice continues to be served:
    - [23 Nightingale Courts are now up and running](#) – the Nightingale programme has provided 44 courtrooms across the estate which enables more crime work to be dealt with.
    - We’ve installed plexiglass screens into more than 450 courtrooms and jury deliberation rooms.
    - Over 290 courtrooms have been assessed as being routinely available to hold jury trials – more than before the pandemic.
    - 20,000 hearings using remote technology are taking place each week – compared to around 550 in March 2020 – a 4000% rise.
    - We are in a much stronger position to manage the impact of the pandemic compared to last spring, and public health experts have confirmed our measures remain sufficient to deal with the current variants of the virus.
  5. These efforts will be [bolstered by a £337m Spending Review settlement](#) to deliver speedier justice to convict offenders, support victims, and protect the wider public.
  6. Every HM Courts & Tribunals building – including Nightingale Courts – meets the government’s COVID-secure guidelines, and public health experts have confirmed the arrangements remain sufficient to deal with the current strains of the virus.
  7. Meanwhile, a rapid testing pilot is being launched in Southwark Crown Court, to determine how the government can test people on their way to a hearing. A [rapid testing pilot launched at Manchester Civic Justice Centre in January 2021](#).
  8. On 1 February 2021 the [Ministry of Justice announced an extra £40m to help victims during pandemic and beyond](#), building on the unprecedented

£76m the government has pledged to help the most vulnerable in society during this challenging time.

9. The latest [HMCTS Management Information was published last week.](#)