

# New tech will help keep the criminal justice system moving during COVID-19 pandemic

- New video technology to support remote hearings in criminal courts
- Secure system can be accessed by a wide range of devices
- First phase of new video platform to be rolled out to more than 100 courts

HMCTS is bringing in a new video platform to enable all parties in a criminal hearing to take part remotely – allowing all magistrate and crown courts in England and Wales to hold secure hearings, making it easier to make sure justice continues to be served.

Most criminal cases are heard in magistrate courts and this technology – available for cases such as remand, custody time limit, and sentencing hearings – will help move people through the criminal justice system in these unprecedented times.

This technology will not be used for jury trials, and a judge will decide whether it is appropriate to use in any other hearing on a case-by-case basis. In addition, no defendant is appearing from their own home and sentencing is not taking place unless the defendant is in custody or physically present in the courtroom. If physically present and sentenced to custody, this will be dealt with in the usual way.

If people are unwell and can't come to court for a hearing, they must contact the court for that hearing to be rearranged.

Thanks to dedicated HMCTS staff, courts continue to prioritise all hearings relating to custody, detention and bail, and urgent applications for matters such as domestic violence, and statistics released today show that 90% of all cases since 14th April have been held remotely to ensure the vulnerable are protected.

Courts Minister Chris Philp, said

It is essential that justice continues to be served in these difficult times and this new platform will help equip courts across England and Wales with secure and robust video technology to enable them to carry out more of their vital work.

I am extremely impressed at the way all those within the justice system have adapted so well to the unprecedented challenges we face

We have already seen a huge rise in the number of cases being heard remotely, and this innovation will ensure the wheels of justice

continue to turn.

His Honour Judge Guy Kearl QC, Senior Circuit Judge at Leeds Crown Court, said:

In times of uncertainty, confirmation that the rule of law endures and justice will be served is a source of profound reassurance to us all.

This secure video conferencing technology is versatile and provides the functions essential to deliver a range of criminal hearings: I am delighted to be involved in its successful introduction.

The Kinly Cloud Video Platform (CVP) is initially being rolled out to 60 magistrates' courts and 48 crown courts currently open to the public, with others to follow as soon as possible. It is also being introduced to the Civil and Family courts.

CVP connects securely to the existing justice video network which links police stations and prisons to courts, and can be accessed by any internet-enabled device with a camera and a microphone.

Magistrates' courts in London, the South-East, the South-West and the Midlands have already begun using CVP, with the first going live earlier this month.

It has also been introduced in Crown Courts in Leeds, Sheffield, Newcastle and Hull, with more courts in the South-East set to go live. The aim is for 16 magistrates' courts and nine crown courts to have access to CVP by the end of next week.

So far, HMCTS has run 412 remand hearings using CVP, brought on line 26 police custody suites, and connected 95 advocates, 42 Crown prosecutors, 20 Probation officers and two translators.

Amanda Pinto QC, Chair of the Bar Council, said:

We must keep the justice system going in the public interest. Barristers, along with the judiciary, court staff and many others, are determined to adapt quickly to delivering justice during Covid-19, including delivering it remotely. The new CVP platform is crucial to these efforts, enabling more cases to be heard without everyone having to gather in a physical courtroom. We have heard positive feedback from barristers involved in hearings where CVP has already been used. I am keen to see it rolled out widely to try and ensure that as far as possible, effective justice is delivered, not delayed.

DCC Tony Blaker from Kent Police and National Police Chief's Council lead for Courts, said:

Policing is adopting this innovative technology and building on our existing partnership with HMCTS; helping to protect the public and people working in criminal justice agencies. By holding court hearings remotely during this crisis, we can help to reduce the spread of the virus and ensure that the Criminal Justice System continues to operate effectively. We are working at pace with our partners to increase the use of technology, providing continued benefit to the public and keeping people safe.

## Notes to editors

- This technology will not be used for jury trials, and a judge will decide whether it is appropriate to use in any other hearing on a case-by-case basis
- Many hearings continue to be conducted by judges sitting in court and the aim is to re-open courts which have been temporarily suspended as soon as practicable
- Connection to a hearing is easy and straightforward: participants simply click on a link in an email invitation or in the Crown court digital case system to join
- Audio and video technology has long played a role in courts and tribunals, and HMCTS has significant experience in this field. Many courts, custody suites and prisons are already connected to the secure Justice Video Service (JVS) network, which enables communication between fixed end points
- The use of audio and video technology in court hearings has rapidly increased in response to the Covid-19 emergency
- To enable the criminal justice system to operate safely and flexibly during the pandemic, the [Coronavirus Act 2020](#) has provided for the use of video within the criminal jurisdiction. The use of video hearings remains always subject to judicial discretion. Video is not being used to run jury trials
- On 24 April 2020, courts and tribunals reported that the estimated use of audio in hearings increased to around 2,800 a day. Currently around 90% of cases in England and Wales have used audio and video technology to some extent
- [Guidance on how to connect to a criminal hearing using CVP](#) is available on GOV.UK, and we plan to publish short videos demonstrating how to access the system. There is also a helpline number offering technical support to participants in hearings: 0330 808 9405
- Over the coming months we will continuously improve our approach to the use of audio-video alternatives during the coronavirus outbreak