

News story: First Courts & Tribunals Service Centres launched

- part of the £1 billion modernisation reforms to our courts and justice system, these service centres will provide support to people across the country
- plans also announced to transform the way we collect criminal fines to make it faster and more effective

Two cities have been chosen to house the country's first Courts & Tribunals Service Centres, which will play a key role transforming the courts and tribunals service.

The centres, in Birmingham and Stoke-on-Trent, will bring together expertise in managing court and tribunal cases as they transform from traditional paper-based processes to modern digital systems.

We are trying to make justice simpler and swifter by bringing more services online, and making courts and tribunals easier to access for working people. The service centres will combine and share best practice and knowledge, so it can be easily accessed by people across the country.

The 2 centres will employ more than 300 people each, in roles that range from processing cases, and issuing court orders and hearing notices, to answering telephone and web enquiries.

Dominic Raab, Justice Minister, said:

These new administrative centres will make sure we deliver better services for those using the Courts system, whilst delivering better bang for the taxpayers' buck.

The move is part of our £1 billion reform programme to digitise the justice system – making it more sensitive for witnesses, more convenient for other users and better value for public money.

Last year HMCTS dealt with over 4.1 million criminal, civil, family and tribunal cases. As more centres open, many of the enquiries relating to these will be channelled through our new Courts & Tribunals Service Centres.

Bringing knowledge together means a better service. The Loughborough HMCTS contact centre, which deals with telephone calls from many county courts, has improved the speed and reliability of responses, and has very good feedback from those using it.

These service centres go beyond what has been done before, because they go beyond telephone-answering. They underpin wider changes in how and where the justice system can be accessed. People can now access easy-to-use services

online – including applying for a divorce, making a benefit appeal, entering a plea for a speeding offence – making the justice system more open to working people.

The new service centres are being planned based on research into what users want and need, and in consultation with judges, magistrates and legal professionals, as well as agencies that represent the public and support people with cases going through the justice system.

The centres are a fundamental part of the way in which justice services will be provided in future in the £1 billion investment in court reform, which will ensure that more citizens will find it easier to use the justice system. That £1bn is made up of £855 million to modernise and digitise the courts, and £240 million to deliver a fully connected criminal courtroom.

We are also transforming the way we collect criminal fines to make it faster and more effective. Our hard-working staff have been hampered by an ICT system which was created in 1989. The new operating model will improve efficiency, reduce delays and increase the amount of fines collected. At present staff are spread out in over 50 bases across the country. Today, we've announced a proposal to consolidate all of their knowledge and expertise by moving them into 3 centres – in Leeds, Runcorn and Cwmbran.