

# Nightingale Courts extended to support justice recovery

Press release

Thirty Nightingale Court rooms are to be extended until March next year as the government continues in its efforts to tackle the impact of COVID-19 on the justice system and secure speedier justice for victims.



- 30 Nightingale Court rooms extended
- It builds on raft of measures to speed up justice for victims after the unprecedented impact of the pandemic
- Backlog already beginning to drop in the Crown Court as a result of efforts so far

During the pandemic, sports arenas, hotels, and conference centres were rapidly transformed into court rooms to provide more space for jury trials when social distancing was in place. The continued use of some of these Nightingale Courts in areas such as the South East, London and the Midlands will help drive court recovery and reduce delays.

Justice Minister, James Cartlidge, said:

Nightingale Courts continue to be a valuable weapon in the fight against the pandemic's unprecedented impact on our courts providing temporary extra capacity.

Combined with other measures – such as removing the cap on Crown Court sitting days, more use of remote hearings, and increasing magistrate sentencing powers – we are beginning to see the backlog drop so victims can get the speedier justice they deserve.

Today's (3 March 2022) announcement builds on the significant action taken since the start of the pandemic to drive court recovery including:

- Legislating to double the sentencing powers available to magistrates from 6 months to a year to free up an estimated 2,000 extra days of Crown Court sitting time each year.
- Investing a quarter of a billion pounds to support recovery in the courts in the last financial year – plus over £50 million for victims and support services.
- Ensuring there is no limit on the number of sitting days in the Crown Court this year.
- Creating 2 ‘super courtrooms’ which can accommodate up to 12 defendants; increasing capacity for large trials.
- Opening 3,265 Cloud Video Platform virtual court rooms across all jurisdictions. These currently hold around 13,600 hearings per week using audio and/or video hearings.

The impact of these measures, alongside the re-opening of 60 Crown courtrooms since the peak of the virus, is already being seen. The latest figures show that in December 2021 the crown court backlog dropped to under 59,000. This is a fall of over 2,000 since its peak in June 2021. Meanwhile, in the magistrates’ courts, the outstanding criminal caseload has dropped by almost 70,000 cases since its peak in July 2021.

In places such as the North West where the number of outstanding cases has dropped significantly in recent months, the majority of the temporary courts are no longer needed and will wind down at the end of March 2021.

Following the relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions, courtroom capacity has returned to pre-pandemic levels.

## Notes to editors

- The sites will remain open until March next year. The locations are as follows:
  - Prospero House, London (three Crown court rooms)
  - Barbican, London (two Crown court rooms)
  - Croydon Jurys Inn, London (two Crown court rooms)
  - Mercure Hotel, Maidstone (two Crown court rooms)
  - Former court, Chichester (two Crown court rooms)
  - Former county court, Telford (three civil and family court rooms)
  - Park Hall Hotel, Wolverhampton (two Crown court rooms)
  - Maple House, Birmingham (two Crown court rooms and two civil family and/or tribunal court rooms)
  - Former Magistrates court, Fleetwood (two civil and family court rooms)
  - Cloth Hall court, Leeds (three Crown court rooms)
  - Civic Centre, Swansea (one Crown court room)
  - Former Magistrates’ court, Cirencester (one Crown court room, one Magistrates rooms)
  - Negotiations to secure a new two-courtroom venue in London to replace the Nightingale at Monument are ongoing
- The sites which are closing as planned are not needed because HMCTS has reopened existing hearing rooms as social distancing measures have eased. We now have sufficient rooms in these areas for all the available

Crown Court judges. We are hiring 1,100 new judges this year to further boost our efforts to increase capacity and tackle the backlog.

- 102 Petty France, London (four family court rooms)
  - Monument, London (two Crown court rooms)
  - Jury's Inn Hotel, Middlesbrough (two civil and family court rooms)
  - Knights' chamber and visitor Centre, Peterborough (one Crown court room)
  - Mercure Hotel, Nottingham (two Crown court rooms)
  - M40 J15 Warwick Hotel, Warwick (two Crown court rooms)
  - Hilton Hotel, Manchester (two Crown court rooms)
  - Hilton Hotel, Liverpool (one Crown court room)
  - University of Bolton Stadium, Bolton (one Crown court room)
  - Crowne Plaza, Chester (two Crown court rooms)
  - The Guildhall, Winchester (three civil family and/or tribunal court rooms)
- 470 existing courtrooms are now open
  - Our latest backlog stats are available on GOV.UK:  
[www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/hmcts-management-information-december-2021](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/hmcts-management-information-december-2021)
  - More information on the increase in magistrate sentencing powers is available on GOV.UK:  
[www.gov.uk/government/news/magistrates-courts-given-more-power-to-tackle-backlog](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/magistrates-courts-given-more-power-to-tackle-backlog)

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