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# Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service Provisional Figures

## October to December 2023

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23 February 2024



Department of  
**Justice**

An Roinn Dí agus Cirt  
Mánnystrie O tha Laa



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# 1

## Key Findings

This report provides an overview of Children Order and County, Crown, High and Magistrates' Courts business during October to December 2023 and how it compares with the comparative figures for the same quarter in the previous year. The headline findings are summarised below -

- During the quarter there were 483 Children Order sittings (1,425 total hours sat), 1,132 Children Order Applications received and 1,055 disposed. In terms of orders made, 208 were own motion, 2,305 were interim and 1,434 were final orders.
  - County Court and District Judges sat a total of 1,233 days within the County Court. In terms of cases 43 equity, 158 ejectment, 1,954 small claims and three criminal damage cases were received; 51 equity, 161 ejectment, 2,087 small claims and 2 criminal damage cases were disposed.
  - In terms of Crown Court business there were 728 sittings with 386 cases and 493 defendants received and 361 cases and 433 defendants disposed.
- There were 572 High Court sitting days. The highest proportion of these was spent on Judicial Reviews business, 105 days (18%).
  - Within the 1,085 Magistrates' sitting days during the quarter, 72% were adult criminal, 6% youth criminal and 22% civil and family days. There were 838 civil and family applications and 9,122 adult and 269 youth defendants received. Corresponding figures for disposals were 820 civil and family, 9,694 adult and 309 youth defendants.

## 2 | Introduction

### About this report

This bulletin is produced in accordance with the pillars and principles set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics. It presents the following statistics for the Northern Ireland Court and Tribunals Service for the quarter October to December 2023 –

- The number of Children Order applications received and disposed at Family Proceedings Courts, Family Care Centres and the High Court, together with waiting times from lodgment to disposal (section 3);
- Civil and family business received and disposed, waiting times and sitting days in County Courts (section 4);
- The number of cases and defendants received and disposed, waiting times, pleas and findings and sittings at the Crown Court (section 5);
- Business received and disposed, waiting times and sitting days in the Chancery, Queen’s Bench and Family Divisions of the High Court (section 6); and
- The number of youth and adult defendants received and disposed, charges and outcomes, sittings, civil applications received and disposed and waiting times at Magistrates’ Courts (section 7).

Comparative information for the same quarter in the previous year is also provided, along with an indication of whether any change is higher or lower.

Background information about the Children Order and the County, Crown, High and Magistrates’ Courts along with methodological information and a glossary is available in the accompanying user guide. Data in the bulletin, along with trend information, are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

The next update covering the quarter to 31st March 2024 will be published in May 2024. A full [publication schedule](#) is available on the DoJ website.

## 2 | Introduction

It is important to note court activity during the quarter covered in this report has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the courts continue to make more use of remote audio and video technology, the impact of COVID-19 can be seen in the figures. It is expected that the limited operation of the courts during the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to have an impact on many of the published figures in this and future releases.

Administrative case management reviews were introduced by the Lord Chief Justice as part of the coronavirus contingency arrangements. This has resulted in Judges investing significant time reviewing cases and making directions or orders administratively (where appropriate), and this has continued even as courts have resumed to support business recovery. This extra time is not recorded on the courts operating system (Integrated Court Operations System known as ICOS), and therefore is not reflected within the sittings times published within this report.

Our statistical practice is regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) that all producers of official statistics should adhere to. You are welcome to contact us directly with any comments about how we meet these standards. Alternatively, you can contact OSR by emailing [regulation@statistics.gov.uk](mailto:regulation@statistics.gov.uk) or via the OSR website.

# 3

## Children Order

### Children Order Quarterly Business

- Table 1 on the following page shows that during the quarter there were 483 sittings (1,425 hours), 1,132 Children Order Applications received and 1,055 disposed.
  - A total of 1,571 children were involved in the applications disposed. Gender and age breakdowns of the children were 50:50 male:female and 28% 0-4 years, 29% 5-8 years, 24% 9-12 years and 18% 13-16 years.
  - Like each of the last five years, the most common reason for transferring Children Order applications during the quarter was Complexity (78%, 142 of 182 reasons). This was followed by Consolidation (14), Jurisdiction (14), Return to Lower Court (7), Convenience (4), Point of Law (1).
- In terms of orders made –
    - 208 were own motion orders.
    - 2,305 were interim orders.
    - 1,434 were final orders.
  - The average waiting time for applications disposed was 50.4 weeks for public and 32.4 weeks for private law.
  - Table 1 shows that applications received increased and applications disposed decreased. The waiting times for disposal for public law and private law were lower than the comparative figures for the same quarter in the previous year.

## 3

## Children Order

Table 1: Children Order Business – October to December 2023 compared with October to December 2022

	Quarter 2023	Quarter 2022	% change from 2022
Sittings	483	508	5% ↓
Hours sat	1,425	1,436	1% ↓
Applications received	1,132	1,056	7% ↑
Applications disposed	1,055	1,121	6% ↓
Number of children involved in applications disposed	1,571	1,685	7% ↓
Own motion orders made	208	629	67% ↓
Interim orders made	2,305	2,237	3% ↑
Final orders made	1,434	1,501	4% ↓
Average waiting time for disposal for public law (weeks)	50.4	58.7	14% ↓
Average waiting time for disposal for private law (weeks)	32.4	40.3	20% ↓

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

# 4 | County Court

## County Court Quarterly Business

- Table 2 on the following pages shows that County Court and District Judges sat a total of 1,233 sitting days during the quarter. Within those days 658 were spent on criminal business and 575 days on civil and family business.
- During the quarter –
  - 2,209 Civil bills with notice of intention to defend (NID) were received and 2,515 disposed.
  - In terms of cases 43 equity, 158 ejectment, 1,954 small claims and three criminal damage cases were received; 51 equity, 161 ejectment, 2,087 small claims and two criminal damage cases were disposed.
  - 327 divorce decrees were granted, 296 decrees absolute issued.
  - 66 licence applications were received and 63 disposed.
- Table 2 shows that by and large there were increases in the number of cases received and disposed across most business areas and a general decrease in time taken to disposal compared with figures for the same quarter in the previous year.



# 4 | County Court

Table 2: County Court Business – October to December 2023 compared with October to December 2022

	Quarter 2023	Quarter 2022	% change from 2022
Sitting days	1,233	1,219	1%↑
Civil bills with NID received	2,209	1,797	23%↑
Civil bills disposed	2,515	2,224	13%↑
Average time taken from issue to disposal of civil bill (weeks)	66	66	-
Equity cases received	43	27	59%↑
Equity cases disposed	51	35	46%↑
Average time taken from issue to disposal of equity cases (weeks)	104	108	4%↓
Ejectment cases received	158	224	29%↓
Ejectment cases disposed	161	124	30%↑
Average time taken from issue to disposal of ejectment cases (weeks)	34	42	19%↓

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

# 4 | County Court

Table 2 continued: County Court Business – October to December 2023 compared with October to December 2022

	Quarter 2023	Quarter 2022	% change from 2022
Small claims received	1,954	1,557	25%↑
Small claims disposed	2,087	1,676	25%↑
Average time taken from issue to disposal of small claims cases (weeks)	23	27	15%↓
Criminal damage cases received	3	2	50%↑
Criminal damage cases disposed	2	1	100%↑
Divorce decrees granted	327	384	15%↓
Decree absolute issued	296	386	23%↓
Average time taken from issue to date divorce decree granted (weeks)	46	42	10%↑
Licences applications received	66	54	22%↑
Licences applications disposed	63	61	3%↑

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

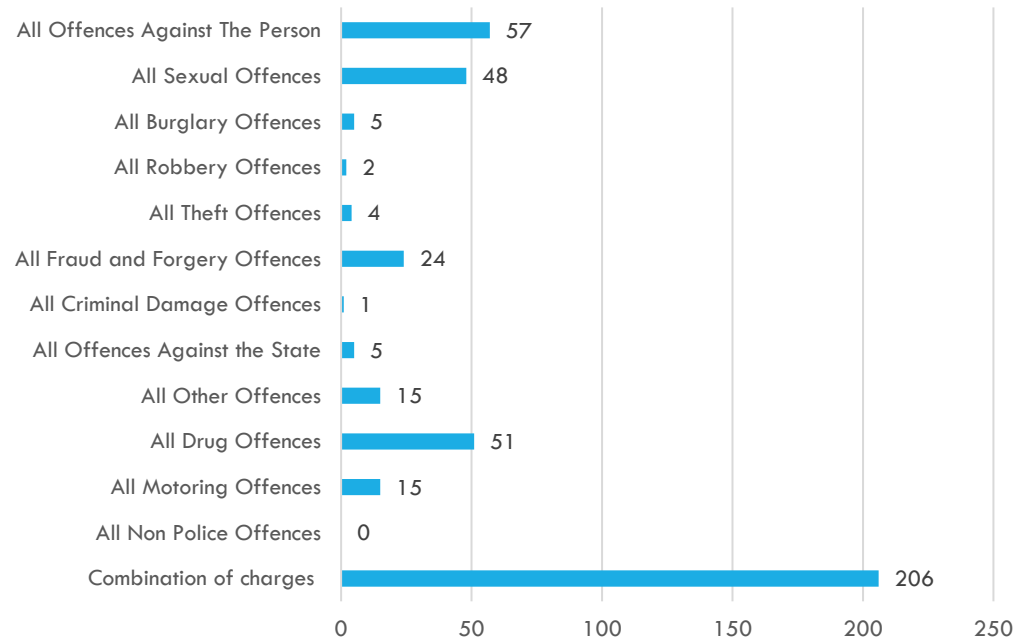
# 5

## Crown Court

### Crown Court Quarterly Business

- Table 3 on the following page shows that during the quarter there were 728 sittings (1,444 hours sat). County Court Judges disposed of 99.5% of defendants (431), a figure that has remained relatively stable over the last five years (96-99.5%).
- There were 386 cases and 493 defendants received during the quarter; 361 cases and 433 defendants were disposed.
- Average time from committal to hearing was 175 days and from conviction to disposal was 71 days.
- In comparison to the same quarter in the previous year the number of cases received and disposed both increased.
- Figure 1 shows that the majority of defendants disposed were charged with a combination of offences, a similar pattern seen in each of the last five years. Average times from committal to hearing and conviction to disposal both decreased. These figures will be affected by the delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 1: Crown Court defendants disposed by charge type October to December 2023



# 5 | Crown Court

Table 3: Crown Court Business – October to December 2023 compared with October to December 2022

	Quarter 2023	Quarter 2022	% change from 2022
Sittings	728	724	1%↑
Hours sat	1,444	1,703	15%↓
Cases received	386	329	17%↑
Cases disposed	361	353	2%↑
Defendants received	493	389	27%↑
Defendants disposed	433	440	2%↓
Defendants pleading guilty to all charges	103	117	12%↓
Defendants pleading guilty or found guilty of at least one charge	273	241	13%↑
Average time from committal to hearing (days)	175	190	8%↓
Average time from conviction to disposal (days)	71	79	10%↓

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

# 6 High Court

## High Court Quarterly Business

- Table 4 on the following pages show that there were 572 High Court sitting days during the quarter, the highest proportion of which was spent on Judicial Reviews business, 105 days (18%).
- King's Bench business included:
  - 1,010 writs and originating summonses were received, 851 were disposed.
  - 69 applications for leave to apply for Judicial Review, 20 applications for Judicial Review and one ancillary application were received.
- Chancery Division business included:
  - Receipt of 518 (62% which were Chancery, 20% bankruptcy and 18% companies cases) and disposal of 454 cases; and
  - 1,716 grants issued in the Probate office.
- Family Division business included –
  - 33 adoption cases and applications received and 12 disposed;
  - 516 divorce petitions received, 271 decrees granted (mainly '2 years with consent' (97, 36%) and '5 years separation' (58, 21%)) and 181 decrees absolute issued;
  - 71 Official Solicitor's Office cases received, 16 disposed and a current caseload of 420 cases at the end of the quarter.

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

## 6

## High Court

Table 4: High Court Business - October to December 2023 compared with October to December 2022

	Quarter 2023	Quarter 2022	% change from 2022
Sitting days	572	593	4%↓
Writs & originating summonses received	1,010	1,020	1%↓
Writs & originating summonses disposed	851	812	5%↑
Applications for leave to apply for Judicial Review received	69	77	10%↓
Applications for Judicial Review received	20	26	23%↓
Ancillary applications received	1	2	50%↓
Chancery cases received	518	258	101%↑
Chancery cases disposed	454	243	87%↑
Grants issued in the Probate office	1,716	1,737	1%↓

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

Table 4 continued: High Court Business - October to December 2023 compared with October to December 2022

	Quarter 2023	Quarter 2022	% change from 2022
Adoption cases & applications received	33	13	154%↑
Adoption cases & applications disposed	12	30	60%↓
Average time taken from issue to disposal for adoption case/application (weeks)	17	36	53%↓
Divorce petitions received	516	627	18%↓
Decrees granted in High Court	271	288	6%↓
Decrees absolute issued	181	148	22%↑
Average time taken from issue of divorce petition to date decree granted (weeks)	51	61	16%↓
Official Solicitors Office cases received	71	38	87%↑
Official Solicitors Office cases disposed	16	12	33%↑
Official Solicitors Office caseload at end of quarter	420	386	9%↑

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

# 7 Magistrates' Court

## Magistrates' Court Quarterly Business

- During the quarter there were 1,033 scheduled, 15 additional and 37 special Magistrates' sitting days (Table 5).
- Within the 1,085 total, 72% were adult criminal, 6% were youth criminal and 22% were civil and family days.

Table 5: Magistrates' Court Sitting Days - October to December 2023 compared with October to December 2022

	Adult	Youth	Civil & Family	Total Quarter 2023	Total Quarter 2022	% change from 2022
Scheduled	735	65	233	1,033	1,021	1%↑
Additional	13	-	2	15	51	71%↓
Special	37	-	-	37	36	3%↑
Total	785	65	235	1,085	1,108	2%↓

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.



# 7 Magistrates' Court

- There were 838 new civil and family applications and 9,122 new adult and 269 new youth defendants received; corresponding disposals were 820, 9,694 and 309 respectively.
- The average waiting times from first hearing to disposal in the adult and youth criminal courts were 9 weeks and 18 weeks respectively. For civil and family applications it was 22 and 9 weeks respectively from date of receipt to disposal.
- Changes from the previous year were mixed - adult defendants received and disposed increased while receipts for youth decreased but disposals increased. Waiting times decreased for adult business and increased for youth and civil business.

Table 6: Magistrates' Court Business - October to December 2023 compared with October to December 2022

	Adult Q4 2023	Adult Q4 2022	% change from 2022	Youth Q4 2023	Youth Q4 2022	% change from 2022	Civil Q4 2023	Civil Q4 2022	% change from 2022	Family Q4 2023	Family Q4 2022	% change from 2022
Defendants or applications received	9,122	9,027	1%↑	269	277	3%↓	84	79	6%↑	754	865	13%↓
Defendants or applications disposed	9,694	9,223	5%↑	309	301	3%↑	94	81	16%↑	726	830	13%↓
Average waiting time (weeks)	9	10	10%↓	18	15	20%↑	22	16	38%↑	9	9	-

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

# 8

## Appendix 1 - Methodology

### Data Source and Coverage

The statistics are produced using administrative data sourced from the Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS). ICOS is a live operating system used in each court tier to process every part of court business, from receipt of payments through to the production of final orders made. The data are input into this system on a daily basis by court clerks, and this information is checked and confirmed by another member of staff to ensure the data entries are correct.

Full details of data relevance, accuracy, timeliness, accessibility, coherence, user need, cost and confidentiality is available in the accompanying background quality report. Details of the data quality checks and processes that DoJ has in place are available in the Quality Assurance of Administrative Data (QAAD) document on the DoJ website.

### Counting Rules

- Children Order

Receipts are counted from the date the case is entered onto ICOS. Disposals are counted from the result date that a final order was made against the case changing the case status to 'dealt with.'

- County Court

Receipts are counted from the date the case is entered onto ICOS and the fees are receipted. Disposals are counted from the result date that a final order was made against the case changing the case status to 'dealt with'.

# 8

## Appendix 1 - Methodology

- Crown Court

Receipts are counted from the date the case is committed to the Crown Court from the Magistrates court. Disposals are counted from the result date that a final order was made against the case changing the case status to 'dealt with.'

- High Court

Receipts are counted from the date the case is entered onto ICOS and the fees are receipted. Disposals are counted from the result date that a final order was made against the case, or the date an applicant withdraws or discontinues their application prior to the hearing, changing the case status to 'dealt with'.

- Magistrates' Court

Receipts are counted from the date a served summons or a charge sheet is received by the Magistrates' Court office. Disposals are counted from the result date that a final order was made against the case changing the case status to 'dealt with'.