



Northern Ireland

Courts and
Tribunals Service

www.justice-ni.gov.uk/courts-and-tribunals



Courts and Tribunals Venue Safety

Spring /Summer 2023

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide staff and court users with updated venue safety information for Spring and Summer 2023. The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) first published venue safety information in May 2020, in the immediate aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The second version of this guidance, published in August 2022, marked a fundamental shift in the approach to managing Covid, moving from legally mandated risk management interventions, to one that was based on communicating safer behaviours and encouraging greater personal responsibility for managing safety.

This latest version sets out a range of measures that will continue to support the health, safety and wellbeing of our staff and court and tribunal users.

Over the last three years, many aspects of how we deliver our court and tribunal business has changed with changes to the physical appearance and layout of hearing rooms and an increasing reliance on the use of technology.

The ongoing use of remote and hybrid hearings where directed will help maintain safer indoor environments for those individuals who attend in person. In addition, it will reduce unnecessary travel between courts, prisons and police stations helping to deliver operational and environmental efficiencies across the justice system.



Role of NICTS

The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) is an Agency of the Department of Justice (DoJ). The role of NICTS includes:

- **supporting:**
 - an independent Judiciary;
 - Northern Ireland's courts;
 - the majority of Northern Ireland's tribunals;
 - the Coroners Service of Northern Ireland; and
 - the delivery of legacy inquests through the Legacy Inquest Unit.
- **enforcing** civil court judgments through the Enforcement of Judgments Office;
- **collecting and enforcing** outstanding financial penalties imposed (or registered) by a criminal court through the Fine Collection and Enforcement Service;
- **managing** funds held in court on behalf of minors and patients; and
- **advising** the DoJ and Minister of Justice on matters relating to the operation of NICTS.

NICTS also provides **administrative support** to:

- the Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland;
- the Planning Appeals Commission and Water Appeals Commission (PACWAC); and
- the Historical Institutional Abuse (HIA) Redress Board

A key element of our role is providing high quality courthouses and tribunal hearing centres.

Accessibility

If you have any specific needs that may affect your attendance at a court or tribunal hearing, including any disability that may need accommodated, please contact the relevant court office or tribunal as soon as possible and we will be happy to discuss with you.

Contacting NICTS

All court offices can be contacted by calling 03002007812 and asking for the office required. E-mail addresses for each venue are provided overleaf.





Venue	Hearing Rooms	Contact
Antrim	3	antrimcourthouse@courtsni.gov.uk
Armagh	3	armaghcourthouse@courtsni.gov.uk
Ballymena	3	ballymenacourthouse@courtsni.gov.uk
Banbridge	1	legacy@courtsni.gov.uk
Belfast Laganside	18	csmlaganside@courtsni.gov.uk
Belfast Royal Courts of Justice	13	adminoffice@courtsni.gov.uk
Coleraine	3	colerainecourthouse@courtsni.gov.uk
Craigavon	4	craigavoncourthouse@courtsni.gov.uk
Downpatrick	4	downpatrickcourthouse@courtsni.gov.uk
Dungannon	4	dungannoncourthouse@courtsni.gov.uk
Enniskillen	2	enniskillencourthouse@courtsni.gov.uk
Londonderry	4	londonderrycourthouse@courtsni.gov.uk
Limavady	1	ballymenacourthouse@courtsni.gov.uk
Lisburn	2	lisburncourthouse@courtsni.gov.uk
Magherafelt	1	londonderrycourthouse@courtsni.gov.uk
Newry	5	newrycourthouse@courtsni.gov.uk
Newtownards	4	newtownardscourthouse@courtsni.gov.uk
Omagh	4	omaghcourthouse@courtsni.gov.uk
Strabane	2	strabanecourthouse@courtsni.gov.uk

General

NICTS is committed to promoting a positive Health and Safety culture in compliance with relevant legislative requirements of the Health and Safety at work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 and such other relevant NI statutory provisions. The Agency is committed to ensuring the health, safety and welfare of its employees and of others who may be affected by its operations.

Training

Mandatory annual Health and Safety (H&S) training is provided to all staff. Each of our buildings has an appointed Health and Safety Officer, Fire Precaution Officer and First Aiders.

Fire Safety

To ensure NICTS premises comply with fire safety regulations, Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) are conducted every 3 – 5 years. This provides reassurance that suitable systems are in place to allow for the safe evacuation of buildings and that adequate fire prevention and alert systems are in operation throughout the NICTS Estate.



Maintenance

Scheduled Planned Preventative Maintenance (PPM) works, both statutory and non-statutory, are carried out at all sites. Procedures are in place for

the reporting of all accidents and near misses. NICTS contractors conduct formal H&S checks including weekly testing of fire alarms and monthly test of emergency lighting.

First Aid

NICTS ensures that there are always trained first aiders available within its buildings. NICTS staff and security staff both fulfil the role of first aider. All first aiders must undergo a recognised first aid course before being listed for this role.

Security

All NICTS locations have multiple protective security measures in place to help maintain a safe environment for all court users. These include a secure perimeter, CCTV, search facilities and access control.

On entry to our buildings attendees will pass through a search area where they and their belongings will be searched to prevent any prohibited items being brought into the building.

Each building has zoned access providing segregated areas as required for various court users.

Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)

CCTV is used within the NICTS estate in the interest of staff and public health and safety; for the protection of property and assets; and for the prevention or detection of crime or disorder.

Smoking

In compliance with the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Policy on smoking in the workplace, there is a total ban on smoking cigarettes and e-cigarettes in all Departmental premises, including NICTS courthouses and offices.

Infection resilience in NICTS Buildings

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the link between public health and our built environments. As we continue to deliver a modernised court and tribunal estate, there are lessons we can learn from the transmission of coronavirus to promote good infection control and help reduce future transmission risks.

Court Capacity and Social Distancing

Court and tribunal venues have a recommended physical capacity in line with the ventilation assessment of each room. Throughout our buildings we will continue to encourage all users to observe safe behaviours and use personal responsibility to socially distance. This approach complements the *Guidance on Physical, Remote and Hybrid Attendance*, recently updated by The Lady Chief Justice's Office, which outlines when the public or profession should physically attend court buildings and balances the efficient dispatch of business and the interests of justice.

Protective Screens

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, screens were installed across the NICTS estate. Many of these now form part of the fabric of buildings and continue to provide ongoing infection resilience. Those screens that are not deemed essential for infection resilience or reassurance will be reviewed where they impact on service delivery.

Face Coverings

We recognise that some staff and court users have become accustomed to wearing face coverings when in public spaces. We will continue to facilitate this but these may need to be removed for identification or communication.

Cleaning

The use of enhanced cleaning products, effective against enveloped shell viruses, will continue throughout our buildings.

Hand Hygiene

We continue to encourage good hand hygiene throughout our buildings. In addition to warm water and soap available in our public bathrooms, hand sanitizing stations will remain available

Ventilation

Throughout our buildings we will continue to prioritise ventilation as one of the most effective mitigations against all respiratory illnesses. We will continue to maximise ventilation through both mechanical and natural means. Mechanical ventilation systems will continue to provide full fresh air, and in naturally ventilated areas, we will continue to encourage that windows are regularly opened during occupation.

We have deployed carbon dioxide monitors in all buildings, and will continue to monitor levels to ensure ventilation levels remain adequate, and can be balanced with thermal comfort and energy efficiency. We have initiated an estate wide project to decarbonise and improve our ventilation systems to provide energy efficiency as well as infection, and climate change resilience.





2023