

Analytical Services Group

Magistrates' Court Bulletin

April to June 2020

Quarterly provisional figures

R Martin

7th August 2020

Produced by Analytical Services Group,
Department of Justice.

For further information write to:

**Analytical Services Group,
NI Courts and Tribunals Service,
4th Floor, Laganside House,
23-27 Oxford Street,
Belfast BT1 3LA**

Telephone: 028 9072 8928

e-mail: richard.martin2@courtsni.gov.uk

This bulletin is available on the Internet at:

**[https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/nicts-magistrates-
court-bulletin](https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/nicts-magistrates-court-bulletin)**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This bulletin provides information on throughput at Magistrates' Courts in Northern Ireland during the period April to June 2020 and commentary on trends observed for this quarter in each year from 2007. On 31st October 2016, a single County Court Division called 'The County Court of Northern Ireland' replaced the seven existing County Court Divisions. As a consequence of this change, data are disaggregated solely by Court Office (Processing Office).
- ***This report covers data from April to June 2020, so court activity during this period has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Figures published show that although courts continue to carry out urgent business and make more use of remote audio and video technology, the impact of COVID-19 is clear to see. It is expected that the limited operation of the criminal courts during the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to have an impact on many of the published figures in this and future releases.***
- During the period April to June 2020:
- There were 766 Magistrates' court sitting days, which was decrease of 23% from 992 in the same period the previous year.
- 4,389 new adult criminal defendants were received in court and 1,037 adult defendants were disposed of. These represent decreases of 58% (from 10,392) and 90% (from 9,963) respectively, compared to the same period the previous year. These are the lowest numbers of adult defendants received and disposed of during the April to June quarter since the time series began in 2007.
- The average waiting time in the adult criminal court from first hearing to disposal was 11 weeks, four weeks longer than the corresponding period last year.
- 139 new defendants were entered in the youth court and 68 youth defendants were disposed of. These represent decreases of 57% (from 320) and of 82% (from 385) respectively, compared to the same period the previous year. These are also the lowest numbers of both youth defendants received and youth defendants disposed of during the April to June quarter since 2007.
- The average waiting time in the youth criminal court from first hearing to disposal was 26 weeks, compared to 14 weeks in the corresponding period last year.
- 1,013 new civil and family applications were received and 575 civil applications were disposed of. These represent decreases of 2% (from 1,037) and 40% (from 962) respectively, compared to the same period the previous year.

- The average waiting time for a case to progress through the civil and family court from date of receipt to disposal was 3 weeks, compared to 10 weeks in the corresponding period last year.

CONTENTS

Contents	Page
1. Introduction	1
2. Methodology	3
3. Findings	6
3.1 Magistrates' court sitting days	
3.2 Adult criminal Magistrates' court	
3.3 Youth criminal Magistrates' court	
3.4 Civil and Family Magistrates' court	
Appendix 1 - Tables	12
Appendix 2 - Explanatory Notes	23

Figure	Page
Figure 1: Magistrates' court sitting days: April to June 2011 to April to June 2020	7
Figure 2: Adult criminal defendants received and disposed: April to June 2011 to April to June 2020	8
Figure 3: Average waiting times in weeks in adult Magistrates' courts (First hearing to disposal): April to June 2011 to April to June 2020	9
Figure 4: Youth criminal defendants received and disposed: April to June 2011 to April to June 2020	10
Figure 5: Civil & family applications received and disposed: April to June 2011 to April to June 2020	11

Table	Page
<u>Table 1.1 Scheduled court sitting days & average court sitting times in the Magistrates' courts by venue</u>	12
<u>Table 1.2 Additional court sitting days & average court sitting times in the Magistrates' courts by venue</u>	13
<u>Table 1.3 Special court sitting days & average court sitting times in the Magistrates' courts by venue</u>	13
<u>Table 2.1 Adult criminal defendants received in the Magistrates' courts by venue</u>	14
<u>Table 2.2 Adult criminal defendants disposed of in the Magistrates' court by venue</u>	15
<u>Table 2.3 Average waiting times in the adult Magistrates' courts by venue</u>	16
<u>Table 2.4 Type of charges brought for adult defendants disposed of by business area</u>	17
<u>Table 2.5 Outcome of adult defendants disposed of by business area</u>	17
<u>Table 3.1 Youth defendants received in the Magistrates' courts by venue</u>	18
<u>Table 3.2 Youth defendants disposed of in the Magistrates' courts by venue</u>	18
<u>Table 3.3 Average waiting times in the youth Magistrates' courts by venue</u>	19
<u>Table 3.4 Type of charges brought for youth defendants disposed of by business area</u>	19
<u>Table 3.5 Outcome of youth defendants disposed of by business area</u>	20
<u>Table 4.1 Number of civil and family applications received in the Magistrates' court by venue</u>	20
<u>Table 4.2 Number of civil and family applications disposed in the Magistrates' court by venue</u>	21
<u>Table 4.3 Average waiting times in the civil and family Magistrates' courts by venue</u>	22
<u>Table 4.4 Outcome of applications under the Family Homes & Domestic Violence Order in the Magistrates' court in Northern Ireland</u>	22

1. INTRODUCTION

A Magistrates' court (other than a youth court or family proceedings court) is presided over by a district judge (Magistrates' court) sitting alone. The present complement of district judges (Magistrates' court) is nineteen. The Magistrates' court hears and determines less serious criminal cases, cases involving youth and some civil and domestic cases including family proceedings.

The vast majority of all criminal offences dealt with in Northern Ireland are tried summarily in a Magistrates' court. A significant number of these offences are offences against Road Traffic Orders, such as the Road Traffic (NI) Order 1995 and the Road Traffic Offenders (NI) Order 1996, sometimes described as the 'penalty points' Order.

Magistrates' courts also deal with offences where the defendant can choose trial by jury but decides to have their case heard in the Magistrates' court. If the defendant chooses trial by jury, the case will be passed on to the Crown Court. It is estimated that where the defendant has a choice between summary trial and trial on indictment, approximately three out of four cases are dealt with summarily. This is mainly because this mode of trial is much quicker and the sentencing powers of a District Judge (Magistrates' court) are more restricted than those of a Crown Court Judge - the most serious punishment which a District Judge (Magistrates' court) can impose is 12 months in prison, unless consecutive terms of imprisonment are imposed for more than one offence, when the limit is extended to 18 months.

The youth court deals with young people who have committed criminal offences, and who are aged between 10 and under 18. The youth court is part of the Magistrates' court and cases are generally heard before a panel of three persons, a salaried District Judge (Magistrates' court) and two specially-trained fee-paid lay magistrates. Although the youth court can deal with the full range of criminal offences (save for murder), if a young person is charged with a very serious offence, which in the case of an adult is punishable with 14 years' imprisonment or more, the youth court can commit them for trial at the Crown Court.

In addition to hearing criminal proceedings the youth court also hears proceedings relating to the care, protection and control of juveniles.

Magistrates' courts can deal with a limited number of civil cases as follows:-

- some civil debts, for example, arrears of income tax, national insurance contributions, VAT arrears, rates
- licences, for example, granting, renewing or taking away licences for pubs and clubs
- some matrimonial problems, for example, maintenance and removing a spouse from the matrimonial home
- welfare of children, for example, local authority care or supervision orders, adoption proceedings and residence orders (known as the Family Proceedings Court).

Data relating to business at the Family Proceedings Court is published on a quarterly basis in the NICTS Children Order Bulletin.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Data sources

Information contained in all tables is sourced from data that are inputted onto the Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS). This system was implemented across the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) over a two year period from 2005 to 2007. While ICOS was introduced in the Magistrates' Court during 2006, data derived from ICOS has been used as the source for official government statistics since 2007, when the implementation of ICOS across all court tiers was completed. 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.

2.2 Methodology for generating data

Analytical Service Group (ASG) statisticians based within the NICTS take a download of Magistrates' court information from ICOS on a monthly basis. The information is downloaded using a package called SharePoint which extracts all the relevant data from ICOS into text files which are refreshed with up-to-date information each weekend. The text files are downloaded onto a secure internal facility that only specified statistical personnel have access to. The data contained in the files are identified only by numbers and names and addresses are not held. These statistical files are not transmitted outside the NICTS statistical team. ASG statisticians based in the NICTS import these data into the Statistics Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). SPSS is then used to perform extensive data validations to identify potential errors in the data and to ensure the data are reliable and robust.

2.3 Baseline and Time period

Data contained within this bulletin relates to the current calendar year, 2020, and the time series for this information dates back to 2007, when ICOS was adopted as the source for official government statistics. However, within this publication, comparisons of trends are viewed over a 10-year period.

2.4 Frequency of Publication

This bulletin is published on a quarterly basis. The next bulletin will cover the third quarter of 2020 and will be published on 6th November 2020.

2.5 Data quality and validation

ASG statisticians based in the NICTS have invested significant time and effort creating an extensive computer programme within SPSS to validate the information downloaded from ICOS. The programme includes over 100 checks against downloaded court data to: (i) check consistency over time and between variables; (ii) assess reliability of data using logic checks; (iii) check that variables fall within accepted ranges; and (iv) check with the ICOS Support Team in the event of any major discrepancies that have occurred since the last download. The validation program produces user friendly tables highlighting the potential problems which are circulated to each Magistrates' court venue as a validation report.

There are Case Progression Officers who are responsible for: monitoring accuracy levels on ICOS, by carrying out sample checks on data entry and court resulting; ensuring all validations on ICOS and manual statistics returns are completed in a timely manner; providing advice and identifying training needs; monitoring the confirmation of ICOS criminal court resulting, including the inputting of adjournment codes; and promoting awareness of the impact error can have, its wide ranging consequences and the negative impact on the reliability of management information.

The Case Progression Officers are given a two-week period from the date the validation report issues to have all records amended on ICOS. This ensures that the corrections are updated before the next download of files. After the files have been refreshed each weekend, all the data are then downloaded again, with the new download reflecting amendments made as a result of the validation reports. If any errors have not been corrected, they will continue to appear in the validation reports until the necessary amendments are made on ICOS.

The NICTS statistics team then ensure that all validations relating to the reporting period are amended prior to publication. Once these amendments have been checked, SPSS syntax programming is then used to generate the tables in the publication.

Data contained in this bulletin are currently provisional and will undergo further validation before being published in their final form in the 2020 edition of Judicial Statistics (published on the 25th June 2021).

2.6 Counting rules

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'.

2.7 Interpreting trends

Changes to practice within the judicial system in general and the Magistrates' Court in particular, may impact upon business volumes presented in this bulletin. One example would be the introduction of Penalty Notices for Disorder on 6th June 2012. These were new diversionary disposals aimed at dealing with minor offences as a direct alternative to a prosecution before the court. The impact of this change means that offences previously dealt with by the Magistrates' Court are no longer received in court, but are rather dealt with out of court, contributing to the decrease in Magistrates' Court business over this period. For further advice on differences in data between years, please contact the statistician responsible for this bulletin.

2.8 Revisions

Any revision to data will be applied in light of the ASG (NICTS) Statistical Note '*Policy Statement on Revisions*'¹ which may be found on the NICTS Statistics and Research Publications section of the DoJ website². Incorrect figures or changes to this publication will be published on the web in a formal Statistical Notice.

¹ Department of Justice, 2013. Statistics and Research: Policy statement on Revisions. [pdf] DoJ. Available at: <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/statistics-and-research-policy-statement-revisions>

² Department of Justice, 2017. Policy Papers [online] Available at: <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/type/policypapers>

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Magistrates' court sitting days

During April to June 2020 there were 723 scheduled Magistrates' sitting days, 11 additional Magistrates' sitting days and 32 special Magistrates' sitting days. These represented decreases of 21% (from 920), 39% (from 18) and of 41% (from 54) respectively, compared to the same period the previous year.

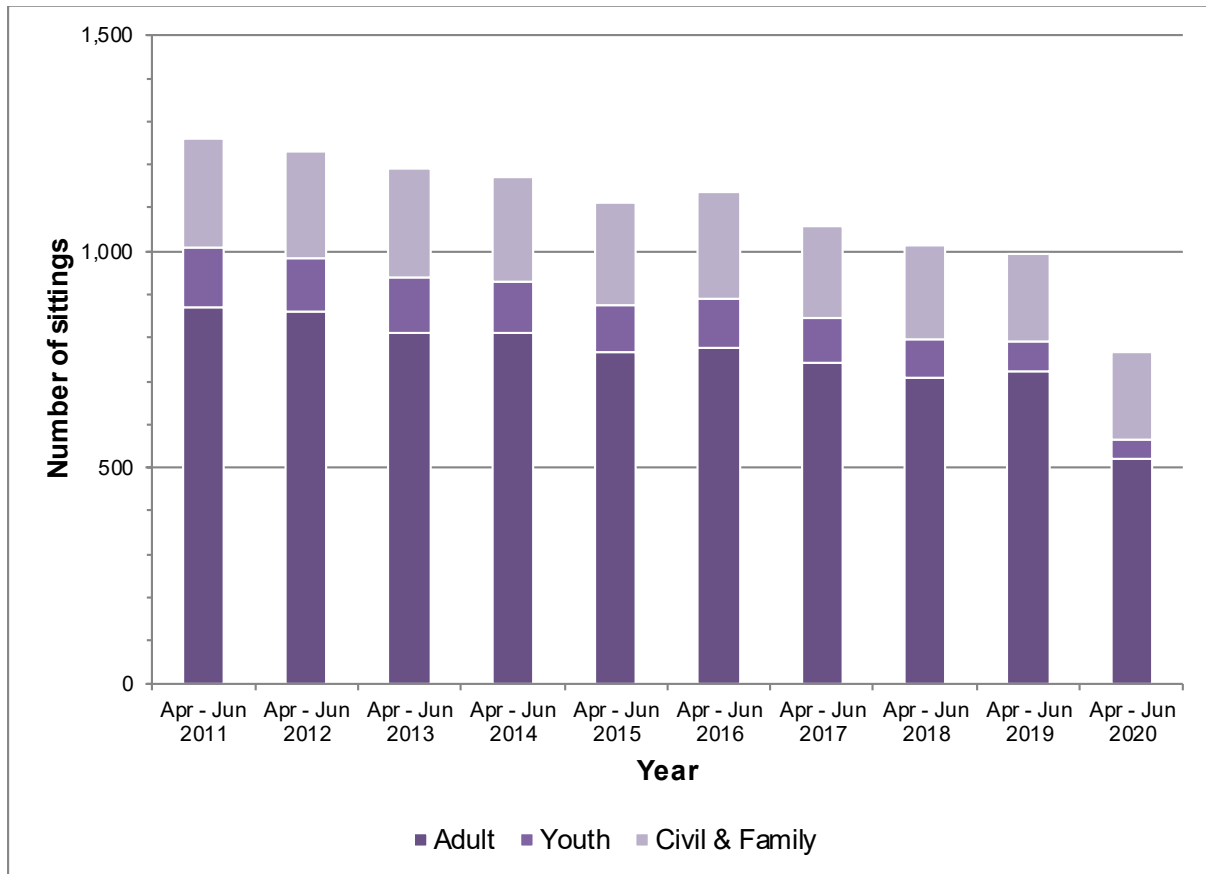
The composition of Magistrates' sitting days for April to June 2020 is outlined in the table below:

	Scheduled	Additional	Special	Total
Adult Criminal	477	9	32	518
Youth Criminal	49	0	0	49
Civil & Family	197	2	0	199
Total	723	11	32	766

Within these 766 sitting days, 68% were adult criminal days, 6% were youth criminal days and 26% were civil and family days.

The number of sitting days across each Magistrates' business type has been gradually decreasing since its peak in 2011, with the exception of a slight increase in 2016, and is at its lowest point since the time series began (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Magistrates' court sitting days: April to June 2011 to April to June 2020



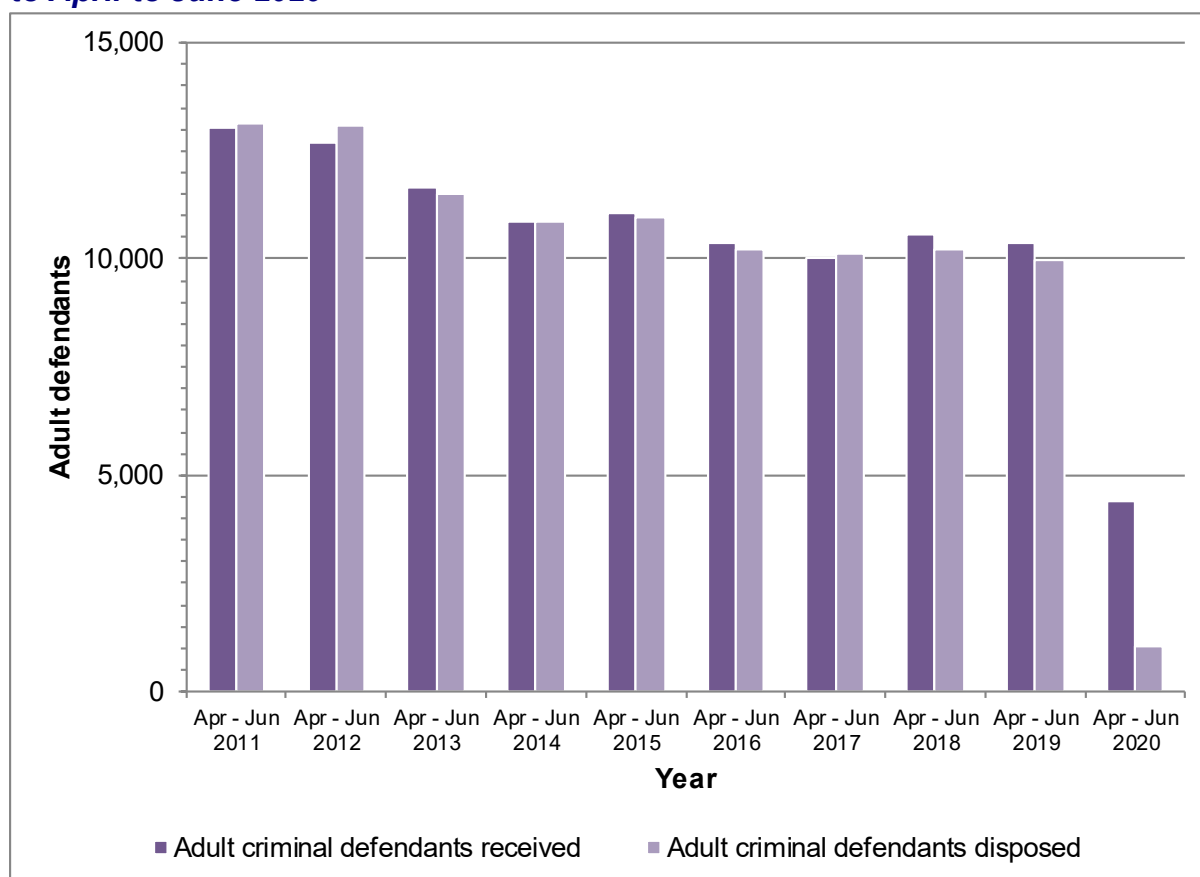
3.2 Adult criminal Magistrates' court

During April to June 2020, 4,389 new adult criminal defendants were received in court and 1,037 adult defendants were disposed of. These represent decreases of 58% (from 10,392) and of 90% (from 9,963) respectively, compared to the same period the previous year.

The majority (97%) of prosecutions disposed of in the adult court were brought by PSNI/ PPS (78.1% in the same period in 2019).

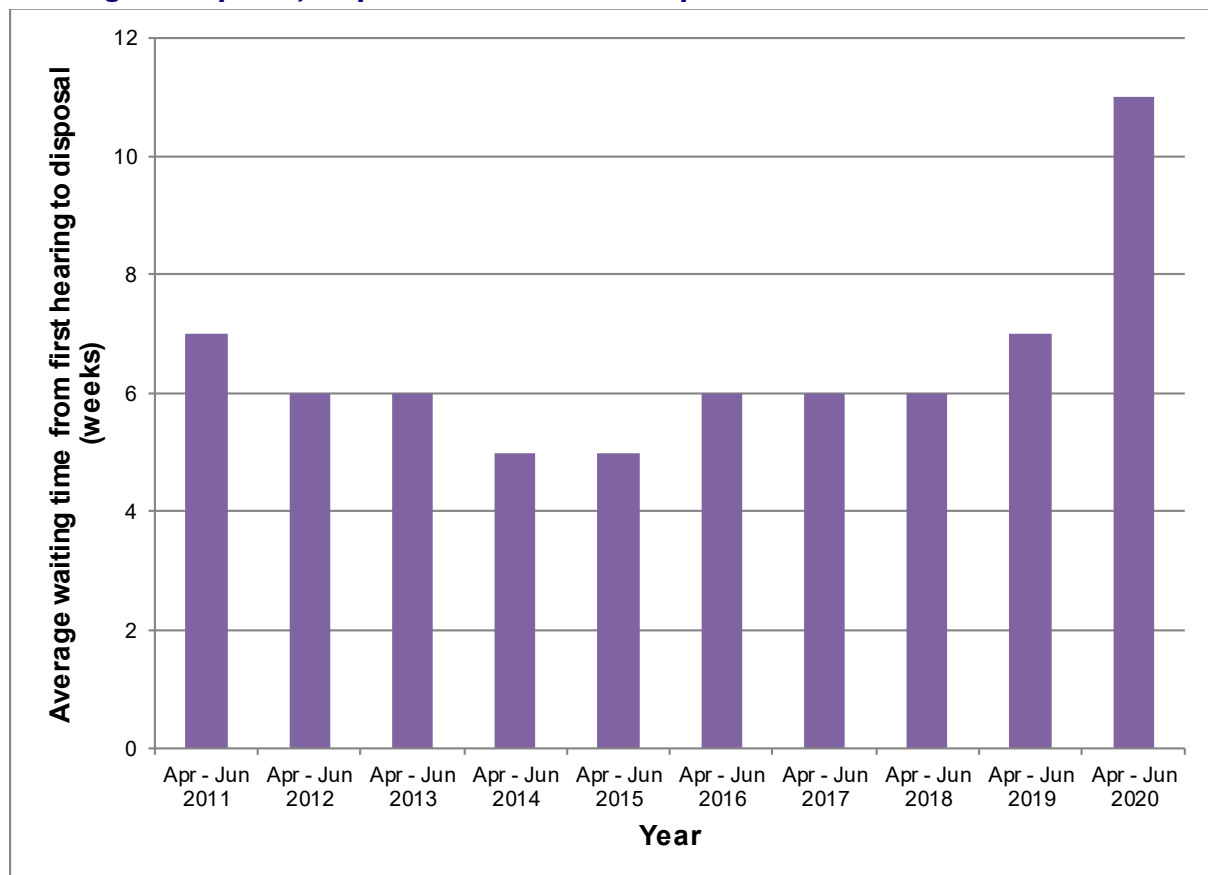
The volume of both adult criminal defendants received and disposed decreased in the quarter April to June between 2010 and 2017, with the exception of a small increase in 2015, and have remained close to this level for the past number of years (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Adult criminal defendants received and disposed: April to June 2011 to April to June 2020



The average waiting time in the adult criminal court from first hearing to disposal has varied over the past number of years, but has remained within the range of 5 to 7 weeks in the April to June quarter since the time series began in 2007 until the current year (Figure 3). It was 11 weeks during April to June 2020, four weeks longer than the corresponding period in the previous year.

Figure 3: Average waiting times in weeks in Adult Magistrates' courts (First hearing to disposal): April to June 2011 to April to June 2020



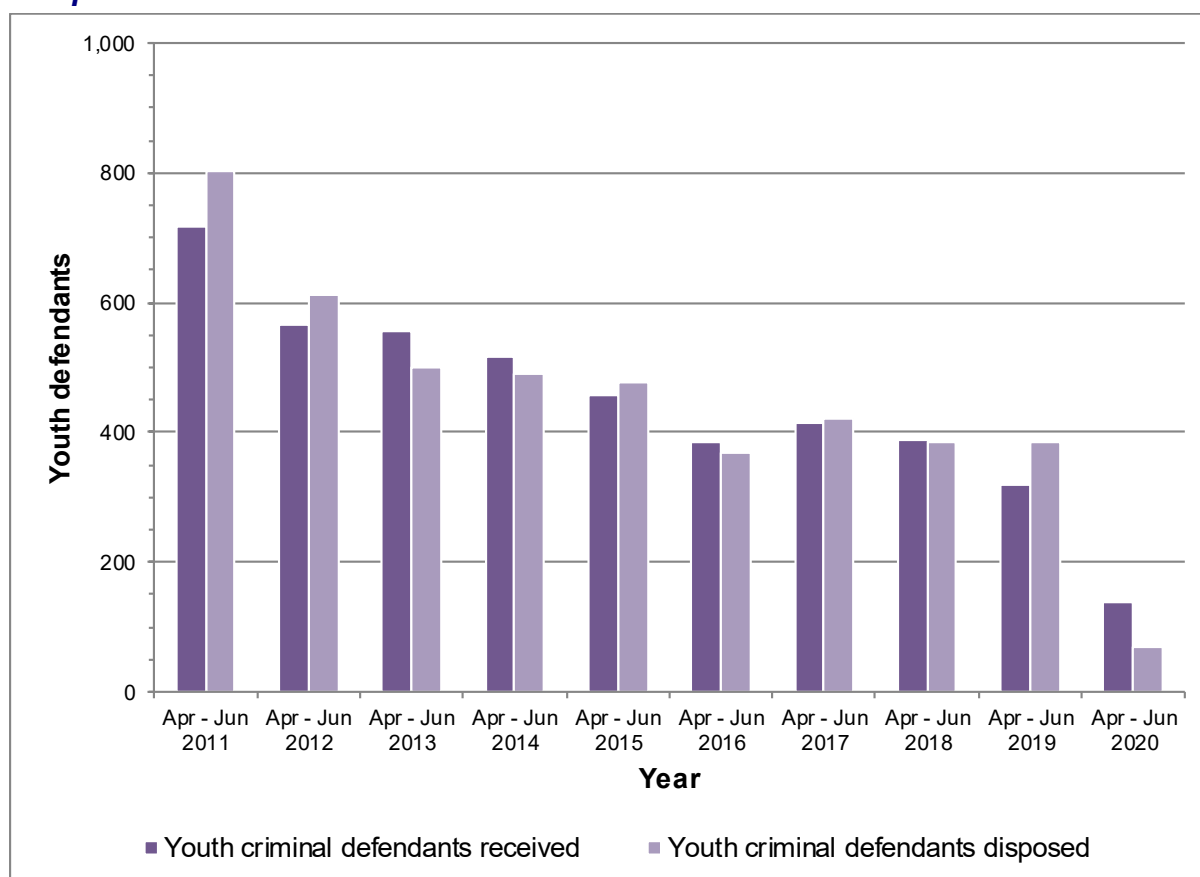
3.3 Youth criminal Magistrates' court

During April to June 2020, 139 new defendants were entered in the youth court and 68 youth defendants were disposed of. These represent decreases of 57% (from 320) and of 82% (from 385) respectively, compared to the same period the previous year.

All of the prosecutions disposed of in the youth court were brought by PSNI/ PPS (compared to 99.1% in the same period in 2018).

The volume of youth criminal defendants received and disposed generally decreased in the April to June quarter between 2011 and 2016. There was a small increase in receipts in 2017, but receipts have since been decreasing. The volume of youth criminal defendants disposed began to fluctuate from 2016 to 2019, until both volumes reached the current levels. (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Youth criminal defendants received and disposed: April to June 2011 to April to June 2020



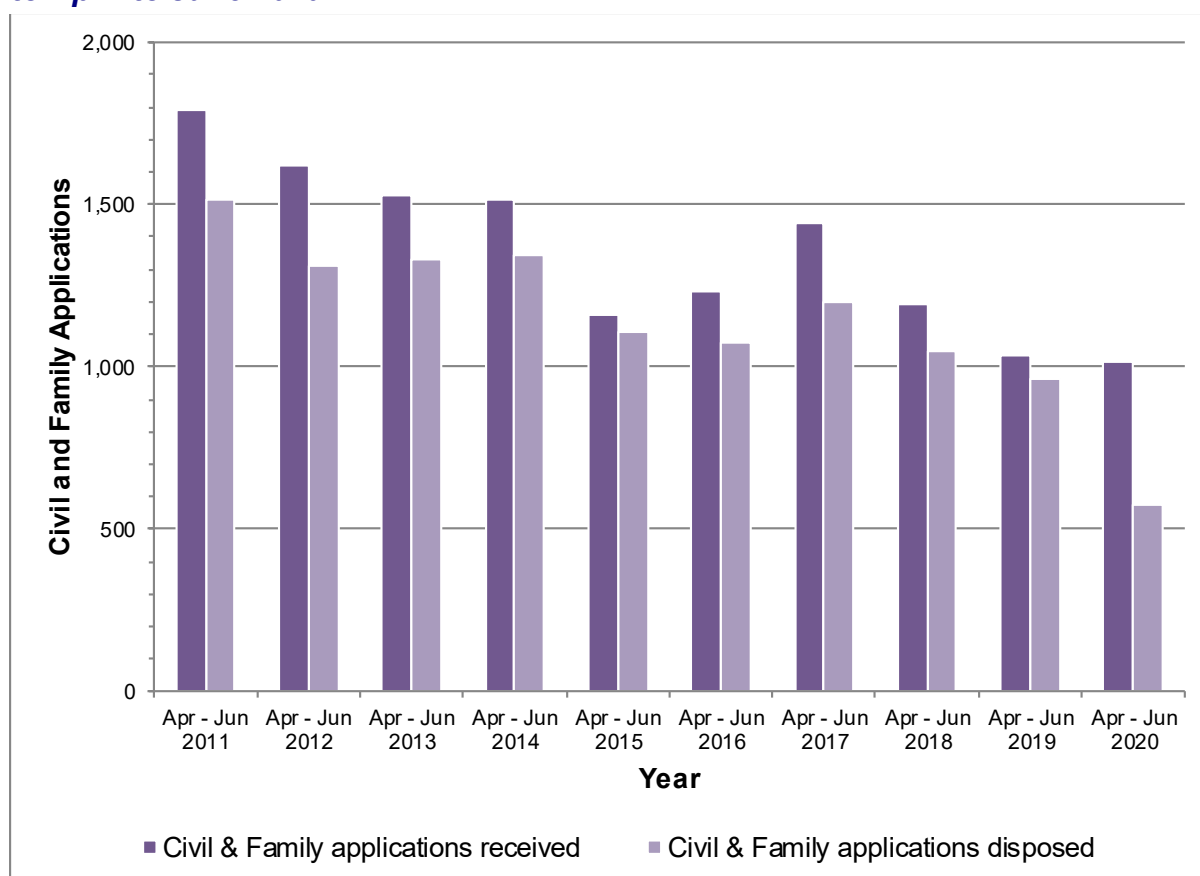
The average waiting time in the youth court from first hearing to disposal was 26 weeks (14 weeks for the same period in 2019).

3.4 Civil and Family Magistrates' court

During April to June 2020, 1,013 new civil and family applications were received and 575 civil and family applications were disposed of. These represent decreases of 2% (from 1,037) and of 40% (from 962) respectively, compared to the same period the previous year.

The volume of civil and family applications received in the April to June quarter generally decreased between 2011 and 2015, then increased until 2017, however figures have been decreasing since then. The volume of civil and family applications disposed peaked in 2011, from which point volumes have fluctuated, but they have steadily decreased since 2017 (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Civil & family applications received and disposed: April to June 2011 to April to June 2020



The average length of time for a case to progress through the civil and family court was 3 weeks from date of receipt to disposal (10 weeks for the same period in 2019).

APPENDIX 1 – TABLES

Table 1.1 Scheduled court sitting days & average court sitting times in the Magistrates' courts by venue³

	Adult criminal day		Youth criminal day		Civil and Family day	
	Number of court sitting days	Average court sitting time	Number of court sitting days	Average court sitting time	Number of court sitting days	Average court sitting time
Antrim	18	0:35:30	2	0:10:00	8	0:43:45
Ballymena	18	0:47:36	2	0:12:30	10	1:22:12
Laganside	67	2:56:13	4	2:27:30	55	2:06:43
Armagh	17	1:21:14	0	-	1	0:30:00
Banbridge@Newry	15	1:06:20	0	-	0	-
Limavady	13	0:52:18	0	-	0	-
Lisburn	36	1:32:50	5	0:23:00	19	1:09:12
Magherafelt	11	1:03:49	0	-	1	0:30:00
Dungannon	29	2:13:47	1	0:50:00	15	1:30:52
Downpatrick	23	0:54:39	1	1:00:00	0	-
Craigavon	31	1:43:03	4	0:42:30	12	0:38:20
Strabane	17	1:49:42	3	1:16:40	0	-
Omagh	16	1:42:03	3	1:15:00	9	1:49:53
Enniskillen	23	2:17:49	4	0:08:45	3	1:05:00
Coleraine	34	1:28:40	5	0:40:00	10	3:13:00
Londonderry	48	1:51:32	1	1:55:00	5	1:25:00
Newtownards	36	0:27:55	9	0:41:06	32	1:03:45
Newry	25	1:07:14	5	0:32:00	17	0:52:38
Total	477	1:37:23	49	0:48:15	197	1:30:25

³ A court sitting day is counted as any day where the judiciary sit in court. It does not include time in chambers or days where the judiciary are sitting in chambers. Days are classified on the basis of, in the first instance, the earliest scheduled sitting. Where the start time for two or more sittings is the same, the days are classified on the majority of business undertaken.

Table 1.2 Additional court sitting days & average court sitting times in the Magistrates' courts by venue³

	Adult criminal day		Civil and Family day	
	Number of court sitting days	Average court sitting time	Number of court sitting days	Average court sitting time
Ballymena	0	-	1	0:35:00
Lisburn	3	1:10:00	1	0:20:00
Dungannon	3	2:31:40	0	-
Craigavon	1	1:20:00	0	-
Londonderry	2	1:20:00	0	-
Total	9	1:40:33	2	0:27:30

Table 1.3 Special court sitting days & average court sitting times in the Magistrates' courts by venue³

	Adult criminal day	
	Number of court sitting days	Average court sitting time
Lisburn	12	0:47:55
Dungannon	11	1:11:49
Londonderry	9	0:46:40
Total	32	0:55:46

³ A court sitting day is counted as any day where the judiciary sit in court. It does not include time in chambers or days where the judiciary are sitting in chambers. Days are classified on the basis of, in the first instance, the earliest scheduled sitting. Where the start time for two or more sittings is the same, the days are classified on the majority of business undertaken.

Table 2.1 Adult criminal defendants received in the Magistrates' courts by venue⁴

	PSNI/PPS prosecution	Departmental prosecution	Fixed penalty	Penalty Notice for Disorder	Total
Laganside Courts	1,144	330	33	13	1,520
Newtownards Court Office	176	117	12	1	306
Downpatrick Court Office	104	41	2	1	148
Craigavon Court Office	200	129	10	5	344
Armagh Court Office	33	31	12	1	77
Banbridge@Newry Court Office	25	32	0	0	57
Omagh Court Office	54	12	0	0	66
Strabane Court Office	45	22	0	0	67
Antrim Court Office	84	54	3	3	144
Londonderry Court Office	294	57	7	1	359
Enniskillen Court Office	65	27	0	0	92
Coleraine Court Office	161	68	1	0	230
Newry Court Office	147	69	0	0	216
Limavady Court Office	31	29	0	0	60
Magherafelt Court Office	53	37	2	1	93
Ballymena Court Office	136	22	2	1	161
Lisburn Court Office	221	57	4	0	282
Dungannon Court Office	128	26	10	3	167
Total	3,101	1,160	98	30	4,389

⁴ Fixed penalty default summonses have been re-instated in the court lists since 1st July 2014.

Table 2.2 Adult criminal defendants disposed of in the Magistrates' court by venue⁴

	PSNI/PPS prosecution	Departmental prosecution	Fixed penalty	Total
Laganside Courts	392	3	0	395
Newtownards Court Office	54	2	0	56
Downpatrick Court Office	19	0	0	19
Craigavon Court Office	71	0	3	74
Armagh Court Office	15	0	5	20
Banbridge@Newry Court Office	5	0	0	5
Omagh Court Office	37	0	0	37
Strabane Court Office	19	1	0	20
Antrim Court Office	28	0	0	28
Londonderry Court Office	80	1	0	81
Enniskillen Court Office	34	0	0	34
Coleraine Court Office	33	1	0	34
Newry Court Office	37	4	0	41
Limavady Court Office	5	0	0	5
Magherafelt Court Office	14	0	0	14
Ballymena Court Office	41	1	0	42
Lisburn Court Office	56	2	0	58
Dungannon Court Office	66	3	5	74
Total	1,006	18	13	1,037

⁴ Fixed penalty default summonses have been re-instated in the court lists since 1st July 2014.

Table 2.3 Average waiting times in the adult Magistrates' courts by venue⁵

	Summons to first hearing (weeks)	First hearing to finding (weeks)	Finding to disposal (weeks)	First hearing to disposal (weeks)
Laganside Courts	1.30	9.93	0.67	10.60
Newtownards Court Office	1.57	9.90	0.87	10.76
Downpatrick Court Office	2.50	6.98	0.00	6.98
Craigavon Court Office	4.40	8.91	0.82	9.73
Armagh Court Office	10.83	7.58	1.32	8.89
Banbridge@Newry Court Office	1.14	11.69	0.00	11.69
Omagh Court Office	1.65	12.66	1.64	14.29
Strabane Court Office	3.08	9.11	5.39	14.50
Antrim Court Office	4.58	9.91	0.72	10.63
Londonderry Court Office	2.77	10.30	1.21	11.51
Enniskillen Court Office	1.53	10.76	0.97	11.73
Coleraine Court Office	0.86	10.65	0.32	10.97
Newry Court Office	2.01	14.56	1.34	15.90
Limavady Court Office	1.07	1.29	0.25	1.54
Magherafelt Court Office	4.95	6.34	0.64	6.98
Ballymena Court Office	1.01	11.23	0.44	11.67
Lisburn Court Office	1.10	9.94	1.05	10.99
Dungannon Court Office	10.00	6.90	1.19	8.09
Total	2.63	9.88	0.92	10.80

⁵ Arrest warrants, adjourned generally and deferred sentences excluded

Table 2.4 Type of charges brought for adult defendants disposed of by business area^{4 6}

	PSNI/PPS prosecution	Departmental prosecution	Fixed penalty	Total
All Offences Against the Person	119	0	0	119
All Sexual Offences	11	0	0	11
All Burglary Offences	26	0	0	26
All Robbery Offences	4	0	0	4
All Theft Offences	74	0	0	74
All Fraud and Forgery Offences	1	2	0	3
All Criminal Damage Offences	40	0	0	40
All Offences Against the State	28	0	0	28
All Other Offences	20	7	0	27
All Drug Offences	93	0	0	93
All Motoring Offences	121	3	4	128
All Non-Police Offences	1	4	9	14
All Breach	26	0	0	26
Combination of charges	442	2	0	444
Total	1,006	18	13	1,037

Table 2.5 Outcome of adult defendants disposed of by business area⁴

	PSNI/PPS prosecution	Departmental prosecution	Fixed penalty	Total
Committed to the Crown Court	66	0	0	66
Plea of guilty on all charges	454	4	0	458
All charges withdrawn	316	13	0	329
Fixed penalty default	0	0	13	13
Plea not guilty - found guilty on at least one charge	162	0	0	162
Plea not guilty - acquitted on all charges	8	1	0	9
Total	1,006	18	13	1,037

⁴ Fixed penalty default summonses have been re-instated in the court lists since 1st July 2014.

⁶ Please note that as of 07/01/2011 the charge of 'disorderly behaviour' was re-categorised from 'other offences' into 'offences against the state'.

Table 3.1 Youth defendants received in the Magistrates' courts by venue

	PSNI/PPS prosecution	Departmental prosecution	Total
Laganside Courts	36	0	36
Newtownards Court Office	25	0	25
Downpatrick Court Office	1	0	1
Craigavon Court Office	6	0	6
Omagh Court Office	1	0	1
Antrim Court Office	6	0	6
Londonderry Court Office	14	0	14
Enniskillen Court Office	3	0	3
Coleraine Court Office	6	1	7
Newry Court Office	10	0	10
Ballymena Court Office	10	0	10
Lisburn Court Office	13	0	13
Dungannon Court Office	7	0	7
Total	138	1	139

Table 3.2 Youth defendants disposed of in the Magistrates' courts by venue

	PSNI/PPS prosecution	Total
Laganside Courts	22	22
Newtownards Court Office	2	2
Craigavon Court Office	4	4
Armagh Court Office	1	1
Omagh Court Office	4	4
Antrim Court Office	3	3
Londonderry Court Office	16	16
Enniskillen Court Office	2	2
Coleraine Court Office	1	1
Newry Court Office	2	2
Ballymena Court Office	1	1
Lisburn Court Office	8	8
Dungannon Court Office	2	2
Total	68	68

Table 3.3 Average waiting times in the youth Magistrates' courts by venue^{5 7}

	Summons to first hearing (weeks)	First hearing to finding (weeks)	Finding to disposal (weeks)	First hearing to disposal (weeks)
Laganside Courts	5.84	65.82	1.29	67.10
Newtownards Court Office	0.71	8.00	0.00	8.00
Craigavon Court Office	0.00	9.39	8.50	17.89
Armagh Court Office	0.00	15.29	0.00	15.29
Omagh Court Office	4.07	7.50	7.71	15.21
Antrim Court Office	0.64	0.86	6.50	7.36
Londonderry Court Office	3.46	3.84	5.45	9.29
Enniskillen Court Office	4.14	0.00	0.00	0.00
Coleraine Court Office	2.00	11.00	0.00	11.00
Newry Court Office	1.07	2.43	14.14	16.57
Ballymena Court Office	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Lisburn Court Office	0.04	10.59	0.00	10.59
Total	2.93	22.54	3.52	26.06

Table 3.4 Type of charges brought for youth defendants disposed of by business area⁶

	PSNI/PPS prosecution	Total
All Offences Against the Person	8	8
All Sexual Offences	1	1
All Theft Offences	6	6
All Criminal Damage Offences	7	7
All Offences Against the State	6	6
All Other Offences	2	2
All Drug Offences	6	6
All Motoring Offences	2	2
Combination of charges	30	30
Total	68	68

⁵ Arrest warrants, adjourned generally and deferred sentences excluded

⁶ Please note that as of 07/01/2011 the charge of 'disorderly behaviour' was re-categorised from 'other offences' into 'offences against the state'.

⁷ The relatively small number of cases disposed in some court offices each quarter can lead to significant differences in average times observed from issue to disposal between the court office average and the Northern Ireland average.

Table 3.5 Outcome of youth defendants disposed of by business area

	PSNI/PPS prosecution	Total
Plea of guilty on all charges	26	26
All charges withdrawn	38	38
Plea not guilty - found guilty on at least one charge	4	4
Total	68	68

Table 4.1 Number of civil and family applications received in the Magistrates' court by venue

	Current Business Area		Total
	Domestic Proceedings	Fh&Dv (Magistrates Court)	
Laganside Courts	2	316	318
Newtownards Court Office	0	116	116
Downpatrick Court Office	0	12	12
Craigavon Court Office	0	34	34
Armagh Court Office	0	5	5
Banbridge@Newry Court Office	0	7	7
Omagh Court Office	0	11	11
Strabane Court Office	0	1	1
Antrim Court Office	0	17	17
Londonderry Court Office	0	81	81
Enniskillen Court Office	0	2	2
Coleraine Court Office	0	71	71
Newry Court Office	0	33	33
Ballymena Court Office	0	63	63
Lisburn Court Office	0	150	150
Dungannon Court Office	0	92	92
Total	2	1,011	1,013

Table 4.2 Number of civil and family applications disposed in the Magistrates' court by venue

	Current Business Area		Total
	Domestic Proceedings	Fh&Dv (Magistrates Court)	
Laganside Courts	3	185	188
Newtownards Court Office	0	61	61
Downpatrick Court Office	1	9	10
Craigavon Court Office	0	22	22
Armagh Court Office	0	1	1
Banbridge@Newry Court Office	0	4	4
Omagh Court Office	0	4	4
Strabane Court Office	0	2	2
Antrim Court Office	0	13	13
Londonderry Court Office	0	43	43
Enniskillen Court Office	0	2	2
Coleraine Court Office	0	36	36
Newry Court Office	0	15	15
Ballymena Court Office	0	32	32
Lisburn Court Office	0	89	89
Dungannon Court Office	0	53	53
Total	4	571	575

Table 4.3 Average waiting times in the civil and family Magistrates' courts by venue⁷

	Date of receipt to first hearing (weeks)	First hearing to disposal (weeks)	Date of receipt to disposal (weeks)
Laganside Courts	0.63	1.12	1.75
Newtownards Court Office	0.40	1.16	1.56
Downpatrick Court Office	2.06	21.60	23.66
Craigavon Court Office	1.13	0.84	1.88
Armagh Court Office	0.00	0.00	0.00
Banbridge@Newry Court Office	0.29	0.00	0.29
Omagh Court Office	0.00	0.07	0.07
Strabane Court Office	2.64	34.50	37.14
Antrim Court Office	1.88	9.04	5.88
Londonderry Court Office	0.43	1.11	1.44
Enniskillen Court Office	2.43	15.93	18.36
Coleraine Court Office	0.42	0.62	0.98
Newry Court Office	0.91	3.13	4.05
Ballymena Court Office	1.19	2.46	1.62
Lisburn Court Office	0.23	1.91	2.13
Dungannon Court Office	0.34	0.20	10.49
Total	0.57	1.85	3.21

Table 4.4 Outcome of applications under the Family Homes & Domestic Violence Order in the Magistrates' court in Northern Ireland

		Order Made					Total
		Granted	Dismissed or refused	Withdrawn	Vary discharge	Other	
Complaint	Non molestation	363	148	34	10	4	559
	Occupation	3	1	3	2	0	9
	Vary discharge non-mol occupation	0	0	3	0	0	3
Total		366	149	40	12	4	571

⁷ The relatively small number of cases disposed in some court offices each quarter can lead to significant differences in average times observed from issue to disposal between the court office average and the Northern Ireland average.

APPENDIX 2 - EXPLANATORY NOTES

Acquittal

A judgement or verdict that a person is not guilty of the crime with which they have been charged.

Additional sitting

These are additional court sittings, not included within the regular court calendar, but planned in advance of the date of the sitting.

Adult Magistrates' Business

Magistrates' court criminal business in which the defendant is aged 18 years or over on the date on which they committed the offence.

Applications

The act of applying to a civil or family court to ask it to do something, for example to start proceedings or make an order.

Charge sheet

A charge sheet is a method by which PSNI can put charge(s) to a defendant and on which they will either release the defendant on police bail to appear at court within 28 days of the charging or they can detain the defendant in custody to produce them before a court at the earliest opportunity.

Civil and Family application

These are applications in relation to Children Order, domestic and family homes and domestic violence proceedings.

Committed to Crown Court

The procedure by which a defendant is returned for trial to the Crown Court by the Magistrates' court, if the Magistrates' court is satisfied that there is a case to answer.

Departmental prosecution

Departmental prosecutions are for criminal offences which are investigated by a department or other non-police body and prosecuted by either the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) or a separate prosecutorial body (e.g. motor tax evasion which is prosecuted by the Department of the Environment).

Disposed

The date a case is finally dealt with via a court or non-court result and the case is no longer in the court process.

Domestic proceeding (including FHDV orders, Non molestation, Occupation, Vary discharge)

These are orders made in respect of applications made under the Family Homes and Domestic Violence (Northern Ireland) Order 1998. These orders include non-molestation orders, occupation orders or both. A non-molestation order is made for the protection of the applicant and may prohibit the respondent from carrying out particular actions or behaviours and may include an exclusion zone. Occupation orders provide for the rights of the application to peacefully occupy a particular property without interference from the respondent. These orders may be varied to add or remove particular requirements and the order can also be discharged by the court to bring the terms of the order to an end.

Family Magistrates' Business

Family business in the Magistrate's Court (the Family Proceedings Court) covers applications brought in respect of the care and welfare of children, domestic proceedings and applications for non-molestation and/or occupation orders.

Finding

This is the date on which a defendant is either found guilty or not guilty of having committed the offence alleged in either the summons or charge sheet.

First hearing

This is the date on which a case first appears in court.

Fixed penalty Default

This is a fixed penalty which has been issued for a minor motoring offence and which has not been paid by the payment due date and has therefore gone into default. At this stage a summons is issued to bring the matter before the court to have a Judge set the default terms for non-payment.

Hybrid charge

This is also referred to as a 'triable-either-way' offence. A criminal offence that may be prosecuted either summarily (in the Magistrates' court) or on indictment (in the Crown Court). In the majority of cases, the prosecution decides how the offence is tried depending on the seriousness of the offence.

Indictable charge

A serious criminal offence where the defendant is usually tried in the Crown Court.

Indictable triable summarily charge

A serious criminal offence where the defendant can be tried in the Crown Court but may in some instances be tried in a Magistrates' court.

Penalty Notice for Disorder

These are diversionary disposals aimed at dealing with minor offences, such as non-motoring offences, as a direct alternative to a prosecution before the court.

Penalty Notice for Disorder Default

This is a penalty notice for disorder which has been issued for a defined offence and which has not been paid by the payment due date and has therefore gone into default. At this stage a summons is issued to bring the matter before the court to have a Judge set the default terms for non-payment.

PSNI/PPS prosecution

These are prosecutions for criminal offences which are investigated by Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and prosecuted by Public Prosecution Service (PPS).

Received

The date a served summons or a charge sheet is received by the Magistrates' Court office.

Scheduled sitting

This is a regular court sitting that is included within the court calendar.

Sitting

This is a period of work by a judge in a single courtroom on a single day. Several types of business may be heard at one sitting. Business heard in different courtrooms, whether at the same venue or elsewhere, is counted as separate sittings.

Sitting Days

A court sitting day is counted as any day where the judiciary sit in court. It is a period of work by a judge on a single day. Multiple sittings on one calendar date will be aggregated into one sitting day based on the Judicial officer, venue and sitting date. Several types of business may be heard within one sitting day. Days are classified on the basis of, in the first instance, the earliest scheduled sitting. Where the start time for 2 or more sittings is the same, the days are classified on the majority of business undertaken. It does not include time in chambers or days where the judiciary are sitting in chambers.

Special sitting

These are additional unplanned court sittings, not included within the regular court calendar, that are required to hear unforeseen business, such a dealing with a defendant on a weekend or public holiday.

Summary charge

This is an offence which is triable in a Magistrates' court.

Summons

This is the method by which a complaint is made to require a defendant to appear before a court in respect of particular charge(s). The details of the charge(s) will be contained on the summons as well as the first date and place at which the defendant is to attend court.

Time intervals

This is the time taken (in weeks) between the case being received by the court and the date it is finally resolved.

Youth Magistrates' Business

Magistrates' court criminal business in which the defendant is aged between 10 and 18 years on the date on which they committed the offence.

Analytical Services Group,
Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service,
Department of Justice
4th Floor, Laganside House
23-27 Oxford Street,
Belfast BT1 3LA
Email: richard.martin2@courtsni.gov.uk
Telephone: 028 9072 8928

<https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/topics/courts-and-tribunals>