

Kent Update
Court Hearings and Trials (Crime)
Covid-19
Monday 4th May

The requirement to maintain social distancing and the required standard of cleaning at all times has had a significant impact on how the courts have been able to operate. As a result, nearly all hearings and trials since the start of Lockdown have had to be cancelled and will be rescheduled for a later date.

Since the start of Lockdown, the courts have been able to continue with what is called Priority 1 work. This includes, but not exhaustively;

- Overnight custody cases from police stations
- Custody time limit hearings from prisons
- Arrest warrants issued under the Extradition Act
- Terrorism applications
- Urgent applications for DVPOs
- Urgent applications for the rights of entry / search warrants

This has been possible because much of the above work can be managed via video or audio attendance and therefore minimises any physical attendance in court.

In an attempt to get other work back into court, the court teams have had an in-depth look at all Magistrates Courts to understand where it's possible to meet current social distancing measures and standards of cleaning. As a result, the court team are looking to list a small number of Priority 2 hearings and trials; however it must be stressed that volumes will be very low as the majority of the court estate is not suitable for use under the current restrictions and guidelines. Priority 2 work does include sensitive/high profile cases and cases involving children and vulnerable victims / witnesses and the Police Witness Care Unit are speaking to victims and witnesses whose cases are being listed.

There are currently no Jury trials being heard.

As government guidance changes, it may be possible to increase the volume of work being heard.

As the backlog in cases continues to grow, HMCTS are looking at how they can adapt and operate in a different way. We are already exploiting the use of video to minimise physical court room attendance but there are many ideas that if taken forward will require legislative changes and an update on these can be provided as plans are firmed up.

If a victim or witness has any concerns over their case then they should contact their Police Witness Care Officer.