

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE JUSTICE MINISTER



Department of  
**Justice**

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt

Máinnystrie O tha Laa

[www.justice-ni.gov.uk](http://www.justice-ni.gov.uk)

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Kathy O'Hanlon  
Clerk to the Committee for Justice  
Room 242  
Parliament Buildings  
Ballymiscaw  
Stormont  
Belfast BT4 3XX

3 December 2025

Dear Kathy,

### **JUSTICE BILL AND LIVE LINKS DEPARTMENTAL AMENDMENTS**

Thank you for your letter dated 19 November 2025 in which you forwarded a copy of the Assembly Research and Information Service's paper on the proposed live links amendments and asked the Department to respond to the scrutiny points contained in the paper.

I am happy to provide the information requested under the separate headings below.

#### **Does any guidance and training still need to be provided to staff working across justice agencies in relation to the use of live links?**

Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service (NICTS) has recently upgraded its Live Links service provision to a Webex-based solution known as Justice Video Platform (JVP). This is used across justice agencies to remotely connect with court hearings. Training has been provided to court staff and judiciary, and demonstrations, awareness and updated instructions for use have been shared with justice partners.



**Will any further research or monitoring be commissioned to identify individuals for whom live link technology is not suitable? Will the Department commission any further work to investigate the impact of digital disadvantage on remote hearings, including lack of skills, internet connection or hardware?**

The utilisation of live links technology is a matter for the Court and if additional support or access issues occur, they are dealt with by the Court by way of application or by bringing it to the attention of the judge at the time of the proceedings. Information on when the Court may consider a request to attend remotely is made available by the Lady Chief Justice on the JudiciaryNI website:

[https://www.judiciaryni.uk/files/judiciaryni/2025-10/Guidance%20on%20Physical%20Remote%20and%20Hybrid%20Attendance%20-%20FINAL%20-%2020201025\\_3.pdf.pdf](https://www.judiciaryni.uk/files/judiciaryni/2025-10/Guidance%20on%20Physical%20Remote%20and%20Hybrid%20Attendance%20-%20FINAL%20-%2020201025_3.pdf.pdf)

There are no plans to commission any further work to investigate the impact of digital disadvantage on remote hearings. However there will be monitoring of any issues that do arise.

**Are there any data protection implications in relation to this live link technology? Will guidance be provided to individuals to help them understand how their information is being used where live links are deployed? If a recording of a live link takes place, will individuals captured in it be able make a request to access the footage?**

This is covered in the courts Privacy Notice(s) which are externally published and available to anyone attending the remote hearing.

Guidance is currently available at: <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/articles/attendance-remote-and-hybrid-hearings>.

The court does not permit recordings of live link hearings by any party, and it is illegal to do so. The Justice Video Platform provides additional safeguards in that should anyone make a recording the recording will be automatically watermarked with their IP address. Any illegal recording of proceedings may be subject to investigation by the PSNI.



**What type of matters is it envisaged that the court should have regard to when determining the use of live links under the regulation making power contained in clause 21E(4)(b)?**

It is not possible to provide an example of the type of matter that may be set out for this purpose under new clause 21E(4)(b) at this time. This provision is a precautionary measure that would only be required should the provisions as drafted not operate as anticipated or hoped for by including the obligation to have regard to guidance as well as give reasons for a refusal.

**How often will the Department review the operation of remote hearings once this legislation is in operation? Will the Department regularly publish data on remote hearings to allow for thorough monitoring and evaluation of their impact? Can information exploring the variations in the use of remote hearings be provided in terms of types of hearings or cases (including for example, length and complexity across different courts) to help build a fuller picture of factors that may affect suitability for remote hearings?**

At present data can be provided regarding the number of live link connections made, however there is currently no way to link these to the outcomes of cases managed through the Legacy IT system. Themis is the NICTS' business transformation and service improvement Programme, that will incrementally deliver new case management technology with enhanced data capabilities. It is intended that the Themis case management solution will capture the details of how each party attended hearings (i.e. in-person / remotely). Themis will be delivered on a phased basis until 2029.

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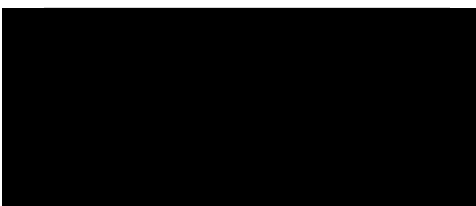
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**Will the Department's upcoming digital justice strategy provide any further funding for investment in technology across the court estate?**

In the coming months the Department plans to publish a new digital justice strategy which aims to set direction and support the delivery of a more modern digital justice system. The strategy recognises the necessity of providing secure, trusted and user-friendly technology to support those working in the justice system and those who need to engage at any point with justice organisations.

This is a cross-justice strategy that has been developed in partnership with stakeholders across the system and aims to ensure that technological developments are used to enhance processes and access to services, and to embed a culture of digital transformation in years to come. The strategy has not yet been published and is not at a significantly advanced stage to determine granularity in relation to funding of specific areas of work. It should however help to inform funding of digital priorities which will be included in future bids including those related to investment and upgrade of court technology.

Yours sincerely



**CAOIMHE MCKEOWN  
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**Northern Ireland Assembly  
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19 November 2025

**Justice Bill – RaSe paper on Live Links amendment**

Dear David

At its meeting on 13 November 2025, the Committee for Justice considered the Assembly Research and Information Service's paper on the proposed Live Links Amendments, which includes a number of scrutiny points.

The Committee has already written separately to the Department regarding the types of matters that it is envisaged that the court should have regard to when determining the use of live links under the regulation power contained in clause 21E(4)(b).

The Committee agreed to forward the paper to the Department for response to the remaining scrutiny points.

I should appreciate a response by 3 December 2025.

Yours sincerely

*Kathy O'Hanlon*

**Kathy O'Hanlon  
Clerk to the Committee for Justice**

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