



Opening Hours

Monday to Friday
9.00am - 8.00pm

Saturday and Sunday
10.00am - 3.00pm

Going to Court

What court will the case be heard at?

All criminal cases are first dealt with at the Magistrates Court.

Criminal cases fall into three types:

- **Summary offences**, such as criminal damage under £5,000, being drunk and disorderly, can be dealt with by Magistrates.
- **Either way offences**, such as theft, certain drug offences or higher value criminal damage can be dealt with either by Magistrates or at the Crown Court.
- **Indictable only offences**, such as murder or rape can only be dealt with at the Crown Court although they start off at the Magistrates Court.

At the Magistrates Court your case may be heard by either a Magistrate or a District Judge. At the Crown Court your case will be heard by a Judge or a Judge and a Jury.

What is the difference between a Magistrate and a Judge?

Magistrates, or Justices of the Peace (JPs), are trained volunteers from all walks of life. They are not required to have any legal

training or qualifications (but are assisted in court by a legal advisor).

District Judges are legally qualified (as a barrister or solicitor). Both have the same function and powers, but the district judge tends to sit alone

Where can I find out travel directions to the court?

You can find more detailed information about individual courts and directions to get to them on the Justice website found at:

www.justice.gov.uk

What time should I arrive at court?

Most cases are listed in a court room for a morning or an afternoon session. A morning session typically begins at 9.45am and an afternoon at 1.45pm. However this may vary between courts. It is best to phone the court you will be attending and ask to speak to 'listings'. They will then be able to tell you what time the case has been listed for. There will be a number of cases listed at the same time and your case may not necessarily be the first. The order with which cases are called on at court depends on whether all the relevant paperwork has arrived at the court room, whether the defence solicitors are present, whether the defendant has attended

and other considerations including the number of cases involving a defendant appearing from custody.

It is worth arriving a little earlier than the time listed as you will have to pass through a security process including a gate similar to that found at an airport and sometimes a search procedure. Bags and other items such as coats are passed through an X-ray machine. You may also be searched using a hand-held metal detector which is passed over your clothes.

If a pre-sentence report has been ordered at an earlier hearing and the defendant is on bail they may have to attend on the day prior to the time the case is listed in order to be interviewed by probation. The defendant will already be aware of this.

It is important to be aware if you intend to drive to the court that there may be limited availability of parking spaces. Phone up and check with the court whether there is parking nearby and if you need to pay for it. If you are accompanying the defendant, whether by car or by public transport, leave enough time to get to the court. Judges are not normally very sympathetic to late comers and may issue a warrant for their arrest.

What should I wear to court?

There is no formal dress code when attending court to support a defendant. However it is important to show respect for the court process and so it is important to dress appropriately. Certain items are discouraged or prohibited. It is not appropriate for those attending to wear shorts in court or other items of clothing that could be considered too revealing. Headwear such as hats and caps should not be worn unless for religious reasons. It is inadvisable to wear clothing featuring inappropriate or offensive slogans.

What am I allowed to take into the court room?

There are certain items which cannot be taken into court buildings. These include:

- Recording equipment such as cameras and video
- Drugs
- Weapons

You should not leave bags unattended. Mobile phones and pagers are allowed into the court room itself but should be switched off or on silent and should not be used at any time.

Food and drink is not allowed into the court room and should be disposed of outside or concealed in a bag.

If you have been informed that you might expect a custodial sentence then it is advisable to take a bag into the dock with you containing a change of clothes and underwear and up to £30 in cash. If you are sent to prison this will go straight into your property/account and save any wait to receive these items through the post/visits. It is important to note that not all prison establishments will cash monies held by the defendant. Sometimes this will be placed with the prisoner's property and returned upon release.



Are there any childcare facilities at court?

Most courts do not have childcare facilities available, it is best to enquire with the individual court prior to your appearance.

Children under 14 years of age are not permitted in the public gallery or courtroom.

Babies and small children must be supervised by an escorting adult at all times. This means that if you attend with a child and no-one else is available to look after the child you will not be able to enter the court room. Court staff are not permitted to supervise children on behalf of a family under any circumstances.

What services are available for disabled people?

All courts should have disabled access and toilet facilities. In addition, courts generally offer enhanced hearing access and welcome guide dogs for the visually impaired. If you have a disability that may affect your appearance in court it is wise to contact the court in advance so that special arrangements can be made.

How will I know when a case has started?

When you first arrive at court you should find the court room that the case will be heard in. Each court is staffed by a member of staff known as an usher. They are there to ensure cases are called on in order and to assist those seated outside the court to know when they can come in.

Introduce yourself to the usher when you first arrive and tell them which case you are there to see. You can then take a seat outside the court and they will come out and announce the name of the defendant when the case is ready to begin.

Will my relative/partner be able to see me in the court room?

This will depend on the layout of the individual court room. In more modern courts the public gallery is often positioned so that you can see the defendant. In older courts the 'dock' where the defendant stands may be positioned such that the view is restricted from the public gallery either by position or by opaque glass. If you have concerns about this you can contact the court to find out about the layout or speak to the solicitor involved in your case who will be able to reassure your loved one that you are present during the hearing.

You can find specific information about individual courts on the website

www.justice.gov.uk

