



To all civil, family, probate and tribunal court users and members of the Civil Court Users Association

Your Reference:

Our Reference – HA/OM

Dear court user

Re: Temporary Closure of Bristol Civil and Family Justice Centre

Further to my previous communications on this matter, you will be aware that the Bristol Civil and Family Justice Centre's basement car park was subject to a severe flood on Tuesday 27 June 2017 which caused damage to the electrical circuits. This incident continues to render the Bristol Civil and Family Justice Centre unavailable to house any court hearings or administrative support from HMCTS court staff. It was anticipated that re-occupation of the Bristol Civil and Family Justice Centre would be achieved by mid-October 2017 but following discussions with the contractors responsible for the remedial repair work, that date is no longer possible.

I am sure that you will be disappointed as HMCTS are to hear this news but hope you will appreciate that the conditions for re-occupation have to be met to allow the Bristol Civil and Family Justice Centre to operate in a safe environment for its staff, stakeholders and customers. The current timeline for re-occupation has therefore been re-adjusted to mid November 2017.

I appreciate that this will and has caused disruption to court users wanting to access the services provided by the Bristol Civil and Family Justice Centre and offer my most sincere apologies for the inconvenience caused. On a more positive note, we are taking the opportunity of installing Wifi into the Bristol Civil and Family Justice Centre prior to re-occupation. I know many customers have asked questions on this for some time so HMCTS see this as an opportunity to make these improvements in conjunction with the repair work to the Bristol Civil and Family Justice Centre.

The court continues to closely work with its judiciary, estates team and stakeholders to secure temporary arrangements to ensure that services to court users are maintained until such time that re-occupancy of the Bristol Civil and Family Justice Centre can be achieved.

The following service provision therefore remains in place until further notice:-

Bristol Probate Registry

Due to this incident the Bristol District Probate Registry will be closed until further notice. Telephone calls and e-mails cannot be answered at this time and no counter service is available. Bristol District Probate Registry staff has been relocated for the duration of the closure to the Probate Registry of Wales in Cardiff.

For further assistance please telephone **02920 474 373** or alternatively email: CardiffDPEnquiries@hmcts.gsi.gov.uk

Counter Services for Civil and Family

The main public counter servicing all civil and family enquiries is temporarily located on the 1st floor at Bristol Magistrates Court, Marlborough Street, Bristol, open from 9.30am to 2pm (Monday to Friday). The only exception will be for Specialist and High Court civil counter enquiries which will be available from 9.30am to 4pm.

Court bundles

Due to limited storage capacity at our temporary venues, we would ask all court users to take any bundles with them at the conclusion of the hearing. Any bundles left in venues will be subject to our confidential wasting procedures and **will not** be retained.

Children attending court

There are (for legal reasons) circumstances when Children are required to attend court hearings which is normally on the direction of a Judge. In these circumstances we realise that we need to make any visit to the court as easy as possible for our Customers so are happy for a box of toys to be kept with the usher team. These toys can then be distributed to our Customers for use in waiting areas or interview rooms where it is required. However, where there is no legal requirement for Children to attend court, Customers with parental responsibility are discouraged from bringing Children to any of our temporary court venues particularly as many of those used are Criminal Courts.

Court hearings

The court listing team has changed over 1,200 hearing notices advising customers on the change of venue to Bristol Magistrates Court. If this venue changes for any reason, the court listing team will contact parties giving as much notice as possible in the event that travelling to other court venues is required **or** if your case has to be adjourned due to lack of court room accommodation. Every effort is being made to keep all listed hearings for civil, family and tribunal hearings in Bristol or in close proximity to Bristol. Other court venues such as Bath Magistrates Court, Gloucester County Court, North Somerset Courthouse in Worle and Taunton Combined Court Centre are also being used where required. The court has recently also secured the use of the rooms of the Council Chambers at College Green in Bristol and of Queensway House in Worle which is adjoined to the North Somerset Courthouse to minimise the disruption and inconvenience of travelling to other venues. These newly secured temporary venues will be used as and when required in direct discussion with the Local Leadership Judiciary. In the event of your case being adjourned this will be supported by a judicial decision as listing is deemed as a judicial function.

Court lists

If you wish to check where your case is being listed, you may do so by visiting the Court Serve website: <https://www.courtserve.net/secure/registration.php> which advertises daily court listings. Please note that Customers do need to register with Court Serve which will then allow viewing the court lists free of charge. There is no charge to register.

Consultation rooms

Can all civil, family and tribunal court users note that we have limited consultation rooms available to use in our temporary hearing venues. If you occupy one of these consultation rooms for any reason, please ensure that you remove any possessions including court papers when you leave them.

Please **do not** under any circumstances leave any items in these rooms or in the court room corridors as this poses security risks.

E-mail services

This remains unaffected by this incident and due to the current situation is the preferred method of communication but we appreciate that not all court users have access to e-mail services. Please note that due to the flood, the court staff have only had limited access to e-mails but that situation is now improving.

As a result there may be a delay in responding to your enquiry. If you are sending e-mails to the court for hearings, please include the case number, date of hearing and the name of the Judge hearing this case (if this is known to you).

The court e-mail addresses are available on the Bristol Civil and Family Justice Centre court finder page: [-courtribunalfinder.service.gov.uk](http://courtribunalfinder.service.gov.uk).

Helping us to help you

The court was asked at a recent meeting held with the Chairman of the Civil Court Users Association how court users could help the court in providing the best service possible to its customers during this incident.

With this in mind and in order for the court to process your enquiry or work processes, the following checklist will assist the court:

- ✓ Please include your hearing date, parties name and case number in the top line of your e-mail or letter to the court.
- ✓ Do not send an e-mail enquiry and post the same enquiry by hard copy as this duplicates the process and slows down the court system.
- ✓ Refrain from contacting the court for at least 10 days from the date of submitting your process or enquiry as sometimes directions are required from the judiciary and this time allowance needs to be built into our processes. Contacting the court before the expiry of 10 working days simply slows down the process of clearing outstanding work for the court staff.
- ✓ Do not send in request for updates weekly (lots of these are computer generated chase ups on warrant of control requests)

Payments of court fees and warrant payments.

Our normal service of accepting payments (by all methods) has been restored. Payments can be accepted via our temporary counter services at Bristol Magistrates Court between the hours of 9.30am to 2pm (Monday to Friday) or by telephone to: **0117 9302430** between the hours of 9am to 4pm (Monday to Friday).

Personal Support Unit (PSU)

This service has been re-located to the 1st floor (room adjacent to Court 6) at Bristol Magistrates Court, Marlborough Street, Bristol. They also have a temporary contact number for customers to arrange appointments or enquiries which is **07756 976823**.

Postal services

All post destined for the Bristol Civil and Family Justice Centre is being re-directed to Bristol Magistrates Court. Please continue to send your mail to the 2 Redcliff Street address – If you address your letter to Bristol Magistrates address it will cause delay as it will enter the magistrates post system instead.

Telephone hearings

Any court users involved in telephone hearings will be provided with the number for their conference provider to call by the listing team giving as much notice as possible.

Telephone services

Our main telephone services have now been restored and any incoming calls are now being directed to the relevant parts of the court for answering. Details on the direct dial numbers to the court staff can be found by visiting Bristol Civil and Family Justice Centre court finder page:- courtribunalfinder.service.gov.uk. The main contact numbers for the court are:-

Civil queries: (including High Court and Court of Protection) **0117 976 3010**

Family queries: (including divorce enquiries) **0117 930 2442**

Payments: (civil and family court fees and judgments) **0117 930 2430**

Listing: (centralised list office for civil and family cases) **0117 930 2411**

Employment tribunal: (South West) **0117 976 3019**

Updates of the incident involving the Bristol Civil and Family Justice Centre

We are working closely with the HMCTS communications team to provide regular updates to court users on the incident as we appreciate and acknowledge the disruption and inconvenience this is causing. These updates will feature on the Bristol Civil and Family Justice Centre court finder page:- courtribunalfinder.service.gov.uk.

Updates may also be found on the independent website: www.familycourtinfo.org.uk.

Finally, may I thank all court users for their continued assistance, patience and understanding while the court tries to restore its services as quickly as possible and offer my most sincere apologies for any inconvenience caused.

Yours Sincerely

Helen Andrews

Mrs Helen Andrews
Operations Manager Bristol Civil, Family and Tribunals