



Sent by email

10 December 2021

Dear Colleague

Evaluation of remote hearings during the COVID 19 pandemic

I am writing to let you know that today we will publish an [evaluation of the use of remote hearings during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

The evaluation carried out by HMCTS and IFF Research aims to understand the experience of public users, the judiciary, legal representatives, court staff, observers and support professionals along with their attitudes towards remote hearings.

The findings in the evaluation include:

- members of the public attending remotely were slightly more likely to be satisfied with the overall experience of their hearing than in-person users. Benefits include greater convenience, reduced costs and removing the worry of being in the same room as a participant, who they may be in conflict with.
- legal representatives were positive about remote hearings, with 93% saying they felt remote hearings were an acceptable alternative during the pandemic. Views were more mixed about how remote hearings should be used in the future.
- 51% of judges thought remote hearings were effective at creating a comparable environment to in-person hearings. Concerns were raised about the impact of remote hearings on wellbeing and increased workload.

The evaluation also makes recommendations on areas such as improved guidance for participants and increased support for vulnerable users.

We accept these recommendations and will be using this valuable insight to inform the development of our services. In fact, we have already started work to address a number of them.

The [Video Hearings service](#), developed as part of the Reform programme to meet the specific needs of court and tribunal hearings, already addresses some of these recommendations. It better reflects the formality of a court hearing and goes further than the services used during the pandemic by offering facilities such as virtual consultation rooms and built-in guidance for court users. We will be transitioning to the Video Hearings service throughout 2022.

Remote hearings will continue to form an integral part of the justice system, and we will continue to listen to all of the feedback we receive and monitor their use.

The decision to hold a remote hearing is at the discretion of a judge who will decide if it is in the interests of justice. We will continue to support the judiciary to conduct remote and in-person hearings and provide technology that enables justice free of the restrictions of a physical location.

Yours sincerely



Kevin Sadler CBE

Acting Chief Executive, HM Courts & Tribunals Service