



Common Platform – update for defence professionals

Answers to questions asked at the webinar on
Friday 24 September 2021



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Overall strategic approach

Q: How long will cases details be kept on Common Platform? How long will they remain available after the conclusion of the case? What is the archiving policy?

A: HMCTS is currently working to identify requirements for archiving across all jurisdictions. We have completed this initial scoping work around archiving criminal cases and will feed the requirements into the archiving project. The outcomes of this project will ultimately determine how long cases will remain available on Common Platform.

For the time being, all cases added to Common Platform will remain on the system until the archiving project is complete and our overall approach is finalised.

Q: The Digital Case System (DCS) works well. Why not keep this, and roll it out to magistrates’ courts as well, instead of removing it?

A: DCS is a standalone system which is only designed to handle case materials for the Crown Courts. Common Platform brings both the end-to-end process functionality and the storing of case material into one single system for both crime jurisdictions.

Q: Is it true that the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) is abandoning Common Platform? Why is this?

A: Alongside HMCTS, CPS has recently undertaken a comprehensive review of the plans for the delivery of the next phase of Common Platform – particularly in light of the significant impact of COVID-19 on the criminal justice landscape and the need to drive the collective priority of criminal justice system (CJS) recovery.

Within this context, the challenges of delivering and implementing the project as originally planned have become clear. We have therefore agreed that the best way for CPS to be part of the Common Platform is to integrate their existing CMS case management system into

Common Platform via a series of 2-way interfaces. This means they will retain their existing system, but information and documents will be exchanged with Common Platform.

There will be no compromise in what Common Platform will deliver for the end user and this altered approach is simply a different route to achieving the same outcome

Common Platform remains critical to reforming the CJS, and CPS' commitment to work with HMCTS, the police and other CJS partners to deliver the Common Platform vision remains as strong as ever. We are very grateful to CPS colleagues for their important contributions to the development of the system so far, and these will remain central to delivering the revised approach.

Q: How is Common Platform being made accessible for people with disabilities?

A: Common Platform has been built in line with [Government Digital Service accessibility guidelines](#), which apply to all government's new online services. You can learn more about how government is working to make digital services more accessible overall through [the 'Accessibility in government' blog](#).

Q: Is there a back-up system? What happens if court wi-fi stops working?

A: A modern, cloud-based system like Common Platform is not a single unit – but a combination of various different components. These unique elements separate out the different functions or capabilities that make up the system as a whole. You can view Common Platform as not so much a single system but rather a collection of smaller, independent but related systems.

Common Platform has been designed to ensure that the failure of one component – for example, “manual case create” – does not adversely affect the whole system. If one component fails, the whole system does not fail. So, if the manual case create component stopped working then other elements could all still be working. Cases could still flow into Common Platform from police and other prosecutors' systems and functions associated with hearings, listing, resulting and so on could still function as intended.

There are obviously certain types of failures, such as network issues, that could prevent anyone accessing the various components. If something like this should occur, we have business continuity processes in place.

Our business contingency plan for Common Platform continues to be the same as it does for heritage systems, which are also dependent on power and internet.

In extreme circumstances, if power and connectivity are completely unavailable, our staff will record proceedings using paper and update systems later.

Q: Will old cases be migrated to Common Platform for viewing (read-only) or further processing?

A: We currently have no plans to migrate existing or old cases to Common Platform.

Q: How can defence practitioners get involved in Local Implementation Teams in their areas?

A: Please contact your regional Head of Crime or Head of Legal Operations and we will provide you with the details. If you're not sure how to get in touch, speak to staff at your local court and they will be able to give you the appropriate contact information.

Q: When will local authorities and other non-police prosecutors have access to Common Platform?

A: We are considering the strategy for accessing the Common Platform. We will be in touch with non- prosecutors to start working with you on how access will be made available.

Q: How do unrepresented co-defendants and litigants in person gain access to case papers?

A: We will follow the existing process used in courts now – the prosecution will provide a paper copy of the case materials.

Q: Is the fraud court also using Common Platform?

A: All criminal court sites are included in the national rollout plan.

Q: We currently need to use and become proficient in DCS, Common Platform, Egress, CJSM, email for the organisations that don't allow or support use of CJSM, the Legal Aid Agency site for training, costing, and legal aid apps, The Sentencing Council, HMCTS site, the MOJ site for forms, the videolink services, (which in the last year have included Pexip, CVP and Teams), Xhibits and Courtserve... quite apart from getting documents from non CPS prosecuting bodies. Could we have one system which will incorporate all of these?

A: Thank you for your comments, which we will feed to our Criminal Justice partners for their consideration. Many of the systems mentioned, of course, sit outside of HMCTS' remit but we recognise that many organisations are also looking to transform their systems and processes, many of which were introduced at pace during the COVID pandemic.

Q: How much will the Common Platform system cost to implement fully?

A: To make it possible for HMCTS to achieve our reform ambitions, there has been an overall investment of nearly £1bn, of which approximately £270m is intended for developing the Common Platform, in partnership with the CPS.

Q: I understand that no new sites have gone live with Common Platform over the summer. Will it be rolling out to any further sites?

A: In August a pause was scheduled into the national rollout plan to accommodate summer leave. We have taken the decision to continue the pause and defer rollout to any new sites to allow time for investigation into service issues experienced by users during the summer.

The timetable of future rolls out is contingent on approval from the Senior Presiding Judge, which is required before courts can go live and start using the Common Platform. We will continue to update our GOV.UK pages as more courts go live with Common Platform.

Security, account registration and logging in

Q: Why can't I access Common Platform as a prosecutor as well as a defence counsel? Will I need separate accounts to prosecute and defend?

A: Our design teams are currently working on providing access for advocates which will enable prosecutors (initially the CPS) to instruct external advocates from within Common Platform: this will avoid the need for separate user accounts.

Until this work is complete, CPS will provide you with the documents you need for the Magistrates' Court. In the Crown court, case materials will still be accessed through DCS.

Q: Do I need a separate login for Common Platform to access cases when I sit as a Recorder?

A: Yes, as this will require a different level of access within Common Platform.

Q: I am a Public Access Barrister and am not part of an organisation – how do I register?

A: You can find detailed information and guidance on [how to register for Common Platform](#) on GOV.UK

Public access barristers can register with Common Platform as single-person defence organisations: this allows them to declare instruction and associate with a case. Onboarding in this way gives them all the privileges held by a solicitors' firm (access to the IDPC, to the case summary, and so on). The verification metric necessary to set up their user account would be their Bar Council membership number.

Q: Whenever I create a new user, I have to ask the helpdesk to set their role so they can gain access. When will I be able to set roles as part of creating new accounts? When members of my firm have problems with registering for accounts, they are told to contact me as administrator, but I do not have the right information to help. Where can I get the appropriate information or support to do this recently been deployed?

A: The ability to set roles for new users has recently been made available on Common Platform. We will shortly be communicating with those defence firms who have already provided us with administrators' details to deliver a user-friendly guide in how to do this. This guide will also cover other aspects of being a firm administrator.

Q: I have tried to register on Common Platform several times, but each time my registration failed. Why is this?

A: We would need to know the specific circumstances around the issues you are facing. Please contact our helpdesk and raise this as an issue so they can investigate. Email CJSCP-ServiceDesk@hmcts.net or phone 0300 303 0688.

Q: Why has my account been deactivated? How do I re-register? Does Common Platform issue warnings/reminders before it deactivates a user's account when it has been inactive for 90 days?

A: This is a security requirement: any account that remains unused for 90 days will be deactivated. For some of the time during the COVID-19 pandemic we were able to extend this period, but it has now been restored to the original 90 days.

Before an account is deactivated, you will receive an automatic email telling you that you need to login to Common Platform to keep your account active. Sometimes this email ends up in your spam/junk folder.

If you do not login within 14 days, your account will be deactivated, and you will need to re-register to continue using Common Platform. At present, reactivating accounts is something which needs to be done by HMCTS, but we are in the process of making it possible for defence organisation administrators to be able to do this for you.

For now, please contact the helpdesk to re-register your account: email CJSCP-ServiceDesk@hmcts.net or phone 0300 303 0688.

Q: I do not use a smart phone. Do I need one in order to access Common Platform?

A: You will need a smart phone, tablet or similar device which you can have with you in court, and which will enable you to complete 2-factor authentication.

Q: What if we fail to check-in for a hearing because we can't login to Common Platform? Does this mean we won't get paid?

A: The expectation is that advocates hold an active Common Platform account and sign in for each case. If you have an account and experience any difficulties signing into your cases, you must raise this with the helpdesk for assistance and/or investigation. Where difficulties persist, and in exceptional circumstances, the court staff will be able to check you in on a case by case basis.

Q: When I try to login to Common Platform, I see an error message saying I am 'not authorised to view this page'. What do I do about this?

A: This may depend on the content you are trying to access. Access to information on Common Platform is determined by user type. There are some categories of information which are restricted to HMCTS staff – this message is something you would see if you click on a hyperlink which connects to information you do not have the right permissions to view.

If you see this error message when you are attempting to login, please contact our helpdesk, describe the circumstances and raise this as an issue so they can investigate. Email CJSCP-ServiceDesk@hmcts.net or phone 0300 303 0688.

Q: Whenever I try to log on to Common Platform on Google Chrome using 'https://prosecuting.cjscp.org.uk' I am met with an error stating 'the specified URL cannot be found'.

A: The URL you've provided is correct, and Google Chrome is a compatible browser, so this should not be happening. Please contact our helpdesk, describe the circumstances and raise this as an issue so they can investigate.

Q: When I try to login, the system tells me I don't have an authentication device set up on my account. But it will not allow me to add a device or confirm if any device is authenticated. What do I do?

A: Your organisation administrator can view your account setup. If your settings show an option to remove your authentication device, this confirms that your account has been correctly associated with it. The administrator can then remove the device, so you can retry associating with it, if problems persist.

[Our video guide can help support you in this process](#) – but if you still experience the problems after you've worked through the guidance, please contact our helpdesk, describe the circumstances and raise this as an issue so they can investigate.

Q: If you require the authenticator app to login, why is it necessary to keep changing your password? Why does this security requirement not apply to DCS?

A: Our systems need to keep pace with the government standard of security measures and processes. Using the MS Authenticator app and regularly keeping your password updated are both measures that our security teams have stipulated, but we will keep this question under review with them.

Q: Why is it difficult to change devices? In the time it takes change phones you can be excluded from Common Platform and it seems very difficult to get accounts reinstated. Why are there no instructions about what to do with the authenticator app when a person changes mobile phones?

A: Security protocols are in place to ensure that, when you access Common Platform and your associated cases, you have the right permissions to do so.

There is now a new feature available in Common Platform which will allow you to remove your Common Platform account from the MS Authenticator app, update your mobile number, and resync your new device. This option can be accessed from your user settings.

It's likely that you will need your organisation administrator to do this for you if you are between devices. The administrator can remove the device, update your number and a new link will be sent to allow you to resync your device.

Q: Do I have to use the Microsoft Authenticator app, or can I use Apple software? Can I use laptop-based authentication instead? This is more convenient in the cells.

A: MS Authenticator is the app which you need to work with Common Platform, and it can be downloaded onto Apple devices and laptops.

Q: Once we have accessed case details, why is it necessary to enter login details and authentication every time we access Common Platform? It is time-consuming.

A: HMCTS has to protect the data we hold this means we need to put measures in place to ensure its security.

Common Platform requires an additional layer of security added to your account to prevent someone else from logging in, even if they have your password. This is called 2-factor authentication and requires an app to be downloaded to a mobile device. This extra security measure requires you to verify your identity using a randomised 6-digit code generated by the app each time you attempt to login.

Limiting the time that a session on Common Platform remains open is another security measure. It ensures that the data held in the system cannot be retrieved by an unauthorised user, even if they are able to gain access to your device.

Q: We applied for Common Platform accounts a couple of months ago. When can we expect to receive login details?

We prioritise setting up Common Platform accounts according to where legal professionals are based. Solicitors and barristers who work at courts due to go live with Common Platform soon will have their account set up expedited. If you work at a court which isn't due to go live for a while, your account will still be set up, it might just take a little longer.

Where courts are going live, we set up onboarding campaigns around 6 weeks before the go-live date, contacting defence firms and asking them to register for accounts. Everyone who has responded to that communication should be onboarded by 2 weeks before the go-live date.

If you work at a court that is already live and you don't have an account, please email CPonboarding@justice.gov.uk and your account will be set up urgently.

Q:

Associating with a case – being the firm ‘on record’

Q: Why can only one solicitors' firm gain full access to each case? What do I do if an outgoing firm has not removed their access (disassociated) and I cannot access the case?

A: You will know who the firm on record is and you will need to contact them and ask them to remove themselves. It is standard practice for the original firm to remove their own access. In exceptional circumstances, if this proves to be an issue, then HMCTS can disassociate a firm from a case.

Disputes of this kind need to be brought to court and you can raise them in the normal way. If this circumstance cannot be resolved on the day, our court staff can check-in the firm representing the defendant in court until the matter is resolved. This means that the records sent to the Legal Aid Agency are correct.

Q: Many processes are time sensitive, but solicitors may have a valid reason for not being available to disassociate from a case. This feature may cause issues for both defendants and defence, and judges may not be sympathetic to defence counsel who are unable to associate with a case. Could this be reconsidered?

A: It is standard practice for the original firm to remove their own access. In exceptional circumstances, if this proves to be an issue, then HMCTS court staff can disassociate a firm from a case. Each case will be considered on its own merits.

Q: If we return the case, how do we access the details later if this becomes necessary, for example to compile a detailed claim for wasted preparation? How long will Fee Clerks have access to download the required information to submit a claim?

A: Before disassociating from a case, you need to download any details and documents required to assist with actions such as billing and save these separately. Common Platform will retain all the information about which firm represents a defendant at any given hearing, and this information is shared with the Legal Aid Agency. It will be retained as part of the case details in the event of any subsequent questions from the Legal Aid Agency.

Q: What happens if we can't check in for a case because another firm is marked on the record? Does this mean we won't be paid?

A: If a firm has been associated to a case (defendant) and a new firm is to take over then the existing firm needs to disassociate themselves to allow the new firm to associate. If there is a transfer of legal aid, the new firm will be automatically associated when the order is processed by the Legal Aid Agency.

Q: Why does the firm on record have to grant access to a barrister or chambers? This system is unworkable for overnight instructions and was dropped from DCS for that reason. Is there a function to add another barrister in Crown court at short notice?

A: The clerk at a barristers' chambers can also grant access to an alternative advocate, subject to the solicitor having invited that chambers to the case.

Q: Why can't I grant access to case details to someone else who has registered and has an SEM address?

A: Please contact our helpdesk, to raise this as an issue so it can be investigated.

Q: Why can't we add barristers to Common Platform cases when Common Platform indicates that we can?

A: For you to grant case access to a barrister, they will need to have a Common Platform account. If this is the case but you are unable to grant access, please contact our helpdesk, describe the circumstances and raise this as an issue.

Getting and using the Unique Reference Number (URN)

Q: Why is it necessary to have the URN to find a case on Common Platform? The URN is often not included on the court list as suggested. Also, many clients' names are not spelled correctly on Common Platform, generating error messages when defence try to access files. I need to keep a record of the URN and date of birth somewhere (which doesn't seem very GDPR compliant or practical) or I have to first get the info from DCS to access Common Platform. How do I get around this?

A: For security reasons, in order for a defence practitioner to initially access a case on Common Platform they need to declare they are instructed by their client.

To do this, security advisers required that the design of Common Platform should include a 2-factor security process using the case unique reference number (URN), and the client's name and date of birth.

The URN should be available on the charge sheet. Should the defence practitioner not have a copy of the charge sheet they can obtain the required information by either consulting the public court list on the day of the hearing or by contacting the Courts and Tribunals Service Centre (CTSC). (Tel: 0330 8084407, Email: professionalcontactcrime@justice.gov.uk.)

In response to feedback, we are looking into whether it would be possible to remove the need for defence practitioners to enter all the required details to view that case on any subsequent occasion after initially gaining access.

Use of the URN supports efficiencies throughout the lifespan of a case and facilitates access to case information for a number of criminal justice partner agencies. These include the LAA, as URN use contributes towards effective billing, among other benefits.

Technical details and technical issues

Q: Why have there been so many technical problems recently with Common Platform? What are you doing to fix it?

A: We'd like to apologise for the slow and unreliable performance of Common Platform over recent weeks. We know that this has been immensely frustrating for all users – thank you for your patience during this time. HMCTS is taking the issues very seriously and colleagues in the Crime Programme have been working around the clock to resolve them.

Because of the issues being experienced and direct feedback from users, we have taken the decision to pause the national rollout to any new sites while we are addressing them, although all sites currently operating with Common Platform continue to do so.

We are working to improve

- monitoring and alerting software
- service and incident management

- Performance system testing

We have deployed a large number of changes to resolve the issues over the last few weeks and have further changes planned and in testing which are designed to consistently stabilise the system.

The timetable of future rollout is subject to approval from the Senior Presiding Judge, which is required before courts can start using Common Platform.

Q: We find that our server will not allow us to access Common Platform due to the protocol used. How do we work around this issue?

A: You will need to speak to your IT security team, who will need to add Common Platform to the sites that you can access – this is known as ‘whitelisting’. Once this is done, you should be able to access Common Platform.

Q: Is there an API for Common Platform?

A: Defence practitioners access Common Platform through a web browser and not an API.

How it works in practice

Q: I’m a Recorder and I sit on the Western Circuit. How will this affect me?

A: Currently, Crown court judicial colleagues use DCS as their source of case information and materials.

Ultimately this will change in phase 2 of the rollout, scheduled to begin in 2022. We will, of course, update you when these changes are due to take place, and provide detailed guidance on the action you will need to take.

Q: Use of Common Platform makes hearings run more slowly when legal advisers have to input court results. This causes delays and inconvenience. What is being done about this?

A: Before a court goes live with Common Platform, court staff will complete a comprehensive learning programme including online learning modules, remote training sessions and time spent on a training environment where they can practise as much as they need without making any changes to live case information.

We are working with the Heads of Legal Operations to understand the impact of Common Platform on the length of hearings, we can see from our courts which have been using Common Platform for a long time that the more a legal advisor uses the system the more familiar and proficient they become.

Q: I have recently received notification from the CPS that I should not be contacting them to email me the IDPC in Common Platform cases. How can I identify which cases are on Common Platform and which are not, and how should I be obtaining the IDPC?

A: During the Local Implementation Team meetings held for each court that goes live, the HMCTS regional Head of Crime will communicate when an individual court is going live with

Common Platform. The expectation would be that, after a court has gone live, all new overnight remand cases at that court will be held on Common Platform.

Guilty anticipated plea (GAP) and not-guilty anticipated plea (NGAP) cases will move onto Common Platform in line with Transforming Summary Justice timescales.

There will be a period of dual running where some case details will still be on the heritage Libra or Xhibit systems: you will need to work with these specific cases as you have always done prior to the introduction of Common Platform.

Q: Why do we have to check-in for hearings? Why does the LAA need to know about attendances at the magistrates' court, which places an additional administrative requirement on defence practitioners?

The Legal Aid Agency will know if there is a representation order in place, as their system is integrated with Common Platform: they will know to expect claims from providers in relation to magistrates' court cases.

In the Crown court, additional validation is undertaken around attendance. Ensuring you check-in enables LAA bill payment caseworkers to see who attended hearings when assessing legal aid bills for AGFS/LFGS schemes, Very High Cost Cases, and also informs Central Funds claim payments.

Professional check-in will also make the court and the judiciary aware of who is attending.

Q: Notifications to let us know that new case material has been uploaded do not include enough information to help us identify the cases to which they refer. We have a number of different offices and trying to identify the right cases is time-consuming and takes away from fee earning time. Why can Common Platform not work in the same way as DCS?

A: We have been working to improve notification emails, in response to user feedback, to make it easier for you to identify and access the relevant case. We have recently changed the information you receive.

There is now additional information included in the notification email, including the name(s) of the defendant(s), the name of the document and a note of which section within Case Material the document was uploaded to.

We also include a link in the email which will take you directly to the document in Common Platform.

Q: Will digital evidence be available on Common Platform or will we still have to use Egress?

A: Work is continuing to develop the document repository for case materials on Common Platform. Until this is concluded, multi-media files will continue to be accessed through Egress.

Q: At present, Preparation for Effective Trial (PET) forms are PDFs, which are not easily edited. Could they be Word documents instead?

A: We are currently reviewing the process around completion of the PET form and are planning to improve it in a future release of Common Platform. The intention is that, in future, completion of the PET form will be an online process, removing the need for a Word document or PDF form to be shared for completion.

Q: When DCS was set up, there were ‘dummy’ cases which we could access to test the system and suggest improvements. Could this be replicated? We need to be able to try the system out before court to be able to work with it efficiently.

A: We will take this suggestion away for further consideration to see what, if anything, might be possible.

Q: Why isn't there a function to see a list of cases you have previously accessed? This would allow practitioners to check on the progress of existing cases.

A: We will take this suggestion away for further consideration.

Q: Is there a function to add notes to a case?

A: Currently, there is no notes feature for defence users on Common Platform. We are reviewing the requirement to add notes and annotations at a case or document level and will consider this for inclusion in a future release.

Q: In a busy courthouse, if a colleague from the same firm needs to take over a case, how do they ‘check-in’ for it if another colleague has already checked in?

A: This will follow the same business-as-usual process used outside Common Platform in the Crown court, as only one advocate will be recorded as representing the client (unless it is a leader and junior situation).

The new advocate should sign in on Common Platform, or request help from HMCTS staff if required.

Working with courts

Q: In the coming months, where can we find a complete up-to-date list of which courts are using Common Platform?

A: You can find [a list of all the courts where Common Platform is currently in use](#) on GOV.UK. We update this list regularly as additional courts go live.

In future, we are considering whether it would be appropriate for this information to appear in court details on our [Find a court or tribunal](#) resource.

Q: Please can Common Platform cases be included in the court list? Our local court cannot produce a list in advance of Common Platform cases.

A: We are unsure about which jurisdiction is being referred to here, but in the Crown court the Common Platform lists (Warned, Firm and Daily) all integrate with the Xhibit equivalent

and are shared on publication. Please speak to your local court to ask them for a copy of the integrated list.

Magistrates' courts publish separate daily lists for cases held on Common Platform and for cases held on the heritage Libra system. Both are available from the magistrates' court.

Q: With the increased use of RUI at the police station, firms monitor the court list to identify clients who have not contacted the firm to inform them that they are in court but fully expect their solicitors to be there. Currently, for those clients, contact is made with CPS for papers in advance of the hearing. This saves time and ensures the case can be dealt with at the allocated time at court. How is this done with the introduction of Common Platform?

A: Both magistrates' and Crown courts publish lists which contain Common Platform cases (in addition to those cases which are still held on heritage systems). If you identify one of your clients in the list, you can associate with their case using Common Platform and self-serve the papers instead of contacting CPS.

To do this, you will need the client's full name, date of birth and URN. If you cannot locate the URN, please contact our service centres: email ProfessionalContactCrime@justice.gov.uk or phone 0330 808 4407. Our service centre staff will be able to provide the URN for you, provided you satisfy the checks required by data protection legislation.

Q: Why are some Crown courts issuing indictment numbers with Common Platform cases, while others do not?

A: When an indictment is lodged at court, the offences on Common Platform are to be numbered to reflect the counts on the indictment.

Q: How will allocation/plead decisions work with Common Platform, as per the criminal procedure provisions in the Judicial Review and Courts Bill?

A: This is being looked at to ensure processes are agreed and Common Platform has the functionality to meet the requirements of the Bill once it receives assent.

Q: When cases have been removed from the list and re-listed, defence practitioners can't see court dates, although court admin staff think we can. Why is this?

A: We are not clear what may be behind the circumstances you describe – it may be due to a misunderstanding around what users can see. Please raise this issue with the court through your Local Implementation Team. If it continues to be a problem, please contact the helpdesk.

Q: Will post-sentence Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) confiscation proceedings be on Common Platform?

A: This is not currently possible but is something that will be enabled in a future release.

Q: What victim details are recorded? Can this be reported on to measure compliance with the victim Code 2021?

A: Currently victim information is only captured on Common Platform as part of the offence particulars, and if it needs to be entered as part of a case result. Our future plans include introducing a requirement to store victim details for the purposes of case progression.

Getting support

Q: Why is it difficult to get immediate support when we contact the helpdesk? Why does it take so long for someone to get back in touch?

A: We are sorry this is causing you difficulties. We recently experienced an issue where a large number of defence practitioners had not accessed Common Platform, leading to deactivation of their accounts. Resolving this issue has led to some delays, which the helpdesk team are urgently working through.

If you require support around a case which is in court today and you need immediate help, please make this clear in the subject line of your email so the helpdesk can prioritise your message.

Q: Who do I contact if I need helpdesk support outside office hours? If I have to wait for office hours the following day, this will be too late for me to be ready for court.

A: For helpdesk support, we are operating the same hours as the helpdesk support for DCS.

How we use your feedback

Q: Can you host a webinar with judges, practitioners and clerks who have used the system on the panel to help and reassure?

A: Thank you for this suggestion. We will take this away to consider for our next webinar.

Q: At Derby Magistrates' Court (one of the first early adopters) there were initially many issues with the system not working well. What has been done about these?

Agile development of new software depends on gathering feedback from users and continually improving the system using that feedback. This can make the initial stages of using a system more difficult, but ultimately results in a much more effective product which genuinely meets user needs.

When the Common Platform was introduced into Derbyshire as the first early adopter, working with the new system was initially challenging. However, detailed feedback from early users allowed HMCTS to make significant improvements to the system in readiness for its introduction at other courts.

We continue to gather feedback from users as we proceed with national rollout and use this information to improve the system incrementally.

Q: What feedback have you received from the first-phase Crown courts?

A: We are continuing to gather feedback and evaluation from the early adopter Crown courts. The comments and suggestions we receive from all courts currently using Common

Platform are all fed back into further development of the system, so we can continue to improve it with each subsequent release.

Support for victims

Q: How do you ensure victims have received enough support when they are giving evidence from home? When a defendant doesn't show up, how do you know that they're not in the same home as the victim? (This is specific to domestic violence cases, of which there are many, especially in magistrates' courts.)

A: Where a witness is giving evidence from any remote location, we would expect the police witness care unit and/or the witness support organisation to provide support for the witness. Where the police raise specific requests, the court will consider each case on its own merit.

Court recovery

Q: Will the national rollout of Common Platform slow down recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in the courts?

Since the COVID-19 pandemic struck, it has been our reformed services that have helped us to keep the courts and tribunals running to the extent that we did. Common Platform remains a key element in our reform programme and the past year has highlighted that better use of technology has a central place in the delivery of justice. Beyond keeping the justice system running in crisis-mode, the more resilient systems that reform has created will continue to be key to our recovery from COVID-19.

Of course, the rollout of any new system on this scale will inevitably be subject to challenges along the way, but the benefits that a fully developed Common Platform will ultimately bring will undoubtedly prove vital to recovery in the criminal courts.

Q: What changes have been made to the way cases are handled as a result of the pandemic?

A: We rolled out our highly successful Cloud Video Platform to over 1,000 individual courtrooms across all criminal courts to enable defence advocates and other criminal justice partners to appear remotely. This meant hearings could still take place, and more than 70,000 hearings were held using this technology during the first lockdown.

This technology remains available although, as restrictions are lifted and it becomes possible for court operations to become more similar to pre-COVID running, an application to the judiciary is required if criminal justice partners want to attend court remotely.