



HM Courts &  
Tribunals Service

# Supporting media access to courts and tribunals

Protocol on sharing magistrates'  
court lists, registers and  
documents with journalists



# Protocol on sharing magistrates' court lists, registers and documents with journalists

There is a longstanding practice of magistrates' courts providing copies of the court register and court lists to journalists free of charge, as well as providing access to documents used in particular cases and hearings.

HMCTS believes that assisting the media to report what is happening in local courts is important in order to maintain and increase confidence in the criminal justice system, and to uphold a clear commitment to open justice.

In this Protocol, we will use "journalists" to mean bona fide journalists and members of the media who are entitled to enhanced court and tribunal information, over and above what is available to members of the public. Provision of this enhanced level of information and access to information is intended to support court reporting by journalists.

This Protocol has been jointly agreed by HMCTS, the News Media Association and the Society of Editors, and approved by the Lord Chancellor to operate alongside Criminal Procedure Rule 5.8. First published in April 2020, it was most recently refreshed in June 2026. The Protocol accords with all relevant legal obligations, including the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Minor operational updates may be agreed between HMCTS, the Society of Editors and the News Media Association, and the Protocol is kept under periodic review, with any amendments agreed collectively by the three parties.

Most journalists covering court and tribunal hearings will have had training in media law as part of wider professional qualifications and so should be familiar with legal issues relating to reporting proceedings.

The law sets out clearly what can and cannot be published in respect of criminal and other proceedings and it is media organisations themselves, not HMCTS, that carry the legal obligation to make sure that these are met.

## 1. HMCTS will:

- ✓ provide copies of court lists primarily through its [Courts and Tribunals Hearing service](#) and, during a transitional period, manually via email from individual courts
- ✓ provide copies of court registers manually via email from individual courts
- ✓ not charge journalists for copies of court registers or court lists
- ✓ ensure that court registers contain details of any reporting restrictions when they are first made
- ✓ ensure that magistrates' court lists, which are intended for accredited members of the media via the [Court and Tribunals Hearing service](#), contain each defendant's name, date of birth (when provided), age, alleged offence and address.
- ✓ provide a defendant's recorded address when providing details of their identity
- ✓ carry out appropriate checks to verify the media accreditation of an individual requesting this enhanced level of information. (Details on the authentication process are set out at Annex A)
- ✓ reserve the right to refuse to disclose data if there is a concern about how that information will be used (e.g. accreditation evidence not provided, sold to a third party, used to create unlawful internet lists of sex offenders etc)
- ✓ ensure that system notifications and emails contain the following disclaimer:

"This communication contains information, or links to information, intended to assist the accurate reporting of court proceedings by journalists.

You must comply with reporting restrictions and any other legal restrictions on the use of information.

HMCTS will stop sharing the data if there is concern about how it will be used.

This data is shared with you in confidence, it should only be used for your own professional journalistic purposes, and must not be shared with any third parties.

If your circumstances change and you no longer have legitimate reasons to receive court hearing lists and registers – for example, if you leave your employer – it is your responsibility to inform HMCTS of this so that your details are removed from the distribution list.

### Contacting magistrates' courts

Journalists should contact our Courts and Tribunals Service Centre for all requests for factual information related to criminal magistrates' court cases and hearings.

Telephone: **0333 0419680** (select **option 1** for criminal cases). This line is for journalists only and should not be promoted for public use.

Email: [mediaandpressenquires@justice.gov.uk](mailto:mediaandpressenquires@justice.gov.uk),

Journalists should use **MEDIA ENQUIRY** in the subject line of all correspondence.

You may be asked to provide details of your UK Press Card or relevant identification to verify your identity."

in addition:

- ✓ use the [Courts and Tribunals Hearing service](#) to conduct a regular authentication review to ensure account validation (annually)
- ✓ ask journalists on our email distribution lists to confirm accuracy of their contact details annually

## 2. Journalists will:

- ✓ only access or request court registers and lists to assist their role in reporting court proceedings and editorial coverage
- ✓ provide bona fide e-mail addresses and appropriate accreditation information
- ✓ safeguard the information that is passed to them, so far as is appropriate and reasonable
- ✓ destroy any electronic or hardcopy personal data supplied by HMCTS as soon as it is no longer required for journalistic purposes. Once personal data is provided, the recipient becomes an independent data controller for that data and is responsible for its lawful handling, including how it is accessed, stored, shared, retained and securely destroyed. Journalists should comply with relevant laws, regulatory requirements or professional standards that apply to their work and should seek their own legal advice on data protection and retention obligations.
- ✓ not pass the information contained in court lists, registers and documents to third parties unless the third party is:
  - is a journalist as defined in this Protocol; or
  - their legal representative and/or legal advisers and the documents are being shared for reasons connected with journalism
- ✓ comply with reporting restrictions and any other legal restrictions on the use of information
- ✓ inform HMCTS of any change in circumstance so that their access and contact details can be updated or removed from HMCTS systems.

## 3. Single Justice Procedure cases

Cases being heard as part of the Single Justice Procedure (SJP) are covered by this Protocol.

Journalists are entitled to access the same data in SJP cases (including lists, registers and documents) as they are entitled to in other magistrates' court criminal cases, and some additional information not available without a court order in other proceedings.

The documents that Journalists may request are:

- the prosecution statement of facts or, if there is no statement of facts, the witness statement(s): this also includes embedded exhibits (such as photographs in motoring offences)
- any defence representations in mitigation (although not the defendant's statement of means which would not be read aloud, or treated as read aloud, were the case being heard in public)

Journalists should be provided with such documents, subject always to any judicial restrictions that, exceptionally, prohibit it.

Requests for documents relating to SJP hearings documents can be made to our Courts and Tribunals Service Centre at the following email mailbox: [SJSTeamLeaders@justice.gov.uk](mailto:SJSTeamLeaders@justice.gov.uk) and should include a copy of the requestor's UK Press Card or other evidence to validate their status as detailed in Annex A

Documents should be provided within 1 working day from the receipt of a request by email.

## 4. Endnote

This guidance is intended to support and promote the provision of magistrates' court lists, registers and relevant documents to journalists. Nothing in this guidance is intended to reduce or limit the existing level of information supplied to or published by the media.

Crown Court staff are encouraged to provide the equivalent information in response to media enquiries and proactively distribute Crown Court registers to accredited members of the media via email in the same way. Crown Court lists are also available to journalists via the [Courts and Tribunals Hearings service](#).

It forms part of HMCTS' wider guidance to staff relating to media access issues. Any disputes arising from the application of this Protocol should be escalated to HMCTS at: [askhmctscommunications@justice.gov.uk](mailto:askhmctscommunications@justice.gov.uk).



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