



Ministry
of Justice

The Right Honourable
Robert Buckland QC MP
Lord Chancellor & Secretary of
State for Justice

Bob Neill MP
Chair of the JSC
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

30 June 2020

Dear Bob,

COURT & TRIBUNAL RECOVERY UPDATE

Tomorrow, I will set out progress being made to recover the operations of our courts and tribunals in response to the pandemic. Since March, the priority of the Government, working closely with the judiciary and others, has been to ensure the justice system continues to perform its vital role while keeping court and tribunal users safe in line with public health guidelines.

Having responded effectively to the immediate crisis by rapidly adapting and prioritising the most urgent cases, HM Courts & Tribunals Service (HMCTS) is now fully focused on recovering its operation to increase court and tribunal capacity to deal with both normal workloads across jurisdictions and outstanding cases. The challenges of doing so are no less great, not least because of the constraints imposed by social distancing. But doing so is essential if we are to ensure that our justice system delivers for those it is there to serve.

As part of the Prime Minister's plan for economic recovery, he announced earlier today that HMCTS will be receiving £142m of additional capital funding this year to speed up technological improvements and modernise courtrooms, building on the rapid progress made to keep the system running during the coronavirus pandemic.

Of this £142m, £105m is allocated to improving the court and tribunal estate. This investment – along with £48m already in the HMCTS budget – will see £153m invested in improvements to court and tribunal buildings over the coming year, which is the biggest single investment in maintenance of the court estate for over 20 years.

Tomorrow, HMCTS will publish a progress update on its recovery plans, a draft of which I include with this letter. The update will be made publicly available on GOV.UK and includes an overview of the work being undertaken in the short and medium terms.

Tomorrow's update outlines many of the important measures that we are putting in place to support the recovery of our courts and tribunals. But returning to pre-Covid-19 activity will require sustained and long-term focus. So, alongside, these operational measures being introduced by HMCTS, the Government continues to keep under review options that will enable more hearings to take place whilst social distancing restrictions remain in place.

We will also learn lessons from what has happened in our response to Covid-19. While some changes will be time-limited and will stop with the end of the pandemic, others may be valuable in the longer term. We will therefore listen to feedback from judges, staff, practitioners and users to improve the way we work in the short term, and gather data and other evidence to support continuous improvement.

The lessons learned will help inform the next phases of court and tribunal modernisation, building on the existing principles and plans.

Yours ever

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Buckland". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

RT HON ROBERT BUCKLAND QC MP