

Justice Committee

Work of the County Court: Government Response

Second Special Report of Session 2024–26

HC 1387

Justice Committee

The Justice Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Ministry of Justice (including the work of staff provided for the administrative work of courts and tribunals, but excluding consideration of individual cases and appointments, and excluding the work of the Scotland and Wales Offices and of the Advocate General for Scotland); and administration and expenditure of the Attorney General's Office, the Treasury Solicitor's Department, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Serious Fraud Office (but excluding individual cases and appointments and advice given within government by Law Officers) and its associated public bodies.

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Second Special Report

The Justice Committee published its Fourth Report of Session 2024–25, [Work of the County Court](#) (HC 677), on 21 July 2025. The Government Response was received on 18 September 2025 and is appended below.

Appendix 1: Government Response: Letter from the Minister of State Sarah Sackman KC MP, dated 18 September 2025

Dear Andy,

Government response to the Justice Committee’s Report: Work of the County Court

The Government welcomes the Justice Committee’s ‘Work of the County Court’ report, and I am grateful to those who contributed to this inquiry through their written or oral evidence.

I was pleased to see praise in the report for *‘the commendable efforts of court staff’* and the performance improvements at the Civil National Business Centre with average correspondence times falling. I also welcomed the recognition that the HMCTS Small Claims Mediation Service is continuing to maintain strong performance and deliver justice. I would like to put on the record my appreciation for the frontline HMCTS staff supporting the work of the County Court.

Whilst I recognise the long-term challenges facing the civil justice system and agree that renewed focus is needed on the County Court to ensure it enables access to justice and supports our economy, I would draw the Committee's attention to the improvements that are already underway, and on which I intend to build.

In recent years, the County Court has had an increasing workload, challenges around staffing, and challenges with judicial capacity particularly in areas such as London and the South East. Performance has been of concern in several areas, as the Committee's report makes clear. However, over the last year performance is turning the corner. The latest civil justice statistics, published on 4 September, show the mean time taken for small claims was 49.2 weeks (1.3 weeks faster compared to the same quarter in 2024) and for fast, intermediate and multi track claims it was 72.4 weeks (6.6 weeks faster than April to June 2024).

A combination of steps taken are driving this improvement, including our work to reduce call waiting times, and to improve performance at key locations where it had dipped, including the Civil National Business Centre and sites such as Central London County Court. Our new digital services are proving their worth in supporting swifter access to justice with reduced processing times, and more engagement with the justice system as evidenced by higher levels of defended claims for cases issued on Online Civil Money Claims and the Damages service. And we are innovating. In tandem with our work to expand the reach of our digital services we are implementing tactical improvements in electronic document management through the Civil Auto File share (CAFS) project, and the HMCTS' small claims mediation service is helping more people than ever to reach a consensual resolution of their dispute, sooner.

The Committee has made 25 recommendations. I have carefully considered the report's conclusions and recommendations and have provided the Government's response in the memorandum attached. Most of the recommendations are accepted in full and where the Government is proposing a different approach to the recommendation, I have set out the rationale for why.

Going forward, the Ministry of Justice and HM Courts & Tribunals Service will continue to work jointly with the judiciary to improve the performance of the County Court.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Sackman KC MP

Appendix 2: Government response

Introduction

The Government is grateful to the Justice Committee for its thorough report ‘Work of the County Court’. We recognise that the civil jurisdiction is where most citizens are likely to access justice. As we acknowledged in our written and oral evidence to the Committee, the County Court faces substantial challenges, and the performance needs to improve. However, we also note the work that is happening, which is seeing progress towards a more efficient, timely and digitised service and which we expect to continue.

Our vision is of a civil justice system in which people and businesses can resolve their disputes and exercise their rights quickly and efficiently at the earliest opportunity using modern, digital services which are fit for a modern economy and society, whilst reducing the cost to the taxpayer. This is a key part of enabling the contribution of effective civil justice to economic growth.

In recent years, the County Court has had an increasing workload, challenges around staffing, and with judicial capacity particularly in areas such as London and the South East. Performance has been of concern in several areas. However, over the last year civil performance has been a particular focus for investment (of both staff resource and sitting days) and the latest civil justice statistics, published on 4 September, show promising progress. This shows our reforms are working. We’re continuing to modernise the Civil Courts so they can work as efficiently as possible. Fast, Intermediate and Multi Track claims now at 72.4 weeks; a reduction of 6.6 weeks from 79.0 weeks 12 months ago. Small Claims are also beginning to show signs of improving to 49.2 weeks in Q2 2025 compared to 50.5 weeks 12 months ago.

A combination of steps we have taken are driving this improvement in performance. This includes process improvement and targeted investment in administrative teams at key locations where performance was under most workload pressure including the Civil National Business Centre and busy County Court sites such as Central London County Court and the Manchester Civil Justice Centre.

We are also investing in the civil court estate. We have major projects underway at Taunton, Barnet and Norwich, and more is to follow including new replacement court buildings in Reading and Blackpool.

We are investing in our digital infrastructure. Our new digital services (Online Civil Money Claims and the Damages service) are proving their worth in supporting swifter access to justice with reduced processing times, and more engagement with the justice system as evidenced by higher levels of defended claims for cases issued digitally.

We are going further and are in the process of building a new digital possession service for all possession claims in England and Wales. And we are innovating. In tandem with our work to expand the reach of our digital services we are implementing improvements in electronic document management through the Civil Auto File Share (CAFS) project which will be delivered by the end of the year. CAFS will end the slow and costly practice of the Civil National Business Centre producing paper files and posting them to courts with the risk of them being mislaid and where they then need to be stored. This will save time and money, is more efficient and will bring practices into the 21st century. And HMCTS' Small Claims Mediation Service is helping more people than ever to reach a consensual resolution of their dispute, sooner.

The Government is confident that the steps it has taken and continues to take to strengthen the County Court will result in better access to justice for those using our civil justice system.

Below we have set out specific responses to the Committee's conclusions and recommendations.

Response to recommendations

Delays in the County Court

Recommendation: HMCTS must collect and publish data on individual court and tribunal performances to allow for the identification of regional disparities, and support investment planning in reducing County Court delays. The data must include the timeliness of pre-trial stages, rates of settlement and enable HMCTS' performance to be measured against published key performance indicators (Paragraph 32)

Government response: Accept. The Ministry of Justice publishes civil statistics quarterly which include the timeliness for pre-trial stages ([Civil justice statistics quarterly – GOV.UK](#)). These statistics present regional

performance and can be filtered by court. We will review the data available and will consider whether improvements could be made to our data and publication processes.

Recommendation: As part of any future review, HMCTS must develop a manageable programme to reduce the delays to pre-2015 levels by the end of this Parliament (Paragraph 33)

Government response: Accept. We accept that some waiting times for those claims that require a trial are too long. We are working with the Judiciary to improve this position. However, whilst we understand the Committee's focus on the length of time for cases to reach hearings, it is important to note that the County Court receives circa 1.7m claims per year and only 3% of cases require resolution at trial; it is this small percentage which are captured in the timeliness metrics. Timeliness is driven by many factors; some administrative which we control and some which we do not as they are driven by the conduct of the parties.

In 2015, Small Claims reached trial in an average of 31.6 weeks and Fast and Multi Track trials within 54.3 weeks. As noted above, performance against these metrics is starting to improve. Most recently (Q2 2025), Small Claims that required determination at trial took an average of 49.2 weeks to reach conclusion compared to a high of 55.7 weeks in Q3 2023. Similar results are apparent across higher value claims with Fast and Multi Track cases improving to 72.4 weeks in Q2 2025 compared to a high of 85.5 weeks in Q4 2023.

A combination of factors is driving this, including increased use of mediation, most notably the requirement for defended Small Claims for a fixed amount of money to proceed through HMCTS' Small Claims Mediation Service. This is enabling more cases to reach conclusion at an earlier stage.

We are increasing resource through judicial recruitment and introducing efficiencies through increased digital working. In addition, HMCTS's new reform services are helping to improve performance and provide swifter access to justice. For example, claims issued on Reform services consistently progress three times quicker from the time the claim is issued to the generation of a Standard Directions Order (8 weeks compared to 30 weeks for Online Civil Money Claims and 13 weeks compared to 39 weeks for Damages Claims). As we continue to increase the volume of claims issued on these services, this will improve performance. We are also implementing improvements in electronic document management through the Civil Auto File share (CAFS) project. CAFS will streamline workflows by digitising paper files and so reduce manual processing time and eliminate the time taken to transfer files by post. This will deliver faster justice and reduce reliance on paper.

Recommendation: HMCTS, together with the Judiciary, must work together to collect the necessary data on listing and settlement rates to allow for data informed listing practices ensuring any over-listing is minimised (Paragraph 42)

Government response: Accept. We agree that developing data-informed listing practices can drive productivity improvements. HMCTS is currently exploring how the development of predictive analytical tools, underpinned by machine learning could support better administration of listing (noting that some over-listing is necessary, as set out below).

Recommendation: Litigants must be able to recover the legal, travel, and subsistence costs from HMCTS wasted as a result of over-listing and/or poor court administration preventing their cases from being heard (Paragraph 43)

Government response: Not accepted. Listing is a judicial function, and over-listing is necessary due to the large volumes of cases that will settle before their hearing (approx. 45%), as this ensures that judicial resourcing and sitting day utilisation are maximised. Over-listing is managed carefully. We consider that the better strategic solution to this issue is improved, data-informed listing.

HMCTS does on occasion make ex-gratia payments to individuals who have been disadvantaged due to maladministration. The number and value of these payments for HMCTS as a whole is released via the Annual Report and Accounts.

Recommendation: HMCTS, and the Ministry of Justice, must facilitate the greater use of remote hearings, working alongside the Senior Judiciary to provide national guidance outlining when virtual hearings should be used (Paragraph 44)

Government response: Accept. HMCTS is developing a Remote Participation Strategy that takes a cross-jurisdictional view of how remote hearings can be used much more strategically across the justice system. While this work responds in part to the Committee's report on the County Court, the strategy is designed to support improvements across all jurisdictions—promoting greater consistency, efficiency, and accessibility in the use of remote participation.

It will address the issues highlighted in the County Court, including delays, inefficiencies, limited access, and reliance on physical infrastructure, while also aiming to ease pressure on staff and judicial resources more broadly.

As part of this work, we are collaborating with the judiciary to establish a set of guiding principles and criteria to inform decisions about when and how remote hearings should be used. This includes identifying hearing types that may be appropriate to list as remote by default, and the key factors that should be considered in determining suitability. This approach is being developed with the support of the judiciary, ensuring alignment with judicial priorities and operational realities. In addition, the judiciary have published overarching judicial principles for remote participation which provides a common set of principles for determining whether remote participation is appropriate.

Contacting the County Court

Recommendation: The Civil National Business Centre must be integrated with local court case management systems to improve coordination and responsiveness. Allocated claims handlers and a clear point of contact must be introduced to ensure claimants can speak with someone knowledgeable and responsible for their case as it progresses through the County Court system (Paragraph 54)

Government response: Accept. An action plan is underway to improve contact rates on County Court contact services. At the heart of this transformation is the integration of Civil Auto File Share (CAFS), a solution that enables call handlers to access the electronic court file in real time and so provide informed responses instantly, reducing delays and enhancing transparency. These improvements are supported by a multiskilling programme for call handlers and the introduction of clearer contact points for customers. The picture on performance is improving markedly: average speed to answer (ASA) has dropped from over 40 minutes to 13 minutes as of July 2025 although we recognise there is more to do. Webchat and a query management tool for legal professionals is now live in several centres, offering faster resolution for routine queries, and query management for litigants in person is being rolled out nationally from September.

Recommendation: ‘Court and tribunal’ finder must be updated with up-to-date information about each county court, what type of claims they hear and all essential contact information (Paragraph 55)

Government response: Accept. A roadmap has been developed to improve the Find a Court or Tribunal (FaCT) system. Key actions include auditing and updating content for accuracy, reviewing related policies such as the Ministry of Justice’s Reasonable Adjustments Policy, and engaging with user groups to improve accessibility for all. Improvements will be supported by quality assurance measures and delivered by September 2026.

Judicial and staff capacity

Recommendation: Any review into the County Court must include an evaluation of its judicial recruitment offer. This has to consider pay and progression opportunities, an assessment of the current working conditions, and evaluate the regional recruitment initiatives (Paragraph 65)

Government response: Accept in part. The Lord Chancellor commissioned the Senior Salaries Review Body (SSRB) to undertake a Major Review of the judicial salary structure in December 2024. The Major Review is looking at the role of pay in supporting consistent recruitment across the judiciary, including the challenges affecting the salaried District Bench, as well as reviewing location-based allowances (such as London weighting) and how these might address regional recruitment shortfalls. The Lord Chancellor has asked the SSRB to deliver their report in November 2026.

A review of the two regional District Judge recruitment exercises which launched in 2024 and 2025 (80 vacancies for London and the South East and 25 vacancies for other regions) will be undertaken concurrently, evaluating the impact of this approach on applications, shortlist and appointments taken up when they conclude in Spring 2026. This will assess whether regional recruitment with greater certainty of location and targeted outreach improve recruitment outcomes.

We are considering the results of the 2024 Judicial Attitude Survey and the findings of the Ministry of Justice's social research (Dr Turenne, Cambridge University) into motivations to apply for salaried office to inform our approach to future recruitment. We continue to invest in judicial recruitment and work closely with Judicial Office and the Judicial Appointments Commission to improve outcomes.

Recommendation: A future review must include an in-depth assessment of the recruitment and retention crisis of the County Court, extending the existing discussions regarding HMCTS pay scales to include assessments of current and required workload capacities ensuring any additional resource is effectively allocated where it is needed most. This assessment needs to learn from areas of good practice such as Wales, and Manchester, and understand why these areas are more successful in retaining staff (Paragraph 75)

Government response: Accept in part. HMCTS is progressing several interconnected strands of work relevant to this recommendation. We plan to review and restate the County Court operating model, clarifying the division of responsibilities between HMCTS' national services and local courts. This includes reflecting future ways of working in operational processes and

roles and providing clarity on what public services will be delivered where and what the judiciary can expect by way of local administrative support. This will include consideration of the knowledge, skills and capabilities needed of those working in the civil jurisdiction, with the aim of creating a more efficient and consistent operating environment that enables judicial effectiveness and improves outcomes for court users. In parallel, HMCTS will revisit the resource model for the County Court, which will aim to more closely align available resources with workload demand and with ways of working following the conclusion of the Reform programme. As part of this, we are investing in our staff by expanding the mediation service, creating new skills and opportunities that support more effective dispute resolution and enhance service delivery.

As an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Justice, HMCTS has the same terms and conditions as Ministry of Justice staff. The MoJ 2025 Pay Offer provides uplifts to all pay range minima and maxima, enabling the majority of employees (98%) to receive an award equivalent to 3.75% or more of their salary; targeting the offer at Admin Assistant to Admin Officer grades to ensure a higher than headline award for staff in these grades and improving the position of the lowest paid of between 4% and 6.1%. This award continues to improve the competitiveness of the department's pay ranges with other government departments. The 2025 Pay Offer recognised the unique challenges associated with Bailiff and Bailiff Manager roles, with an allowance increase that doubled to £2,000 for Bailiffs and an increase to £1,000 for Bailiff Managers.

Any pay flexibility above the Increase in Remuneration Costs figure for future pay awards (i.e. 2026+) must demonstrate productivity gains and efficiencies in return for a higher pay award and is subject to agreement with HMT and Cabinet Office. A case to increase base pay further is currently being considered for the Ministry of Justice non-SCS pay remit cohort, of which HMCTS is the largest stakeholder. The focus for any business case on pay would be on improving pay and aligning more closely with other large operational government departments.

Access to justice

Recommendation: HMCTS must increase the collection and publication of data on litigants in-person. This needs to include the type of claim, timeliness of issue to trial or settlement, and court location (Paragraph 86)

Government response: Accept. The Ministry of Justice and HMCTS already publish some information on the representation status of claimants through the following publications, namely: [Civil justice statistics quarterly – GOV.UK](#), [HMCTS management information – reformed services – GOV.UK](#) and [Assessing Access to Justice in HMCTS Services – GOV.UK](#)

We will review existing data collected in the courts in line with the recommendation, to consider whether further, more granular data can be made available, ensuring we balance accuracy and quality against the needs of the committee and wider users.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Justice and Civil Justice Council must publish guidance for litigants-in-person. It needs to explain the claims process, their responsibilities, and the implications of failing to comply with deadlines. This must be written in clear, accessible language and be available in accessible formats (Paragraph 87)

Government response: Accept. The Online Procedure Rules Committee (OPRC) is taking a new approach to the development of procedure rules to make processes clearer and simpler for lay users and litigants-in-person. The rules underpinning the new digital possession service are being drafted by the OPRC and will offer litigants in person guided online journeys to complete the steps in possession proceedings, as well as paper equivalents for digitally excluded users. In the long term the goal of the judiciary is to move more digital services into the remit of the OPRC and simplify the rules.

The Ministry of Justice also provides over £6 million of grant funding to improve access to legal support and advice, including for litigants in person. This includes support to help people navigate the process effectively where court proceedings are needed, as well as the provision of online support across a range of civil, family and tribunal jurisdictions.

Finally, there is judicial guidance for litigants-in person available [Advice for Litigants in Person – Courts and Tribunals Judiciary](#). We will work the judiciary on further guidance and consider any role for AI in supporting this programme of work, which will commence in October.

Condition of the court estate

Recommendation: We recommend that the Ministry of Justice and HMCTS publish a detailed breakdown of how the £220 million in capital funding was spent between March 2023 and March 2025. The breakdown should include further information as to the type of maintenance and repairs completed, and at which courts they were completed, to aid transparency in Government spending. This detailed breakdown must be published by the end of March 2026 (Paragraph 101)

Government response: Accept. We will provide the requested breakdown of spending, via a letter to the Committee, before the end March 2026.

It is important that court buildings are safe, secure and meet statutory requirements. We announced a boost in court capital maintenance and project funding from £120 million last year to £148.5m for 2025/26.

Recommendation: HMCTS must collect and publish regular data on the condition of the court estate. This is imperative to informing preventative repairs (Paragraph 102)

Government response: Accept in part. HMCTS utilises a range of information on the condition of the estate, and this informs a prioritised pipeline of future works across the estate which is kept under regular review. However, HMCTS will review the data it collects, including data collected by its Facilities Management provider Equans, and will consider if improvements can be made to inform future works and repairs. The review will also consider the publication of consistent site condition data, and how this could be achieved in a cost effective and proportionate way. We will provide the outcome of this review, via letter to the Committee, before the end of March 2026.

Recommendation: All works to increase accessibility, in all of its aspects, of the court estate must be prioritised and delivered at pace. It is not satisfactory for lift repairs to take months, or for disabled users to be taken through back entrances in order to access the County Court. Any review must cover accessibility for both users and staff. There should be measurable targets, a clear timeline and a fully costed budget for such improvements to be made (Paragraph 111)

Government response: Accept in part. While HMCTS acknowledges that accessibility in the County Court remains a challenge, we are taking a comprehensive, organisation-wide approach to address it. An accessibility strategy is currently being developed, covering all aspects of the courts and tribunals services—including estates, property, digital systems, and reasonable adjustments. As a first step, we will prioritise courts that are currently inaccessible, supported by a detailed action plan to guide enhancements wherever feasible. We are also investing over £1 million in 2025/26 in lift replacement projects across the County Court estate, including at Brighton County Court, Milton Keynes County and Family Court, and Hastings County and Family Court.

Recommendation: HMCTS must introduce a standardised process by which Court and judicial listing staff proactively engage with court users on any access requirements for litigants, witnesses or legal practitioners prior to listing cases (Paragraph 112)

Government response: Accept. There is already a system in place which meets this objective. In short, court users are invited to notify HMCTS where they are requesting a Reasonable Adjustment. The process is set out at – [Equality and diversity – HM Courts & Tribunals Service – GOV.UK](#)

Digitisation

Recommendation: All future digital reforms must be co-designed with users and stakeholders and should not be rolled out until they have proven reliable through extensive piloting and testing (Paragraph 128)

Government response: Accept. HMCTS’s approach to designing digital services involves extensive user research and co-designing with users (judiciary, court staff, legal representatives and Litigants in Person). We have continued to adjust and improve our piloting and testing approach, having learnt lessons from the Reform programme. We can confirm that this will continue to be our approach for any future digital reforms in the County Court in line with the Government Service Standard ([Service Standard – Service Manual – GOV.UK](#)).

Recommendation: The Ministry of Justice must, as a matter of urgency, review all descoped work and prioritise its digitisation. Without this, we are left with an incomplete and inefficient system at significant public expense (Paragraph 129)

Government response: Accept. HMCTS has reviewed the civil work that was descoped from the Reform Programme. The services that have been delivered via Reform (Online Money Claims and Damages Service) are demonstrating significant benefits for the user including much swifter access to justice with timeliness improved for all stages of a case, and these services are also helping more users settle their cases; however, we recognise that further digitalisation is required to deliver our full vision of civil justice.

The Civil Auto File Share (CAFS) is a solution to modernise civil case file handling. CAFS replaces manual, paper-heavy workflows with a digital system that automates email intake, tags and stores documents centrally, and enables courts to access, manage and store files via SharePoint. It allows contact centre staff to view real-time updates from the court file, providing accurate, timely information to users. By streamlining each stage of the case journey, CAFS will save approximately a month in overall claim timeliness. This not only improves transparency and responsiveness but also reduces duplication, delays, and the need for re-submissions, delivering a more efficient and user-centred service across the Civil National Business Centre and the County Courts.

Recommendation: A single case management system must be introduced to provide real time status updates for all cases, integrating both Reform and legacy systems (Paragraph 130)

Government response: Accept. HMCTS recognises the importance and value of providing real time status updates for users. Real time status updates are available on our new digital services. They will also be introduced as part of possession digitalisation.

Recommendation: All claims must be issued a single reference number regardless of the “off-ramps and on-ramps” between paper and digital systems (Paragraph 137)

Government response: Accept in part. HMCTS systems use different case number references. HMCTS is updating the Reform systems so that users are provided with the case reference numbers applicable for each case regardless of off-ramps and onramps. This will provide staff and end users a clearer method of associating the correct documents with a case.

Recommendation: Use of postal services for sending paper files must be replaced with email or other electronic methods. Postal options should be an opt-in service as already implemented across multiple Government agencies to effectively mitigate against digital exclusion (Paragraph 138)

Government response: Accept. Under the Civil Auto File Share project (CAFS), HMCTS is introducing a new system (via Microsoft PowerApps) to increase the use of electronic document management processes to ensure effective working within the Civil National Business Centre (CNBC) and to ensure case files are transferred electronically between the CNBC and local County Courts. The aim is to eliminate the reliance on physical post, streamline workflows, and enhance transparency and efficiency for users and staff alike. To mitigate digital exclusion and ensure all users benefit, for those unable to submit claims digitally, documents are scanned in and added to the electronic case file. Our ambition to make the Civil National Business Centre (CNBC) fully paperless is progressing. By digitising paper files and enabling secure file sharing within HMCTS, we’re reducing the cost and unreliability of posting, while improving efficiency across the board.

The rollout of CAFS began at the end of August and is already helping to streamline how we transfer case files—saving time, money, and effort.

Recommendation: HMCTS must enhance existing electronic systems to support the upload of larger documents for all types of claims heard in then County Court (Paragraph 139)

Government response: Accept. The new digital systems, developed by HMCTS, are already of sufficient size to cater for most documents that need to be uploaded during proceedings. Limits are currently 1GB for documents and 500MB for multimedia. These are in place to protect systems from malicious attack. A 1GB limit allows for a standard text document of around 26,000 pages, and around 7,000 pages if images are included. These standards will be the baseline for future digital development. A review will be completed on the current limit relating to email submissions which is set at a lower level, and we recognise is particularly restrictive for users.

Other opportunities for reform

Recommendation: As part of any future review into the County Court, an evaluation of mandatory mediation must be undertaken to understand whether it can be effectively deployed in other claim types (Paragraph 147)

Government response: Accept. Practice Direction 51ZE of the Civil Procedure Rules establishes a pilot which mandates that the majority of small monetary claims under the value to £10,000 be automatically referred to HMCTS' Small Claims Mediation Service. The pilot runs until May 2026. There will be an evaluation and a review of the Practice Direction by the Ministry of Justice and the Civil Procedure Rule Committee. The Ministry of Justice, working with HMCTS, will use the lessons from the review to inform decisions on extension of the pilot, and any further expansion of mandatory mediation to other claim types.

Recommendation: Following the completion of the £1 billion Reform Programme, HMCTS must prioritise the roll out of existing systems from other jurisdictions, such as CE Filing, which are well-regarded by legal professionals. These should not be replaced for the sake of change alone; instead, efforts must focus on integration and interoperability, ensuring successful tools are preserved and enhanced (Paragraph 155)

Government response: Accept. A project to continue providing a digital case management and e-Filing solution in the High Court is under way, with a key requirement being better operability with existing Civil, Family and Tribunals platform. HMCTS is committed to providing the highest quality services for all jurisdictions that resources allow.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Justice must launch a consultation, into how it plans to effectively use AI to improve the performance and operations of the County Court and report its conclusions by the end of 2026 (Paragraph 156)

Government response: Accept in part. The AI Action Plan for Justice, published in July 2025, sets out the Ministry of Justice’s approach to responsible and proportionate AI adoption across courts, tribunals, prisons, probation and supporting services. It has been developed in consultation with the judiciary and legal services regulators and will be implemented in collaboration with our wider justice sector partners such as the Home Office, the Crown Prosecution Service and our trade unions. It complements wider government efforts to safely modernise public services and builds on the UK’s global strengths in legal services, data science, and AI innovation. As such, the Ministry of Justice has already conducted consultation into the use of AI to improve the performance and operations of the justice system.

HMCTS sees the introduction of AI as a key enabler of better service provision for court users and is committed to delivering AI innovation. This must be done safely, ethically and responsibly in partnership with the judiciary. HMCTS is supporting the implementation of the AI Action Plan for Justice, and has already delivered pilots with promising results that indicate how AI could be used to improve performance and operations of the County Court including: Piloting AI-powered transcription and summarisation, to help judges process cases more efficiently while maintaining accuracy and oversight; exploring how AI can support anonymisation of judgments and documents, helping to protect privacy while maintaining transparency; and testing AI-enabled search and assistant capabilities within case management systems to help legal professionals find information more effectively.

We will continue to share updates on our progress and welcome engagement from across the justice community as we work together to harness the potential of AI while safeguarding the principles of justice that underpin our legal system.

Conclusions on the Work of the County Court

Recommendation: We recommend an urgent and comprehensive, root-and-branch review of the County Court. This review must be launched by Spring 2026 and encompass recruitment and retention challenges within both the Judiciary and HMCTS, establish a realistic and sustainable plan for future digitisation and capital investment, and explore the future role of artificial intelligence. The overarching goal must be to reduce the systemic delays and inefficiencies entrenched across the County Court. It is not tenable to continue without fundamental reform (Paragraph 159)

Government response: Not accepted. The work of the Justice Committee through its Work of the County Court Inquiry has been meticulous and thorough. The Inquiry itself has provided a solid foundation and highlighted the areas of the County Court's operation that need urgent attention. Rather than focusing on a root and branch review of the County Court, the Government is keen to focus on taking tangible and practical steps to improve the operation of the County Court – which will benefit everyday users – without further delay. We are already seeing these measures bear fruit with improvements to the timeliness of claims that got to trial, improving call waiting times, growth in small claims mediation and further improvements to case management and file transfer systems.