



HOUSE OF LORDS

Select Committee on the Constitution

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Penelope Gibbs
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14 April 2021

Dear Penelope Gibbs,

Covid-19 and the Courts – video remand hearings

I write on behalf of the Constitution Committee in response to your letter dated 31 March 2021 regarding the Committee's report on the impact of Covid-19 on courts and tribunals in England and Wales.

Our report makes clear that the shift to audio and remand hearings during the pandemic has stretched court resources, created new barriers to communication between lawyers and their clients, and has risked excluding court users. We have recommended that operational changes introduced during the pandemic should not be regarded as irreversible where they have risked undermining access to justice, open justice or consistency in the application of the law.

The Committee nonetheless consider remote hearings necessary in appropriate cases to maintain the operation of the justice system during the pandemic, and to tackle the unacceptably high backlog of cases in the short to medium term. HMCTS have stated that virtual remand hearings reduce the delay between defendants being detained and appearing in court, allow solicitors to represent multiple defendants and appear before different courts more easily, and free up traditional court rooms. We have concluded that video remand hearings have the potential to reduce the already significant pressures on courts and prisons, and welcome plans to introduce legislation that will enable their greater use.

We expect the Government to respond to the recommendations set out in our report shortly. This will be uploaded on to the Committee's website when it is available.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your colleagues at Transform Justice for the written evidence provided to the Committee in support of this inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

Baroness Taylor of Bolton
Chair of the Constitution Committee