

**Message from Kevin Sadler, Acting Chief Executive of HMCTS, to Amanda Pinto QC,
Chair of the Bar
23 September 2020**

You will no doubt have heard the Prime Minister's [statement to the House of Commons](#) and seen media coverage over the past few days about the course that the COVID-19 pandemic has taken over recent weeks, and the seriousness with which we must all continue to act in order to limit its spread. In light of this, I wanted to write to you on the latest situation. A similar message has also gone out to our staff, as well as to the judiciary.

The government's Chief Scientific Officer and Chief Medical Officer made this clear in their [press conference on Monday](#) with the Prime Minister going on to describe the country as being at a 'perilous tipping point' in his statement. It's important to note that there are things we can all do to help change the course of the pandemic.

As things stand, there have not been any additional measures announced that directly affect our ways of working in courts and tribunals but, for all of us, an emphasis on observing the measures that are already in place. These are summarised in the [Government's updated guidance](#), which includes links to guidance for Wales and Scotland, as well as the '[Hand. Space. Face](#)' public information campaign. It is incumbent on every one of us to follow this guidance and play our part in protecting each other - our colleagues, professional and public court users, friends, families and communities.

One area of focus for the Government is to break the chain of transmission by limiting social contact with others. The Prime Minister detailed six actions being taken to support this. This includes advice for office workers who can work at home to do so and where this is not possible – for example, those providing key public services such as us – to continue to attend their place of work.

The PM also confirmed that following advice from senior clinicians, the government guidance continues to be that individuals do not need to shield, unless in local lockdown areas, where they should follow the guidance issued locally. I can assure you that we take everyone's health, safety and wellbeing very seriously and have put in place rigorous measures to make our workplaces as safe as possible.

As an essential service - providing access to justice for defendants, witnesses, victims and claimants - our work continues. Anyone working in the courts and tribunals service has keyworker status and is deemed essential to running the justice system. The measures announced today work to reduce the risk for those, like many of us, who need to continue to go to the workplace to deliver essential services. It remains up to the judge in each case to decide whether it is fair and suitable for a particular hearing to be dealt with remotely and, if not, what the alternative arrangements might be.

We will, therefore, continue to operate as we have been doing throughout these challenging times, safely increasing capacity in line with our plans, which is a position that is fully supported by the judiciary. We are now more prepared than ever to do so. Our measures have been tried and tested through local lockdowns, in Leicester, Greater Manchester and elsewhere, as we have successfully restored operational capacity within a safe environment.

You will already be familiar with the arrangements we have put in place around our buildings, which are all COVID-secure, to keep people safe. Additional cleaning, social

distancing, one-way systems, use of face coverings, plexiglass screens, new office and courtroom layouts, use of technology, limiting the number of people on site, rotational working and staggered hours are all important factors in keeping our workplaces safe and keeping the justice system running. We continue to monitor and review these arrangements and ask you to support us in ensuring that they don't become any less stringently observed as they become increasingly familiar.

Your support and work to keep the justice system going since March has been invaluable. We will do everything that we can to give you the latest information and the assurance you need to continue your work with confidence.