

Public Consultation: Future of Limavady Courthouse Travel Impact Assessment

The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) is proposing the permanent closure of Limavady Courthouse and reallocation of Limavady Adult Magistrates Court business to an alternative courthouse in the NICTS estate.

The listing of court business is a judicial function, and the guiding principles for the distribution and transfer of business between Courthouses are included in Practice Direction 5/16¹, published by the Lord Chief Justice in 2016.

Limavady Court jurisdiction sits within the North Eastern Administrative Court Division (ACD), which also includes Laganside (Belfast), Antrim, Ballymena and Coleraine. The catchment area for Limavady Courthouse covers 10 geographical wards within Causeway Coast and Glens District Council: Althahullion, Ballykelly, Coolessan, Drumsurn, Dungiven, Feeny, Greysteel, Greystone, Magilligan and Roeside. The population of the area according to the 2021 census is 34,049.

Under the Practice Direction, court users from the Limavady area attend Antrim Courthouse for Crown business, and Coleraine Courthouse for County Court, Domestic Proceedings, Family Proceedings Court, Family Care Centre and Youth Court.

Limavady Courthouse is currently temporarily closed. It was last used for court business in March 2020, when it operated as a Hearing Centre for Adult Magistrates Court once a week. As pandemic-related public health measures could not be accommodated in Limavady Courthouse, Limavady business was transferred to Ballymena Courthouse, then to Coleraine Courthouse, where it continues to be heard once a week.

As case listing is a judicial matter, this consultation does not propose any change to the current operational arrangement of the separate listing of Limavady Adult Magistrates court business in Coleraine Courthouse.

To assess the travel impact of this proposal, NICTS considered driven and public transport journeys to both Limavady Courthouse and Coleraine Courthouse.

¹ <https://www.judiciaryni.uk/judicial-decisions/lcj-direction-516-direction-governing-distribution-and-transfer-court-business>

Driven journeys (from the Limavady area)

NICTS used Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland (OSNI) data to estimate the drive time and travel distance for these journeys. Drive time measures the route in minutes based on speed limits, road hierarchy and turn delays when travelling via car.² Travel distance measures the route in miles without considering the actual drive time. For example, travelling more miles might make a journey quicker by avoiding certain traffic lights, junctions etc.

The following table shows the drive time and travel distance from the geographical centre of each of the 10 wards in the Limavady Courthouse Catchment area, and the weighted average for the overall Limavady Courthouse Catchment area:

Ward	Population	Drive time			Travel distance		
		Minutes to Limavady Courthouse	Minutes to Coleraine Courthouse	Increase in minutes	Miles to Limavady Courthouse	Miles to Coleraine Courthouse	Increase in miles
Altahullion	3,152	8.54	24.31	15.77	6.00	18.71	12.71
Ballykelly	3,102	5.35	23.82	18.47	3.82	18.28	14.46
Coolessan	2,892	2.05	19.97	17.92	0.94	14.68	13.74
Drumsum	3,704	6.06	19.33	13.27	3.32	14.58	11.26
Dungiven	3,307	13.72	24.08	10.36	9.72	19.29	9.57
Feeny	3,618	15.17	27.92	12.75	11.39	22.29	10.9
Greysteel	4,639	8.86	27.14	18.28	6.16	20.59	14.43
Greystone	3,489	3.39	18.59	15.2	1.57	14.12	12.55
Magilligan	3,485	6.91	18.06	11.15	5.22	13.97	8.75
Roeside	2,661	1.49	18.68	17.19	0.75	14.41	13.66
Weighted Average³ for Limavady area		7.43	22.74	15.13	5.09	17.55	12.46

Based on this data, the increase in average drive time ranges from 10.36 minutes to 18.47 minutes. The greatest increase in average drive time is for those travelling from the

² The OSNI Fusion Road Network map was used to provide estimated drive times which are approximated as 'Speed Limit Attribution' and are derived from OSNI Transport Network. Local variation can exist within the terms of the Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill 2015 and due to local factors.

³ The Weighted Average takes into account the relative differences in the populations within each ward.

Ballykelly ward, requiring an additional 18.47 minutes of drive time and bringing their total average drive time to 23.82 minutes. Across the Limavady area, the weighted average, taking into account population distribution across the wards, shows an increase of 15.13 minutes in drive time, extending the journey from 7.43 minutes to 22.74 minutes.

After considering the travel impact from the geographical centre of each ward, NICTS considered the greatest impact by identifying the postcode within each ward which is furthest from Coleraine Courthouse.

The following table shows the drive time and travel distance from the postcode within each ward which has the longest travel time in minutes from Coleraine Courthouse to both Limavady Courthouse and Coleraine Courthouse.

		Drive time			Travel distance		
Ward	Population	Minutes to Limavady Courthouse	Minutes to Coleraine Courthouse	Increase in minutes	Miles to Limavady Courthouse	Miles to Coleraine Courthouse	Increase in miles
Altahullion	3,152	11.02	29.68	18.66	8.51	23.01	14.5
Ballykelly	3,102	9.15	27.82	18.67	7.71	22.21	14.5
Coolessan	2,892	3.28	21.16	17.88	1.31	15.1	13.79
Drumsum	3,704	7.52	22.53	15.01	4.86	17.19	12.33
Dungiven	3,307	19.86	30.48	10.62	15.19	25	9.81
Feeny	3,618	14.71	32.12	17.41	12.47	25.39	12.92
Greysteel	4,639	13.12	31.44	18.32	9.09	24.09	15
Greystone	3,489	3.87	20.07	16.2	1.77	14.72	12.95
Magilligan	3,485	6.14	24.39	18.25	4.62	18.91	14.29
Roeside	2,661	2.16	20.74	18.58	0.83	15.22	14.39

Based on this data, the most significant increase in drive time is for those travelling from a postcode within the Ballykelly ward, requiring an additional 18.67 minute drive time and bringing their total drive time to 27.82 minutes. The greatest drive time for those travelling to Coleraine Courthouse is from a postcode in the Feeny area, requiring a total drive time of 32.12 minutes, which is 17.14 minutes longer than their 14.17 minute drive time to Limavady Courthouse.

The following tables categorise the ward population according to the drive time associated with the analysis above. As such, this is weighted toward the longest journey from each ward and in reality, most of the population in each ward will experience a shorter journey

Journey to Limavady Courthouse		Drive time categories		
		<15 minutes	15-30 minutes	30-45 minutes
Population per drive time category	Population	30,742	3,307	0
	% of total	90%	10%	0%

Journey to Coleraine Courthouse		Drive time categories		
		<15 minutes	15-30 minutes	30-45 minutes
Population per drive time category	Population	0	22,485	11,564
	% of total	0%	66%	34%

Drive time (Across NI)

NICTS considered these increases in the context of travel time and distance to Magistrates Court across all geographical wards in Northern Ireland according to the distribution of business as set out in the Practice Direction 5/16⁴.

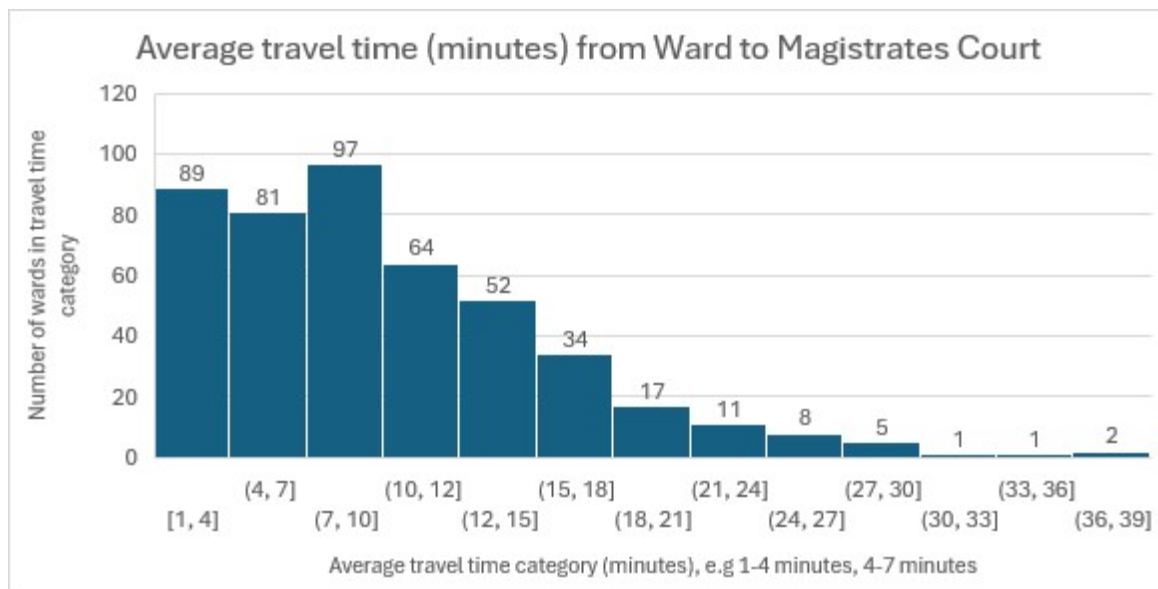
Across Northern Ireland, the weighted average of travel to Magistrates Court, taking into account population distribution across all wards, shows a 14.03 minute drive time and 10.42 mile travel distance. For those in the Limavady area, the average drive time of 7.43 minutes to Limavady Courthouse is therefore significantly below the NI average. The increased travel time to Coleraine Courthouse of 22.74 minutes is 8.71 minutes higher than the NI average.

In Northern Ireland, some court users travel for up to 38.57 minutes to access Magistrates Court. The 4 longest drive times/distances between the centre of a geographical ward and its Magistrates Court are:

- Lurigethan to Coleraine Courthouse – 38.57 minutes / 30.67 miles
- Islandmagee to Ballymena Courthouse – 36.31 minutes / 30.13 miles
- Whitehead South to Ballymena Courthouse – 33.89 minutes / 28.53 miles
- Annalong to Newry Courthouse – 31.47 minutes / 24.19 miles

⁴ Allocation of business outside of the Practice Direction guidance has not been considered in this analysis, such as temporary closures or operational/judicial reallocation decisions.

The following chart illustrates that most wards in NI have an average travel time of 7-10 minutes to access Magistrates Courts. In terms of the increased travel time from Limavady to Coleraine Courthouse of 22.74 minutes, there are currently 11 other wards which share that category (21-24 minutes) and 17 other wards who fall within a longer travel time category.



Public transport journeys

NICTS considered public transport journeys from each of the 10 wards in the Limavady Courthouse Catchment area to both Limavady Courthouse and Coleraine Courthouse. For consistency with the drive time analysis, the starting point assigned to each public transport journey is the postcode associated with the greatest travel distance, or the longest drive time, from Coleraine Courthouse.

The following table shows the public transport journey from the assigned starting point of each journey to both Limavady Courthouse and Coleraine Courthouse, assessed using Google Maps and aiming to arrive by 10am on a Wednesday morning.

Ward and Start Point	Ward Population	Destination Courthouse	Duration (Hrs: min)	Start time	End time	Mode	Difference
Altahullion	3,152	Limavady	2hr53m	6.51am	9.44am	2 buses, 1hr 5min walk	3 mins longer
		Coleraine	2hr56m	6.51am	9.47am	2 buses, 1hr	

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						08min walk	
Ballykelly	3,102	Limavady	2hr17	7.27am	9.44am	2 buses, 39min walk	3 mins longer
		Coleraine	2hr20	7.57am	9.47am	2 buses, 1 train, 42min walk	
Coolessan	2,892	Limavady	24m	8.25am	8.49am	1 bus, 23min walk	1hr 17mins longer
		Coleraine	1hr41m	7.36am	9.17am	2 buses, 35min walk	
Drumsumn	3,704	Limavady	34m	7.52am	8.26am	1 bus, 18min walk	1hr 54mins longer
		Coleraine	2hr28m	7.52am	10.20am*	2 buses, 34min walk	
Dungiven	3,307	Limavady	2hr31m	7.28am	9.59am	2 buses, 41min walk	42 mins shorter
		Coleraine	1hr49m	7.28am	9.17am	2 buses, 42min walk	
Feeny	3,618	Limavady	2hr21m	7.23am	9.44am	2 buses, 38min walk	3 mins longer
		Coleraine	2hr24	7.23am	9.47am	2 buses, 1 train, 41min walk	
Greysteel	4,639	Limavady	1hr26m	9.13am	9.44am	1 bus, 1hr 9min walk	55 mins longer
		Coleraine	2hr21m	7.51am	9.17am	2 buses, 1hr 1min walk	
Greystone	3,489	Limavady	23m	8.26am	8.49am	1 bus, 21 min walk	1hr 48mins longer
		Coleraine	2hr11m	7.06am	9.17am	2 buses, 30min walk	
Magilligan	3,485	Limavady	25m	7.57am	8.22am	12min walk	1hr 48 mins longer
		Coleraine	2hr23m	7.57am	10.20am*	2 buses, 27min walk	
Roeside	2,661	Limavady	7m	9.53am	10.00am	7min walk	50 mins longer
		Coleraine	57m	8.02am	8.59am	1 bus, 27min walk	

*Arrival by 10am not possible using solely public transport

Based on this data, the average journey across the Limavady area would increase by 49 minutes, from 1 hour 20 minutes to Limavady Courthouse to 2 hours 9 minutes to Coleraine Courthouse. 8 of the 10 sample journeys assessed would be more complex, involving additional transfers within the overall journey.

The most significant increase in public transport journey time is for those travelling from a postcode within the Drumsumn ward, requiring an additional 1 hour 54 minutes journey time and bringing their total journey time to 2 hours 28 minutes. The greatest journey time for those travelling to Coleraine Courthouse is from a postcode in the Altahullion area, requiring a total journey time of 2 hours 56 minutes, which is 3 minutes longer than their 2 hours 53 minute journey time to Limavady Courthouse.

The following tables categorise the ward population according to the public transport journey time associated with the analysis above. As such, this is weighted toward the longest journey from each ward and in reality most of the population in each ward will experience a shorter journey.

Journey to Limavady Courthouse		Public transport journey time categories		
		<1hour	1-2 hours	2-3 hours
Population per journey time category	Population	16,231	4,639	13,179
	% of total	48%	14%	39%

Journey to Coleraine Courthouse		Public transport journey time categories		
		<1hour	1-2 hours	2-3 hours
Population per journey time category	Population	2,661	6,199	25,189
	% of total	8%	18%	74%

These considerations have been based on journeys which are completed entirely on public transport (with associated walking time). In many cases, where transport could be arranged from the journey starting point to the nearest public transport station, such as Limavady bus station, the journey could be completed within a shorter time.

Conclusion

NICTS considers that that increased travel associated with the reallocation of Limavady Adult Magistrates Court business to Coleraine Courthouse is reasonable and justified by the legitimate aim of implementing the NICTS Estate Strategy and providing Limavady court users with access to higher quality, safer, more modern and more accessible courthouse facilities.

NICTS further considers that the impact of increased travel is mitigated by several factors:

- The number of court users experiencing increased travel will be low
- Attendance at a courthouse is an infrequent occurrence for most people
- Attendance at Coleraine Courthouse will be more convenient for some court users

- Policy and technological changes are expected to result in a reducing requirement for courthouse attendance in future
- The 2021 NI Census showed that 84% of households within the Limavady District Electoral area have access to at least one car or van. NICTS 2025 (provisional data) shows that 42% of Limavady Adult magistrates Court business related to motoring offences. There is a reasonable assumption that the majority of court users are likely to travel by car or van, with a lesser impact than those travelling by public transport
- The analysis of public transport journeys was based on solely using public transport (and walking where necessary). Some court attendees will use a mixed mode of travel, and this will reduce the travel time overall
- The Disability Action Transport Scheme⁵ (DATS), funded through grant assistance provided by the Department for Infrastructure, is a local transport service for disabled people, older individuals and those who find it difficult to use public transport. While DATS cannot facilitate travel from Limavady to Coleraine, they can facilitate easier access to public transport links in Limavady
- Older people over 60 are eligible for free travel on public transport across NI through the Translink Smartpass
- The increased travel does not exceed travel requirements for other court users across NI
- The increased travel aligns with travel requirements for users in the Limavady area who attend court for other tiers of court business
- Remote attendance at court can be facilitated (Subject to judicial approval)
- Video evidence at court can be facilitated (Subject to judicial approval)
- Later start times can be facilitated by exception (Subject to judicial approval)
- When the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) calls victims and witnesses of crime to court to give evidence in the prosecution of cases, the PPS will pay travel and subsistence expenses and compensation for loss of earnings in attending, subject to daily capped rates. Claims can also be made in relation to childcare costs.⁶

⁵ <https://www.disabilityaction.org/Pages/Category/transport>

⁶ <https://www.ppsni.gov.uk/witness-expenses>