Future of Magherafelt Courthouse

Travel Assessment

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 5/16[1], published by the Lord Chief Justice in 2016.

Magherafelt Courthouse sits within the Western Administrative Court Division (ACD), which also includes Dungannon, Enniskillen, Londonderry, Omagh and Strabane Courthouses. The catchment area for Magherafelt Courthouse falls within Mid-Ulster Council District and covers 3 district electoral areas (Carntogher, Moyola, Magherafelt) comprised of 15 geographical wards (Lower Glenshane, Maghera, Swatragh, Tamlaght O'Crilly, Valley, Ballymaguigan, Bellaghy, Castledawson, Draperstown, Tobermore, Coolshinny, Town Parks East, Glebe, Lissan and The Loup). The population of the area according to the 2021 census is 55,019. 12 of these wards are classified as rural (population 43,611), 2 wards are urban (population 7,383) and 1 mixed urban/rural (population 4,025).

Under this Practice Direction, court users from the Magherafelt area attend Londonderry Courthouse or Dungannon Courthouse for Crown business, County Court, Family Proceedings Court and Family Care Centre; and Magherafelt Courthouse for Magistrates Court (including Domestic Proceedings Court), Small Claims and Youth Court.

Magherafelt Courthouse is currently temporarily closed. It was last used for court business in March 2020, when it operated as a Hearing Centre around 5 days a month. As pandemic-related public health measures could not be accommodated in Magherafelt Courthouse, business heard at Magherafelt Courthouse was temporarily transferred to Londonderry Courthouse, where it continues to be heard once a week.

Driven journeys

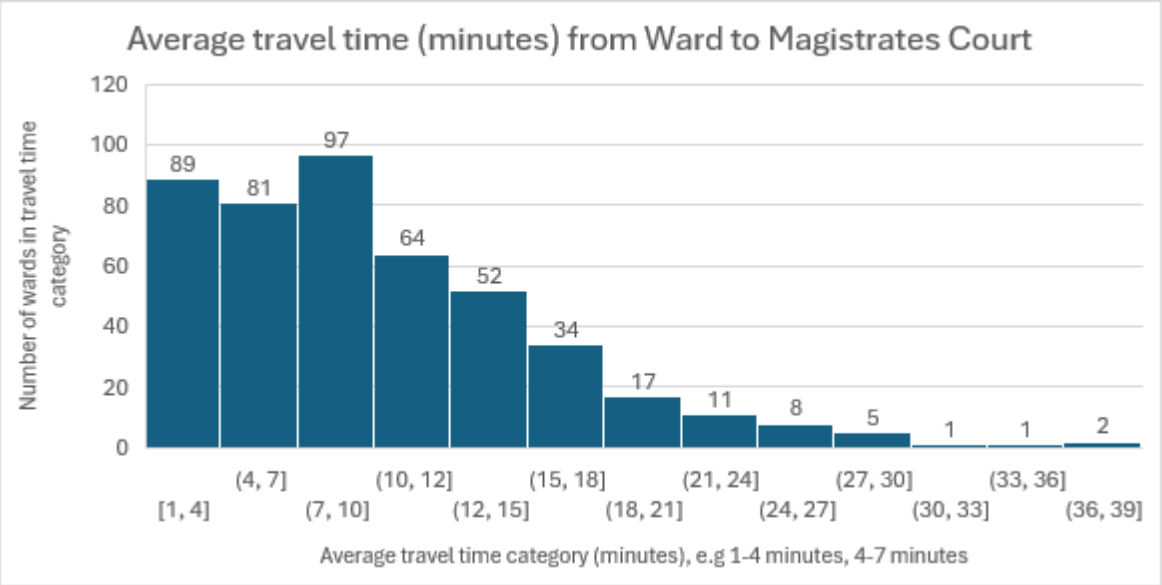
NICTS used Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland (OSNI) data to estimate the drive time and travel distance for driven journeys from the Magherafelt catchment area to court (a one-way journey). Drive time measures the route in minutes based on speed limits, road

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

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.

- **Average drive time to Magistrates Court**

At regional level, according to the designations set out in Practice Direction 5/16[3], the weighted average[4] journey to attend Magistrates Court in Northern Ireland is a 9.27 minute drive time and a 6.47 mile journey. Most wards have an average drive time of 7-10 minutes to attend Magistrates Court.



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

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

[4] Weighted average takes into account population distribution across the wards.

- Annalong to Newry Courthouse – 31.47 minutes / 24.19 miles

Table 1 illustrates how the weighted average drive time to Magistrates Court for those in the Magherafelt catchment area compares to the weighted averages for the Western ACD and across NI. As this analysis is based on the allocations set out in Practice Direction 5/16, this reflects the journey to Magherafelt Courthouse. Analysis is based on the distance from the geographical centre of each ward in the Magherafelt catchment area.

Table 1: To Magistrates Court

Area	Catchment Population	Average drive time (mins)	Average driving distance (miles)	Longest journey (mins)	Drive time category	<30 mins	30 - 60 mins	>60 mins
Magherafelt	55,019	9.1	6.6	16.1	% of catchment population	100%		
Western ACD	417,859	9.8	6.7	29.2		100%		
NI	1,903,175	9.3	6.5	38.6		99%	1%	

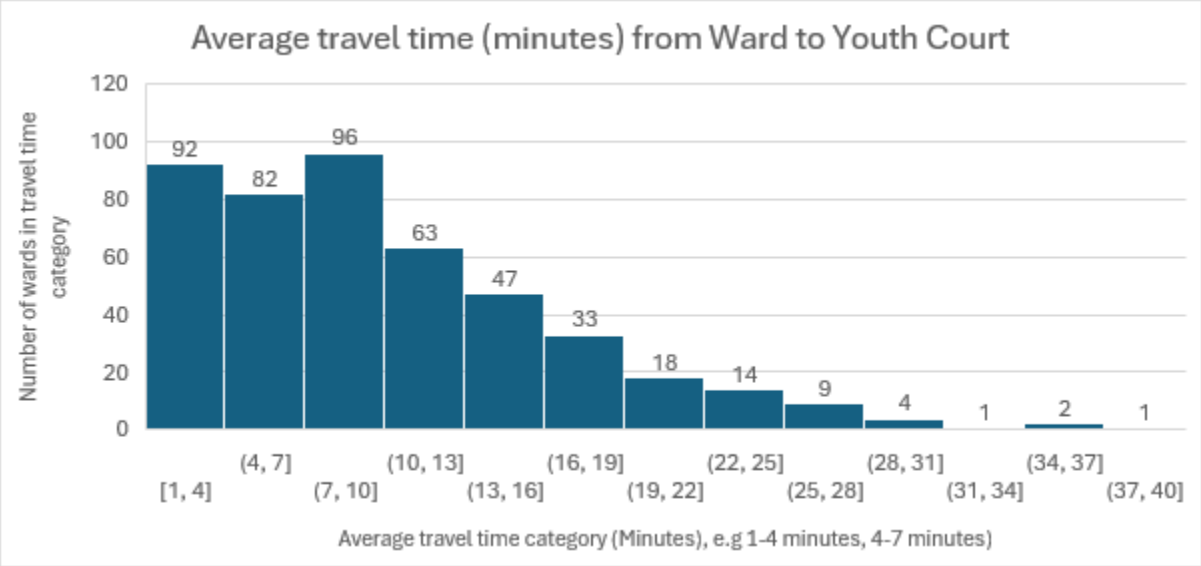
This analysis shows that Magherafelt Courthouse is geographically well situated for those in the Magherafelt area accessing Magistrates Court, as the average drive time is below the ACD and NI average.

- **Average drive time to Youth Court**

At regional level, according to the designations set out in Practice Direction 5/16[5], the weighted average[6] journey to attend Youth Court in Northern Ireland is a 9.5 minute drive time and a 6.7 mile journey. Most wards have an average travel time of 7-10 minutes to attend Youth Court.

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

[6] Weighted average takes into account population distribution across the wards.



Some court users travel for up to 38.6 minutes to access Youth Court. The 4 longest drive times/distances between the centre of a geographical ward and its Youth 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

Table 2 illustrates how the weighted average drive time to Youth Court for those in the Magherafelt catchment area compares to the weighted averages for the Western ACD and across NI. As this analysis is based on the allocations set out in Practice Direction 5/16, this reflects the journey to Magherafelt Courthouse. Analysis is based on the distance from the geographical centre of each ward in the Magherafelt catchment area.

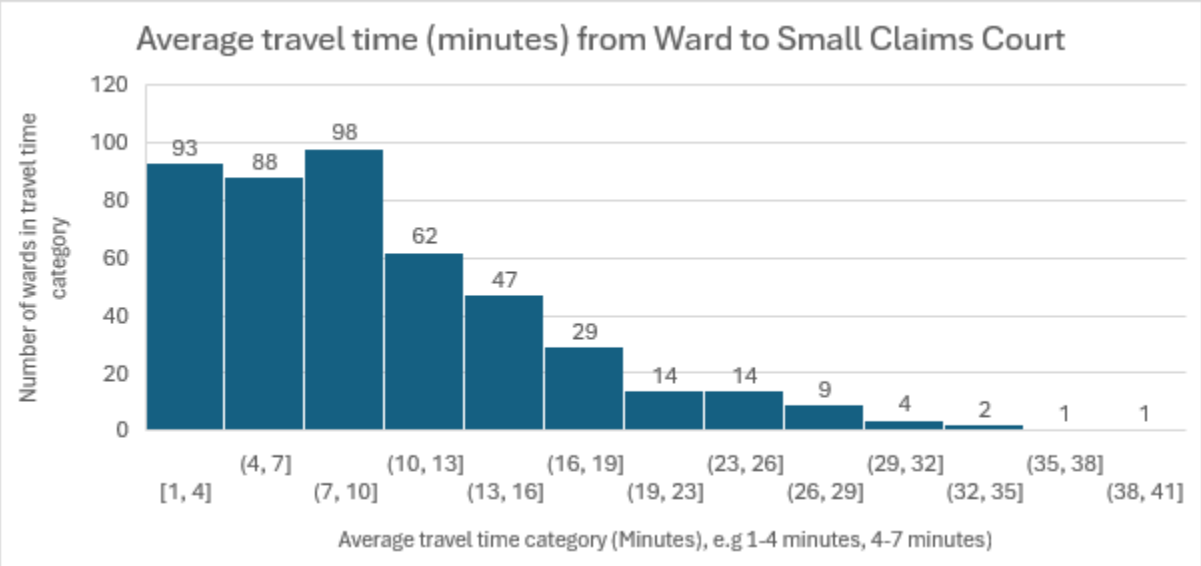
Table 2: To Youth Court

Area	Catchment Population	Average drive time (mins)	Average driving distance (miles)	Longest journey (mins)	Drive time category	<30 mins	30 - 60 mins	>60 mins
Magherafelt	55,019	9.1	6.6	16.1	% of catchment population	100%		
Western ACD	417,859	9.8	6.7	29.2		100%		
NI	1,903,175	9.5	6.7	38.6		99%	1%	

This analysis shows that Magherafelt Courthouse is geographically well situated for those in the Magherafelt area accessing Youth Court, as the average drive time is below the ACD and NI average.

- **Average drive time to Small Claims Court**

At regional level, according to the designations set out in Practice Direction 5/16[7], the weighted average[8] journey to attend Small Claims Court in Northern Ireland is a 9.6 minute drive time and a 6.7 mile journey. Most wards have an average travel time of 7-10 minutes to attend Small Claims Court.



Some court users travel for up to 38.6 minutes to access Small Claims Court. The 4 longest drive times/distances between the centre of a geographical ward and its Small Claims Court are:

- Lurigethan to Coleraine Courthouse – 38.57 minutes / 30.67 miles
- Islandmagee to Ballymena Courthouse – 36.31 minutes / 30.13 miles
- Park to Omagh Courthouse – 34.90 minutes / 26.40 miles
- Whitehead South to Ballymena Courthouse – 33.89 minutes / 28.53 miles

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

[8] Weighted average takes into account population distribution across the wards.

Table 3 illustrates how the weighted average drive time to Small Claims Court for those in the Magherafelt catchment area compares to the weighted averages for the Western ACD and across NI. As this analysis is based on the allocations set out in Practice Direction 5/16, this reflects the journey to Magherafelt Courthouse. Analysis is based on the distance from the geographical centre of each ward in the Magherafelt catchment area.

Table 3: To Small Claims Court

Area	Population	Average drive time (mins)	Average driving distance (miles)	Longest journey (mins)	Drive time category	<30 mins	30 -60 mins	>60 mins
Magherafelt	51,753	9.1	6.6	16.1	% of catchment population	100%		
Western ACD	417,859	11.3	7.8	34.9		98%	2%	
NI	1,903,175	9.6	6.7	38.6		99%	1%	

This analysis shows that Magherafelt Courthouse is geographically well situated for those in the Magherafelt area accessing Small Claims Court, as the average drive time is below the ACD and NI average.

Driven journeys (temporary reallocation)

Following the temporary closure of Magherafelt Courthouse in March 2020, business that was previously heard at Magherafelt Courthouse was transferred to Londonderry Courthouse which operated as a regional hub as part of the pandemic response. This business continues to be heard at Londonderry Courthouse around once a week.

To consider the impact of the reallocation of Magherafelt Court business to Londonderry Courthouse, **Table 4** shows the drive time and travel distance from the Magherafelt catchment area to Magherafelt Courthouse and Londonderry Courthouse. This analysis is based on a journey starting point in each ward which is furthest from the respective courthouse. While the furthest journey affects a small number of the population in each ward, it illustrates the longest drive time experienced.

Table 4: Drive time (minutes) from the furthest postcode in the Magherafelt catchment area

Ward	**To Magherafelt Courthouse**	**To Londonderry Courthouse**
Ballymaguigan	7.95	51.86

Bellaghy	12.86	52.83
Castledawson	9.32	48.07
Coolshinny	11.12	51.10
Draperstown	22.79	42.45
Glebe	2.51	48.68
Lissan	19.41	52.78
Lower Glenshane	18.75	45.77
Maghera	12.88	42.11
Swatragh	20.68	45.69
Tamlaght O'Crilly	18.73	48.50
The Loup	12.67	57.06
Tobermore	12.25	45.61
Town Parks East	4.04	48.62
Valley	20.76	50.69
AVERAGE	**13.78 minutes**	**48.79 minutes**
	Difference	**35.62 minutes longer**
	Greatest impact	**46.17 minute increase**
	Longest journey	**57.06 minutes**

Table 4 shows that the temporary transfer of business from Magherafelt Courthouse to Londonderry Courthouse increased drive time across all wards. Based on this data, the most significant increase in drive time is for those travelling from a postcode within the Glebe ward, requiring an additional 46.17 minute drive time and bringing their total drive time to 48.68 minutes. The greatest drive time for those travelling to Londonderry Courthouse is from a postcode in The Loup area, requiring a total drive time of 57.06 minutes, which is 44.39 minutes longer than their 12.67 minute drive time to Magherafelt Courthouse.

The average longest drive time of 48.79 minutes to Londonderry Courthouse is significantly longer than the average drive times to Magistrates Court, Youth Court and Small Claims Court for the Western ACD (9.8/ 9.8/ 11.3 minutes) and across Northern Ireland (9.3/ 9.5/ 9.6 minutes). The temporary transfer to Londonderry Courthouse introduced a greater travel requirement to Magistrates Court, Youth Court or Small Claims Court than any of the designations under Practice Direction 5/16, where the longest estimated journey was 38.57 minutes.

Tables 5 and 6 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.

Table 5: Journey to Magherafelt Courthouse		**Drive time categories**		
		<30 minutes	**30-60 minutes**	**>60 minutes**
Population per drive time category	**Population**	55,019	0	0
	% of total	**100%**	**0%**	**0%**

Table 6: Journey to Londonderry Courthouse		**Drive time categories**		
		<30 minutes	**30-60 minutes**	**>60 minutes**
Population per drive time category	**Population**	0	55,019	0
	% of total	**0%**	**100%**	**0%**

Public transport journeys

Table 7 shows the public transport journey from the assigned starting point of each journey to Magherafelt Courthouse and Londonderry Courthouse (a one way journey). 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 the respective courthouse. These journeys were assessed using Google Maps and aiming to arrive by 10am on a Wednesday morning.

Table 7: Public transport journeys from Magherafelt catchment area

Ward and Start Point	**Ward Population**	**Destination Courthouse**	**Duration (Hrs: min)**	**Start time**	**End time**	**Mode**	**Difference**
Ballymaguigan	4,138	Magherafelt	30m	8.01am	8.31am	1 bus, 18min walk	
		Londonderry	2hr28m	8.01am	10.39am *	3 buses, 1hr 23min walk	1hr58m longer
Bellaghy	3,886	Magherafelt	2hr25m	6.04am	8.29am	1 bus, 1hr48min walk	

		Londonderry	4hr35m	6.04am	10.39am *	2 buses, 1hr53min walk	2hr10m longer
Castledawson	3,838	Magherafelt	25m	8.07am	8.32am	1 bus, 15min walk	
		Londonderry	2hr18m	7.21am	9.39am	2 buses, 26min walk	1hr53m longer
Coolshinny	4,025	Magherafelt	31hr	7.32am	8.32am	1 bus, 43min walk	
		Londonderry	2hr51m	7.48am	10.39am *	3 buses, 31min walk	2hr21m longer
Draperstown	3,266	Magherafelt	3hr10m	5.49am	8.59am	2 buses, 41min walk	
		Londonderry	4hr09m	5.20am	9.39am	3 buses, 17min walk	59m longer
Glebe	3,810	Magherafelt	18m	9.20am	9.38am	1 bus, 8min walk; or 23m walk	
		Londonderry	2hr34	7.05am	9.29am	2 buses, 29min walk	2hr16m longer
Lissan	3,638	Magherafelt	1hr22m	7.41am	9.03am	2 buses, 39min walk	
		Londonderry	3hr18m	7.21am	10.39am *	3 buses, 41min walk	1hr56m longer
Lower Glenshane	3,128	Magherafelt	29m	8.29am	8.58am	1 bus, 24 min walk; or 40m walk	
		Londonderry	1hr56m	7.43am	9.39am	1 bus, 41min walk	1hr27m longer
Maghera	3,473	Magherafelt	51m	8.07am	8.58am	1 bus, 15min walk	
		Londonderry	2hr7m	7.32am	9.39am	2 buses, 39min walk	1hr16m longer
Swatragh	3,476	Magherafelt	2hr4m	7.32am	9.36am	2 buses, 57min walk	
		Londonderry	2hr32m	7.07am	9.39am	2 bus, 58min walk	28m longer
Tamlaght O'Crilly	3,660	Magherafelt	2hr28m	7.08am	9.36am	3 buses, 38m walk	
		Londonderry	2hr23m	7.36am	9.59am	3 buses, 13m walk	5m shorter
The Loup	4,220	Magherafelt	32m	8.00am	8.32am	1 bus, 6 m walk	

		Londonderry	2hr39m	8.00am	10.39am *	15m walk	2hr7m longer
Tobermore	3,458	Magherafelt	22m	9.14am	9.26am	1 bus, 19m walk	
		Londonderry	2hr44m	6.55am	9.39am	2 buses, 29m walk	2hr22m longer
Town Parks East	3,573	Magherafelt	28m	9.04am	9.30am	1 bus, 14m walk; or 27m walk	
		Londonderry	2hr37m	7.02am	9.39am	2 buses, 32m	2hr9m longer
Valley	3,430	Magherafelt	56m	7.34am	8.30am	1 bus, 28m walk	
		Londonderry	3hr15m	6.26am	9.40am	2 buses, 1 train, 31m walk	2hr19m longer
AVERAGE	**55,019**	Magherafelt	1hour, 7minutes				
		Londonderry	2hours, 49minutes		11/15 journeys more complex		1hr 42m longer

*Arrival by 10am not possible using solely public transport

Based on this data, the temporary transfer of business to Londonderry Courthouse resulted in the average public transport journey from the Magherafelt catchment area increasing by 1hour 42 minutes, from 1 hour 7 minutes to Magherafelt Courthouse to 2 hours 49 minutes to Londonderry Courthouse. 11 of the 15 sample journeys assessed would be more complex, involving additional transfers within the overall journey. The most significant **increase** in public transport journey time was for those travelling from a postcode within the Tobermore ward, requiring an additional 2 hour 22 minutes journey time and bringing their total journey time to 2 hours 44 minutes. The greatest **absolute** journey time for those travelling to Londonderry Courthouse is from a postcode in the Bellaghy area, requiring a total journey time of 4 hours 35 minutes, which is 2 hours 10 minutes longer than their 2 hours 25 minute journey time to Magherafelt Courthouse.

Tables 8 and 9 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 it is likely that most of the population in each ward will experience a shorter journey.

Table 8: Journey to Magherafelt Courthouse		**Public transport journey time categories**			
		<1hour	**1-2 hours**	**2-3 hours**	**3-4 hours**
Population per	**Population**	37,093	3,638	11,022	3,266

journey time category	**% of total**	**67%**	**7%**	**20%**	**6%**

Table 9: Journey to Londonderry Courthouse		**Public transport journey time categories**				
		<1hour	**1-2 hours**	**2-3 hours**	**3-4 hours**	**4-5 hours**
Population per journey time category	**Population**	0	3,128	33,861	10,878	7,152
	% of total	**0%**	**6%**	**62%**	**20%**	**13%**

Conclusion

NICTS considers that that increased travel associated with the reallocation of Magherafelt Adult Magistrates, Youth and Small Claims Court business to an alternative courthouse in the NICTS estate is reasonable and justified by the legitimate aim of implementing the NICTS Estate Strategy and providing Magherafelt 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
- Policy and technological changes are expected to result in a reducing requirement for courthouse attendance in future
- The 2021 NI Census showed that 89% of households within the Magherafelt District Electoral area have access to at least one car or van. NICTS 2025 data shows that 57% of Magherafelt 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 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 point, the journey could be completed within a shorter time.

- The Disability Action Transport Scheme[9] (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 may not facilitate travel for the entire end-to-end journey, they can facilitate easier access to public transport links in Magherafelt.
- Older people over 60 are eligible for free travel on public transport across NI through the Translink Smartpass
- The increased travel aligns with travel requirements for users in the Magherafelt 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.[10]

As case listing is a judicial matter, this consultation does not propose any change to the current operational arrangement of the separate listing of Magherafelt Adult Magistrates, Youth and Small Claims Court business in Londonderry Courthouse.

[9] https://www.disabilityaction.org/Pages/Category/transport

[10] https://www.ppsni.gov.uk/witness-expenses