

Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service Provisional Figures

July to September 2023

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1

Key Findings

This report provides an overview of Children Order and County, Crown, High and Magistrates' Courts business during July to September 2023 and how it compares with the comparative figures for the same quarter in the previous year. The headline findings are summarised below -

- During the quarter there were 371 Children Order sittings (1,060 total hours sat), 1,202 Children Order Applications received and 983 disposed. In terms of orders made, 241 were own motion, 2,146 were interim and 1,362 were final orders.
 - County Court and District Judges sat a total of 735 days within the County Court. In terms of cases 49 equity, 214 ejectment, 1,992 small claims and three criminal damage case were received; 21 equity, 80 ejectment, 1,957 small claims and 2 criminal damage cases were disposed.
 - In terms of Crown Court business there were 433 sittings with 346 cases and 437 defendants received and 261 cases and 303 defendants disposed.
- There were 298 High Court sitting days. The highest proportion of these was spent on Bails business, 84 days (28%).
 - Within the 1,098 Magistrates' sitting days during the quarter, 72% were adult criminal, 7% youth criminal and 22% civil and family days. There were 1,088 civil and family applications and 10,084 adult and 289 youth defendants received. Corresponding figures for disposals were 917 civil and family, 9,439 adult and 333 youth defendants.

2 | Introduction

About this report

This bulletin is produced in accordance with the pillars and principles set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics. It presents the following statistics for the Northern Ireland Court and Tribunals Service for the quarter July to September 2023 –

- The number of Children Order applications received and disposed at Family Proceedings Courts, Family Care Centres and the High Court, together with waiting times from lodgment to disposal (section 3);
- Civil and family business received and disposed, waiting times and sitting days in County Courts (section 4);
- The number of cases and defendants received and disposed, waiting times, pleas and findings and sittings at the Crown Court (section 5);
- Business received and disposed, waiting times and sitting days in the Chancery, Queen’s Bench and Family Divisions of the High Court (section 6); and
- The number of youth and adult defendants received and disposed, charges and outcomes, sittings, civil applications received and disposed and waiting times at Magistrates’ Courts (section 7).

Comparative information for the same quarter in the previous year is also provided, along with an indication of whether any change is higher or lower.

Background information about the Children Order and the County, Crown, High and Magistrates’ Courts along with methodological information and a glossary is available in the accompanying user guide. Data in the bulletin, along with trend information, are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

The next update covering the quarter to 31st December 2023 will be published in February 2024. A full [publication schedule](#) is available on the DoJ website.

2 | Introduction

It is important to note court activity during the quarter covered in this report has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the courts continue to make more use of remote audio and video technology, the impact of COVID-19 can be seen in the figures. It is expected that the limited operation of the courts during the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to have an impact on many of the published figures in this and future releases.

Administrative case management reviews were introduced by the Lord Chief Justice as part of the coronavirus contingency arrangements. This has resulted in Judges investing significant time reviewing cases and making directions or orders administratively (where appropriate), and this has continued even as courts have resumed to support business recovery. This extra time is not recorded on the courts operating system (Integrated Court Operations System known as ICOS), and therefore is not reflected within the sittings times published within this report.

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Children Order

Children Order Quarterly Business

- Table 1 on the following page shows that during the quarter there were 371 sittings (1,060 hours), 1,202 Children Order Applications received and 983 disposed.
 - A total of 1,444 children were involved in the applications disposed. Gender and age breakdowns of the children were 49:50 male:female and 27% 0-4 years, 33% 5-8 years, 26% 9-12 years and 15% 13-16 years.
 - Like each of the last five years, the most common reason for transferring Children Order applications during the quarter was Complexity (65%, 110 of 170 reasons). This was followed by Consolidation (32), Jurisdiction (17), Convenience (5), Gravity (4) and Return to Lower Court (2).
- In terms of orders made –
 - 241 were own motion orders.
 - 2,146 were interim orders.
 - 1,362 were final orders.
 - The average waiting time for applications disposed was 38.1 weeks for public and 26.8 weeks for private law.
 - Table 1 shows that applications received increased and applications disposed decreased. The waiting times for disposal for public law and private law were lower than the comparative figures for the same quarter in the previous year.

3

Children Order

Table 1: Children Order Business – July to September 2023 compared with July to September 2022

	Quarter 2023	Quarter 2022	% change from 2022
Sittings	371	431	14% ↓
Hours sat	1,060	1,190	11% ↓
Applications received	1,202	1,067	13% ↑
Applications disposed	983	1,037	5% ↓
Number of children involved in applications disposed	1,444	1,476	2% ↓
Own motion orders made	241	469	49% ↓
Interim orders made	2,146	2,150	-
Final orders made	1,362	1,383	2% ↓
Average waiting time for disposal for public law (weeks)	38.1	43.2	12% ↓
Average waiting time for disposal for private law (weeks)	26.8	31.3	14% ↓

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

4 | County Court

County Court Quarterly Business

- Table 2 on the following pages shows that County Court and District Judges sat a total of 735 sitting days during the quarter. Within those days 384 were spent on criminal business and 351 days on civil and family business.
- During the quarter –
 - 1,975 Civil bills with notice of intention to defend (NID) were received and 1,956 disposed.
 - In terms of cases 49 equity, 214 ejectment, 1,992 small claims and three criminal damage cases were received; 21 equity, 80 ejectment, 1,957 small claims and two criminal damage cases were disposed.
 - 296 divorce decrees were granted, 264 decrees absolute issued.
 - 45 licence applications were received and 41 disposed.
- Table 2 shows that there was a mixed outcome in the number of cases received and disposed across most business areas and a general decrease in time taken to disposal compared with figures for the same quarter in the previous year.

4 | County Court

Table 2: County Court Business – July to September 2023 compared with July to September 2022

	Quarter 2023	Quarter 2022	% change from 2022
Sitting days	735	755	3%↓
Civil bills with NID received	1,975	1,608	23%↑
Civil bills disposed	1,956	1,807	8%↑
Average time taken from issue to disposal of civil bill (weeks)	63	65	3%↓
Equity cases received	49	32	53%↑
Equity cases disposed	21	21	-
Average time taken from issue to disposal of equity cases (weeks)	116	133	13%↓
Ejectment cases received	214	186	15%↑
Ejectment cases disposed	80	111	28%↓
Average time taken from issue to disposal of ejectment cases (weeks)	37	60	38%↓

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

4 | County Court

Table 2 continued: County Court Business – July to September 2023 compared with July to September 2022

	Quarter 2023	Quarter 2022	% change from 2022
Small claims received	1,992	1,623	23%↑
Small claims disposed	1,957	1,549	26%↑
Average time taken from issue to disposal of small claims cases (weeks)	28	40	30%↓
Criminal damage cases received	3	1	200%↑
Criminal damage cases disposed	2	3	33%↓
Divorce decrees granted	296	333	11%↓
Decree absolute issued	264	305	13%↓
Average time taken from issue to date divorce decree granted (weeks)	44	41	7%↑
Licences applications received	45	54	17%↓
Licences applications disposed	41	52	21%↓

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

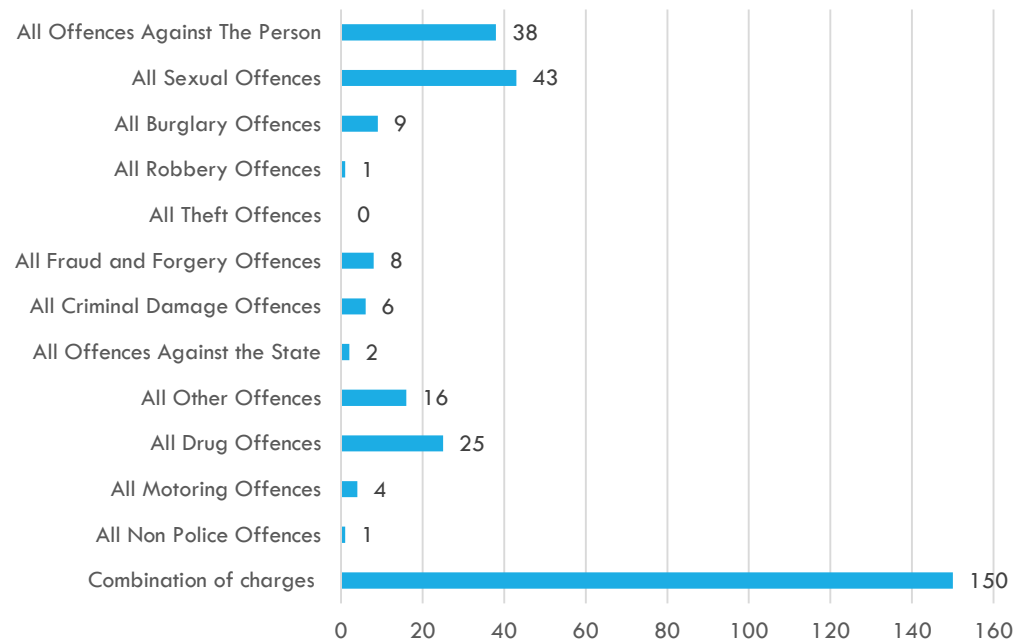
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Crown Court

Crown Court Quarterly Business

- Table 3 on the following page shows that during the quarter there were 433 sittings (755 hours sat). County Court Judges disposed of 98% of defendants (296), a figure that has remained relatively stable over the last five years (96-99%).
- There were 346 cases and 437 defendants received during the quarter; 261 cases and 303 defendants were disposed.
- Average time from committal to hearing was 168 days and from conviction to disposal was 92 days.
- In comparison to the same quarter in the previous year the number of cases received increased, and the number of cases disposed also increased.
- Figure 1 shows that the majority of defendants disposed were charged with a combination of offences, a similar pattern seen in each of the last five years. Average time from committal to hearing decreased and from conviction to disposal increased. These figures will be affected by the delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 1: Crown Court defendants disposed by charge type July to September 2023



5 | Crown Court

Table 3: Crown Court Business – July to September 2023 compared with July to September 2022

	Quarter 2023	Quarter 2022	% change from 2022
Sittings	433	444	2%↓
Hours sat	755	1,088	31%↓
Cases received	346	303	14%↑
Cases disposed	261	254	3%↑
Defendants received	437	388	13%↑
Defendants disposed	303	319	5%↓
Defendants pleading guilty to all charges	78	91	14%↓
Defendants pleading guilty or found guilty of at least one charge	197	204	3%↓
Average time from committal to hearing (days)	168	178	6%↓
Average time from conviction to disposal (days)	92	91	1%↑

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

6 High Court

High Court Quarterly Business

- Table 4 on the following pages show that there were 298 High Court sitting days during the quarter, the highest proportion of which was spent on Bails business, 84 days (28%).
- King's Bench business included:
 - 957 writs and originating summonses were received, 809 were disposed.
 - 103 applications for leave to apply for Judicial Review, 5 applications for Judicial Review and one ancillary application were received.
- Chancery Division business included:
 - Receipt of 517 (69% which were Chancery, 14% bankruptcy and 17% companies cases) and disposal of 247 cases; and
 - 1,833 grants issued in the Probate office.
- Family Division business included –
 - 20 adoption cases and applications received and 6 disposed;
 - 558 divorce petitions received, 98 decrees granted (mainly '2 years with consent' (30, 31%) and 'unreasonable behaviour' (30, 31%)) and 237 decrees absolute issued;
 - 37 Official Solicitor's Office cases received, 28 disposed and a current caseload of 365 cases at the end of the quarter.

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

6 High Court

Table 4: High Court Business - July to September 2023 compared with July to September 2022

	Quarter 2023	Quarter 2022	% change from 2022
Sitting days	298	327	9%↓
Writs & originating summonses received	957	919	4%↑
Writs & originating summonses disposed	809	306	164%↑
Applications for leave to apply for Judicial Review received	103	71	45%↑
Applications for Judicial Review received	5	19	74%↓
Ancillary applications received	1	0	100%↑
Chancery cases received	517	285	81%↑
Chancery cases disposed	247	138	79%↑
Grants issued in the Probate office	1,833	1,983	8%↓

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

Table 4 continued: High Court Business - July to September 2023 compared with July to September 2022

	Quarter 2023	Quarter 2022	% change from 2022
Adoption cases & applications received	20	26	23%↓
Adoption cases & applications disposed	6	10	40%↓
Average time taken from issue to disposal for adoption case/application (weeks)	27	59	54%↓
Divorce petitions received	558	623	10%↓
Decrees granted in High Court	98	93	5%↑
Decrees absolute issued	237	157	51%↑
Average time taken from issue of divorce petition to date decree granted (weeks)	64	53	21%↑
Official Solicitors Office cases received	37	25	48%↑
Official Solicitors Office cases disposed	28	41	32%↓
Official Solicitors Office caseload at end of quarter	365	360	1%↑

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

7 Magistrates' Court

Magistrates' Court Quarterly Business

- During the quarter there were 1,036 scheduled, 22 additional and 40 special Magistrates' sitting days (Table 5).
- Within the 1,098 total, 72% were adult criminal, 7% were youth criminal and 22% were civil and family days.

Table 5: Magistrates' Court Sitting Days - July to September 2023 compared with July to September 2022

	Adult	Youth	Civil & Family	Total Quarter 2023	Total Quarter 2022	% change from 2022
Scheduled	733	72	231	1,036	1,041	-
Additional	14	0	8	22	23	4%↓
Special	40	0	0	40	38	5%↑
Total	787	72	239	1,098	1,102	-

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

7 Magistrates' Court

- There were 1,088 new civil and family applications and 10,084 new adult and 289 new youth defendants received; corresponding disposals were 917, 9,439 and 333 respectively.
- The average waiting times from first hearing to disposal in the adult and youth criminal courts were 9 weeks and 21 weeks respectively. For civil and family applications it was 27 and 8 weeks respectively from date of receipt to disposal.
- Changes from the previous year were mixed - youth defendants received and disposed increased while receipts for adults increased but disposals decreased. Waiting times decreased for adult business and increased for youth and civil business.

Table 6: Magistrates' Court Business - July to September 2023 compared with July to September 2022

	Adult Q3 2023	Adult Q3 2022	% change from 2022	Youth Q3 2023	Youth Q3 2022	% change from 2022	Civil Q3 2023	Civil Q3 2022	% change from 2022	Family Q3 2023	Family Q3 2022	% change from 2022
Defendants or applications received	10,084	9,983	1%↑	289	287	1%↑	95	99	4%↓	993	968	3%↑
Defendants or applications disposed	9,439	9,554	1%↓	333	204	63%↑	82	77	6%↑	835	795	5%↑
Average waiting time (weeks)	9	10	10%↓	21	14	50%↑	27	19	42%↑	8	8	-

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Appendix 1 - Methodology

Data Source and Coverage

The statistics are produced using administrative data sourced from the Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS). ICOS is a live operating system used in each court tier to process every part of court business, from receipt of payments through to the production of final orders made. The data are input into this system on a daily basis by court clerks, and this information is checked and confirmed by another member of staff to ensure the data entries are correct.

Full details of data relevance, accuracy, timeliness, accessibility, coherence, user need, cost and confidentiality is available in the accompanying background quality report. Details of the data quality checks and processes that DoJ has in place are available in the Quality Assurance of Administrative Data (QAAD) document on the DoJ website.

Counting Rules

- Children Order

Receipts are counted from the date the case is entered onto ICOS. Disposals are counted from the result date that a final order was made against the case changing the case status to 'dealt with.'

- County Court

Receipts are counted from the date the case is entered onto ICOS and the fees are receipted. Disposals are counted from the result date that a final order was made against the case changing the case status to 'dealt with'.

8

Appendix 1 - Methodology

- Crown Court

Receipts are counted from the date the case is committed to the Crown Court from the Magistrates court. Disposals are counted from the result date that a final order was made against the case changing the case status to 'dealt with.'

- High Court

Receipts are counted from the date the case is entered onto ICOS and the fees are receipted. Disposals are counted from the result date that a final order was made against the case, or the date an applicant withdraws or discontinues their application prior to the hearing, changing the case status to 'dealt with'.

- Magistrates' Court

Receipts are counted from the date a served summons or a charge sheet is received by the Magistrates' Court office. Disposals are counted from the result date that a final order was made against the case changing the case status to 'dealt with'.