



# **NORTHERN IRELAND COURT BUSINESS SINGLE JURISDICTION Practice Direction 5/16**

The Lord Chief Justice published a draft practice direction in July 2016 setting out the details of how court business will be distributed in the Magistrates' Courts and County Court in Northern Ireland when the legislative provisions in the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 are commenced to create a single legal jurisdiction.

The draft practice direction was published online and views were sought from court users on the proposals. The consultation period closed in mid-September, with some organisations seeking a short extension within which to submit a response. We are very grateful for all those who took the time to reply to the draft directions and make very useful observations on the operational impact of some of the proposals.

As a result of the responses received during the consultation process, some changes were made to the draft direction previously published, and the Office of the Lord Chief Justice today publishes Practice Direction 5/16 which will come into operation on 31 October 2016, which is the date on which the relevant provisions in the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 will be commenced.

The most significant changes in the direction and the related annexes can be summarised below:

- Lisburn and Castlereagh Local Government District has been included as part of the South Eastern Administrative Court Division. In the earlier draft it was in the North Eastern Administrative Court Division. Including Lisburn and Castlereagh Local Government District in the South Eastern Administrative Court Division means that the current listing arrangements in relation to Lisburn business will largely continue as normal with cases originating in Lisburn Magistrates Court and then going to Craigavon on appeal or committal.
- Lisburn Court presently deal with cases originating from five electoral wards which presently are part of Belfast City Council (Ladybrook, Dunmurry, Lagmore, Poleglass and Twinbrook). However, as a result of discussions about business volumes with the presiding and local judiciary and the court children's officers who presently deal with cases in this region, a decision has been made to keep these cases listed, for the time being, in Lisburn Magistrates Court, despite the fact that they are cases which originate from within Belfast Local Government District.
- Belfast Family Care Centre will sit in Coleraine to deal with cases originating from Coleraine and Ballymena Family Proceedings Court. This change was made as a result of submissions received from consultees who indicated that it would be particularly onerous for families in the Limavady and Coleraine area to have to travel to Belfast for Family Care Centre Cases. The Recorder and the Chief Justice agree that the most sensible option would be to have these case heard in a Family Care Centre sitting in Coleraine.
- Family cases originating in the Larne area will go to Belfast Family Proceedings Court in the first instance and then go to Belfast Family Care Centre. The previous direction which was published for consultation indicated that these cases would go to Ballymena in the first instance. However, as a result of the decision to have Belfast Family Care Centre sit in Coleraine to deal with cases originating in Coleraine and Ballymena Family Proceedings Courts, it would be onerous to expect families from the Larne area to travel to Coleraine for Family Care Centre cases. Therefore, Larne family cases at both Family Proceedings tier, and Family Care Centre tier will be dealt with in Belfast.

- Practice Direction 5/16 provides a form which parties can use when seeking to transfer a case to a different court venue, and sets out the procedure to be followed when seeking to transfer a case.

OFFICE OF THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE  
25 October 2016