

Virtual Court London Pilot Duty Solicitor Operation

1. London Regional Office team will prepare rotas. Rotas will be issued one month before they come in to effect.
2. Rotas will, unless notified otherwise by the LSC, be prepared to cover periods of three months at a time. The next rota will whenever possible be issued one month before the current one expires.
3. Slots will be allocated by firm name and a single office contact number.
4. The police will request allocation by ringing the main DSCC number and requesting "a virtual court solicitor". When requesting the virtual court solicitor the custody officer or dedicated detention officer, (DDO), will give the following information, name of the defendant, the time booked for a conference with the defendant, the time of the virtual court hearing, the borough and police station where the virtual court hearing will take place, (e.g. Westminster, Charing Cross) contact number for that police station and name of the custody officer or dedicated detention officer, (DDO).
5. Slots will reflect the operating hours of the virtual court as from time to time notified by the London Criminal Justice Partnership.
6. Slots will be allocated to firms who volunteer to participate in the scheme. Slots may be swapped between providers provided sufficient notice is given to the DSCC. Participating providers will be required to have access to the internet if they wish to swap slots.
7. The principle requirement to be met to join the VCDS is that the firm must be a member of the duty solicitor scheme(s) which cover a police station participating in the pilot they are applying to join and that they agree to have a solicitor who will be able to provide representation at the virtual court when requested by the DSCC.
8. Once they are on the rota the provider must accept all calls that they receive when they are on duty.
9. The DSCC will try for up to 20 minutes to contact the slot holder before reverting to back up arrangements. Where a provider cannot accept the call or cannot be contacted they will be required to justify the reason for their non-acceptance / non-availability. The DSCC will contact the police after 20 minutes (initially) and then every 20 minutes, should a provider not accept a case or not be contacted.
10. When deploying the virtual court duty solicitor the DSCC will inform the solicitor of the defendant's name, the time booked for a conference with the defendant, the time of the virtual court hearing, the police station where the virtual court hearing will take place, contact number for that police station and name of the custody officer or DDO.
11. Any unallocated calls will be offered to the other firms on a back up basis. The call will be offered to firms participating on the same rota.

The call will be offered first to the firm rostered for the following day. The DSCC will make one call to this firm and if unanswered, or the firm is unable to provide representation, will move on to the firm rostered for the next day and so on until the call is allocated. The DSCC will continue in this order making one call to each firm until the call is allocated.

12. If after 60 minutes, (or earlier if known), no provider has the capacity to provide the representation from the panel for that police station (anticipated time elapsed after police make request for VCDS is 30 minutes), the DSCC will notify the police. The DSCC will close the call and mark the slot holder as having failed to provide the necessary coverage.
13. When a provider has accepted the call they must attend the relevant police station at least 30 minutes before the notified virtual court hearing time.
14. After accepting the call the provider may wish to consider whether they want to contact the police station to inform them they have been deployed to attend the defendant at the virtual court hearing.
15. If after accepting a call the provider is running late or will not be able to attend they must inform the police station as soon as possible.
16. If the Virtual Court Hearing is going to be delayed and the virtual court solicitor as not arrived at the police station the custody officer must as soon as possible call the DSCC and inform them of the delay or non-attendance.
17. When the DSCC are informed of a delay or non attendance they must call the deployed virtual court duty solicitor and either re schedule the deployment, if they still need to attend during their duty slot, or stand down the solicitor for that hearing.
18. Each month, the DSCC will provide the LSC with a report showing the acceptance rates by firms on each rota. The LSC will the follow up those who fail to accept 90% of the calls offered, provided a minimum of 10 calls have been offered. Where a firm is unable to provide a reasonable explanation of the performance over a 3-month rota period, they may be removed from the rota. The firm may appeal to the relevant Regional Director where this decision is taken.
19. The proportion of calls not accepted and the minimum number offered as per paragraph 13 may be reviewed and adjusted during the pilot where initial assumptions have proved incorrect.

