

Greater Manchester Crown Courts Practice Protocol No.1 of 2026

Greater Manchester Crown Courts

Practice Protocol

Issued for the guidance of Greater Manchester Crown Court practitioners

Status and Purpose

This Practice Protocol is issued for the guidance of **Greater Manchester Crown Court practitioners**. It consolidates and formalises recent **listing arrangements, case management expectations, and cross-courting principles** arising from local and national developments. **Trial time estimate** in this Practice Protocol means the time estimate from jury empanelment to jury retirement (**not** to verdict).

The Protocol is intended to:

- Promote consistency across Greater Manchester Crown Courts;
 - Maximise effective trial capacity;
 - Reduce unnecessary hearings and delay;
 - Support earlier resolution of appropriate cases;
 - Minimise disruption caused by unmanaged cross-courting of advocates.
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1. Scope: Courts Covered

This Protocol applies to all criminal proceedings listed in:

- Manchester Crown Court at **Minshall Street**;

- Manchester Crown Court at **Crown Square**;
 - **Bolton Crown Court**;
 - Certain Greater Manchester cases listed at **Liverpool Crown Court** pursuant to section 3 below.
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2. Distribution of Work within Greater Manchester

2.1 Rebalancing of Receipts

To achieve parity between incoming work and available judicial and courtroom resources:

- **All Rochdale and Bury committals** will be sent to **Crown Square** rather than Minshull Street from the start of the 2026/27 sitting year (week commencing 30 March).
- This change applies **only to new cases** and does not affect cases already allocated.

2.2 Bolton Crown Court

- Further rebalancing within Greater Manchester may not be feasible due to Bolton's physical and listing constraints.
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3. Use of Liverpool Crown Court for Greater Manchester Sex Trials

3.1 Additional Trial Capacity

An additional courtroom at **Liverpool Crown Court** will be available from 13 April to hear Greater Manchester **RASSO trials**. The court will be staffed by:

- A Greater Manchester circuit judge or recorder; and
- Liverpool court staff.

3.2 Cases Eligible for Listing at Liverpool

Cases considered for listing at Liverpool may include (non-exhaustively):

- **Bolton custody sex trials**;
- **Section 28 cases**;
- Sex trials listed for a **third trial date or beyond**.

Selection will be undertaken **in consultation with the CPS and the defence**. Cases under consideration will be listed en bloc for PTR, at which suitability for transfer, live issues, and trial time estimates will be examined.

3.3 Effect on Listing

- The Liverpool court constitutes an **additional trial court** for Greater Manchester.
 - Its use is intended to increase sex-trial capacity **without displacing other priority work**.
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4. Reduction of Unnecessary Hearings

4.1 General Principle

The court expects **greater procedural discipline** from all parties. Many intermediate hearings arise from:

- Failure to comply with existing orders; or
- Lack of meaningful inter-party engagement.

Unnecessary hearings undermine trial capacity and will be actively discouraged.

4.2 Judicial Gatekeeping

Any request for a hearing between **PTPH and the 10–12 week PTR** (see 5 below) will:

- Be reviewed by a judge;
 - Be listed only if a hearing is necessary;
 - Otherwise be dealt with administratively where appropriate.
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5. Pre-Trial Reviews (PTRs) and Trial Readiness

5.1 Non-RASSO Cases (< 10 Days)

For all non-RASSO trials with a time estimate of **less than 10 days**:

- A **PTR will be listed 10–12 weeks before trial**;
- For new cases, this PTR will be fixed at PTPH;
- **No other intermediate hearings** should be fixed unless there is a specific identified need.

5.2 RASSO Cases

- RASSO cases may require closer management, particularly for disclosure and section 28 issues;
- Intermediate hearings may be required;
- A 10–12 week PTR will generally still be beneficial.

5.3 Longer or Complex Trials (> 10 Days)

- Intermediate hearings remain the exception, not the norm;
- Parties remain responsible for trial readiness;
- A 10–12 week PTR will usually be listed.

5.4 PTR Procedure

- A **revised Trial Readiness Form** must be completed in advance;
- At the PTR, the court will review readiness, confirm or revise estimates, and **identify any external commitments (including cross-court commitments) affecting trial progression.**

Where appropriate, a further PTR may be listed approximately **3 weeks before trial**. Failure to demonstrate readiness may result in the trial being vacated.

6. Expedited Trial Scheme – Domestic Abuse Cases

With immediate effect:

- **All domestic abuse cases** with a trial estimate of **less than 3 days** should be considered at PTPH for inclusion in the expedited trial scheme;
 - Stage 1 compliance at PTPH is **no longer a prerequisite.**
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7. Cases Likely to Resolve (Early Trial Dates)

7.1 Identification at PTPH

Where a judge considers a case **very likely to resolve**:

- A trial date will be obtained **within 12–16 weeks of PTPH**;
- The case will be placed into a **separate Forward Listing Officer (FLO) managed list**;
- A PTR will be listed **3–4 weeks before trial**.

7.2 Typical Characteristics

Such cases will generally:

- Be trial-ready within 3–4 months;
- Be short (often < 5 days);
- Involve a single defendant.

These slots must **not** be used for priority trials requiring early listing.

8. Judicial Administrative Weeks

Judicial administrative weeks will be used to support:

- Identification of cases capable of early resolution;
- Removal of unnecessary hearings;
- Administrative determination of appropriate applications;
- Identifying priority sex trials before referral to the RASSO Unit.

Practitioners should expect increased administrative decision-making and fewer routine hearings.

9. Cross-Courting and Daily Listing

9.1 General Principle

Cross-courting of advocates has long been a feature of Crown Court practice. However, unmanaged cross-courting can **adversely affect the efficient use of courtrooms and judicial time** and must therefore be actively managed.

9.2 Advocate Responsibilities

- Advocates must, **so far as reasonably possible**, avoid other professional commitments when engaged in trials.
- If an advocate **knows of another commitment before a trial commences**, the **trial judge must be informed** at the earliest opportunity so that the timing of the trial can be discussed and, where appropriate, adjusted.

9.3 List Work and Fixed Times

- Advocates and clerks engaged across courts in **list work** should note that **fixed times are generally given only to PVL cases**.
- There is therefore flexibility in the daily list: **list order is not rigidly observed**.

9.4 Coordination and Court Communication

- Judges and court clerks will seek to keep courts running without significant breaks to await counsel.
- This requires that advocates:
 - Ensure court clerks are aware of their involvement in cases across different courts, **this requires compliance by advocates with the DCS Protocol**;

- Work cooperatively with other counsel to **coordinate appearances and availability;**
- Proactively manage and communicate competing commitments.

Effective communication and professional cooperation are essential to minimise delay and avoid wasted court time.

10. Compliance

This Protocol is to be read alongside the **Criminal Procedure Rules** and applicable national guidance. **Non-compliance may result in adverse listing or case management decisions.**

The Protocol and the revised PTR form have been distributed to all Manchester chambers and to the Manchester Law Society. The Protocol and the revised PTR form will appear at Section 1 on new cases on the DCS and will be available for downloading on the Northern Circuit website (Helpful Information – Greater Manchester Crown Courts).

Issued for the assistance of Greater Manchester Crown Court practitioners.

HH Judge Nicholas Dean K.C.

HH Judge Maurice Greene

HH Judge Nicholas Clarke K.C.

27 March 2026