



PUBLIC
PROSECUTION
SERVICE

Independent, Fair and Effective

Victims & Witnesses





What is the role of the Public Prosecution Service (PPS)?

The Public Prosecution Service (PPS) decides whether or not to prosecute people for committing criminal offences and what the correct charges should be and is also responsible for prosecuting the case at court.

The PPS prosecutes cases on behalf of the whole community, not on behalf of any one individual. For this reason, the views of the victim while important, and fully taken into account, cannot be the only consideration when deciding whether or not to prosecute.

Why might the PPS decide not to prosecute a case?

Lack of sufficient evidence is the most common reason for decisions not to prosecute. If there is not enough evidence to provide a reasonable prospect that a court will be satisfied that a person is guilty, the prosecution will not go ahead.

Even where the victim's account is credible, the evidence may simply not be strong enough to prosecute anyone.

What can a Victim or Witness expect from the PPS?

The PPS will treat all victims and witnesses with courtesy and respect. If you are the victim in the case, the PPS will inform you of the decision to prosecute or not to prosecute. If the case is prosecuted the PPS will inform you of what offences the defendant is to be prosecuted for.

If you are required to attend court to give evidence as a witness, the PPS will contact you to find out what dates you are available. You should let the PPS Community Liaison Team know when you will be able to attend. If you cannot attend, you should contact the PPS Community Liaison Team as soon as possible letting them know and telling them the reason.

If you are the victim in the case the PPS will write to you confirming the outcome of the case.



What are PPS Community Liaison Teams (CLT)?

The PPS has established dedicated Community Liaison Teams (CLT) who provide a range of services to victims and witnesses for the prosecution who are involved in Magistrates' and Youth Court cases. This includes being a contact point for victims and witnesses who have queries concerning the overall prosecution process and the progress of their specific case.

The relevant contact details are listed at the end of this document.

- Victims/witnesses will be contacted by a CLT staff member to check availability prior to a date being fixed for a contest
- Victim/witness letters of notification to attend court are produced by CLT and are issued to witnesses. These include expenses forms, guidance notes and support service information leaflets
- Where English is not the first language of the victim/witness CLT will endeavour to organise a suitable interpreter
- If applicable CLT will make travel/accommodation arrangements for witnesses who are required to attend
- CLT staff will contact victims/witnesses to advise them of any change with regard to court dates/venue

Do I have to give evidence at court?

Yes, if the PPS send you a requirement to attend. Giving evidence is an important public duty. If you are asked to attend court and you do not, or you tell the CLT that you are not going to attend, a witness summons may be issued compelling you to do so. This is an official document requiring you to attend court.

If you are worried about attending court and giving evidence, tell the CLT or the Victim Support Witness Service at once, so that efforts can be made to give you appropriate support and advice.



If you are being harassed because you are a witness in the case, you should inform the police or the CLT. Harassment, and intimidation of a witness are criminal offences. Also certain legal measures may be available to assist you in giving evidence in these circumstances.

What if I am not free to attend court?

If you have something planned that cannot be changed such as a pre-booked holiday, or a medical operation, you should let the CLT know as soon as possible so that this can be taken into account when the court fixes the date for the hearing. Once a date has been set for a hearing it is expected that the hearing will take place on that date unless something unforeseen occurs.

If you are concerned about getting time off work, you should let your employer know well in advance that you are going to be called as a witness. It is not your choice whether to go to court and you are fulfilling a public duty so your employer must give you time off work to go to court. You can show your employer the letter you receive from the PPS confirming that you are required to attend court as proof. If you still have difficulty, your employer can contact the PPS who can confirm that you are required to give evidence at court.

If you are ill on the day of the trial, and your illness is serious enough to prevent you from attending, you should contact the CLT as soon as possible. You should also obtain a medical certificate from your doctor. If your illness is likely to persist, you should inform the CLT so that alternative arrangements can be made for your evidence to be given to the court.

If you fail to attend court without good reason and your evidence is essential to the case the PPS will apply for an adjournment to allow you to give evidence at a later date. It is therefore very important that you make every effort to attend.



What should I consider or bring with me when going to court?

Make sure you leave plenty of time for the journey. The time you must attend court will be on your letter.

Plan to be at court for the whole day as you may have to wait a while before being called to give evidence.

Bring any papers you have about the case, including the letter asking you to attend court.

It is a good idea to bring something with you to read, as you may have to wait a while.

Is there anyone who can help explain things to me?

Before the day of the hearing you can contact the CLT. On the day of the case the PPS prosecutor will make every effort to introduce him or herself to you and explain what you can expect to happen at court. If after a while you have not been approached, you should make yourself known to the PPS representative.

In addition, volunteers from Witness Service or Young Witness Service (if you are under 18 years old), will be available if you wish, to support you while you wait to give evidence. They will also, if you wish, arrange for you to have a pre-trial familiarisation visit to the court in advance. These volunteers can explain the court process to you, but cannot discuss your evidence with you.

Witness Service is run by Victim Support NI, an independent charity, and Young Witness Service is run by the NSPCC. They are completely independent from police, Court Service and the PPS.



Can I wait in a different room from the Defendant and his or her family & friends?

In almost all courts, a separate room is available for you to wait in so that you do not have to wait beside the defendant and his or her family and friends. The volunteer from Witness Service or Young Witness Service, or the PPS prosecutor or a member of the court security staff will be able to tell you where this is.

Where do I wait at court?

When you arrive at court you should give the receptionist or member of court security staff the name of the defendant in the case you are to give evidence in. (Cases are listed under the defendant's name.) They will show you where to go. You can ask for Witness Service when you arrive at court.

Listen for your name or the name of the case being called.

If you have made a written statement and would like to see a copy before you give evidence, ask the PPS representative to give you a copy.

Sometimes a defendant pleads guilty on the day of trial. So you may be told at the last minute that your evidence is not needed.

Can I talk to anyone about the case?

You should not talk to anyone, especially other witnesses, about the evidence you will be giving before you go into the witness box. If you have discussed your evidence with other people, the accuracy of your personal recollection of events may be challenged.

You should not talk to anyone other than the police officer or PPS lawyer about your evidence until after the trial is over.



What measures are available to help me give evidence if I need them?

It is a matter for the courts whether to allow special measures to be used to assist a witness. To allow the use of special measures for a witness, a court needs to be satisfied that the quality of the witness's evidence would be diminished if such facilities were refused.

Special measures include the use of screens in court to shield the witness from the defendant, giving evidence by video recording or by live TV link, or, giving evidence in private in sexual cases or cases of witness intimidation. The PPS also works closely with our partner agencies including the Northern Ireland Court Service, Victim Support NI and NSPCC to help provide support at court. Other legal measures, such as witness anonymity, may be available where the court considers it necessary depending on the circumstances of the case.

Can I claim expenses?

You are entitled to claim certain expenses incurred through your attendance at the trial (travel expenses and a refreshment allowance). The CLT will send you documentation explaining how you can apply for witness expenses.

Is there anyone who can help me after the case is over?

Yes. The PPS will no longer be involved once the case is over, but voluntary services are available from agencies such as Victim Support NI or NSPCC.

The PPS 'Victims and Witnesses Policy' explains the above issues in more detail. Please contact the PPS if you would like a copy. Alternatively it is available on our website: www.ppsni.gov.uk



Getting in touch:

For further information about the PPS, please contact:

Departmental Records and Information Manager
Public Prosecution Service
 Belfast Chambers
 93 Chichester Street
 BELFAST
 BT1 3JR
 Tel: (028) 90 897100
 E-mail: info@ppsni.gsi.gov.uk
 Website: www.ppsni.gov.uk

Regional Offices:

Community Liaison Branch Belfast Region (Headquarters)

Belfast Chambers
 93 Chichester Street
 BELFAST
 BT1 3JR
 Tel: (028) 90 897070/1

Community Liaison Branch Southern Region

(temporarily based in Belfast)
 Belfast Chambers
 93 Chichester Street
 BELFAST
 BT1 3JR
 Tel: (028) 90 545928

Community Liaison Branch Eastern Region

Lisburn Chambers
 Linen Hill House
 23 Linenhall Street
 LISBURN, BT28 1FJ
 Tel: (028) 92 625509

Community Liaison Branch Northern Region

Ballymena Chambers
 4 Parkway
 BALLYMENA, BT43 5ET
 Tel: (028) 25 666563

Foyle Chambers

35 Limavady Road
 LONDONDERRY
 Co Londonderry, BT47 6LP
 Tel: (028) 71 340600

Community Liaison Branch

18 Lodge Road
 Coleraine, BT52 1MB
 Tel: (028) 70 340082

Community Liaison Branch Western Region

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 OMAGH, BT78 1BL
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