

Judicial Communications Office

Wednesday 7 September 2011

Press Statement

JUDGE PERMITS JOURNALISTS TO USE TWITTER FROM COURT

Mr Justice Gillen has today permitted journalists in Court to use Twitter to report on proceedings from the in trial of R v Haddock and others for the purposes of fair and accurate reporting.

This is the first time that journalists in Northern Ireland have been permitted to use live, text-based communications such as Twitter from Court. Mr Justice Gillen said that a fundamental aspect of the proper administration of justice is the principle of open justice. He added that fair and accurate reporting of court proceedings forms part of that principle. The judge recognised that there was significant public interest in this trial and for that reason he was content to permit the use of Twitter by journalists from within the courtroom.

Mr Justice Gillen warned journalists of the risks attached to using live, instantaneous communications from Court. He said it is possible that information, such as the name of a person not connected with this trial, may be given in court during oral evidence which, if publicised, could place a member of the public in real and immediate risk. While the Court may impose a reporting restriction order prohibiting publication of this information, the names may already have been tweeted from Court. Mr Justice Gillen acknowledged that the press in this jurisdiction invariably report responsibly on court proceedings but reminded them, however, of the need to be careful when reporting information about persons not before the court.

The permission to use Twitter or other live communications from Court relates to this trial only. It also only extends to journalists and not the wider public in court. The authorisation will be reviewed by Mr Justice Gillen should he become aware of instances of improper use which could adversely affect the proceedings or breach reporting restrictions. Where reporting restrictions orders have already been, or are, made, journalists will obviously be required to comply with them

ENDS

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NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The Lord Chief Justice will consider the use of Twitter and other live text-based forms of communication from court in genera when the results of the consultation by the Judicial Office in England and Wales are known next month. The Interim Practice Guidance to the Judiciary in E&W and the Consultation Paper can be found at www.judiciary.gov.uk.

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