

Press release

3 March 2010



PUTTING THE CASE FOR A HIGHER COUNTY COURT JURISDICTION

The Northern Ireland Court Service is launching a consultation today into a proposal to raise the limit for bringing cases to the County Court from £15,000 to a new £50,000 ceiling. Other options are an increase to £25,000 or an unlimited jurisdiction.

The consultation exercise is also seeking views on the financial limits of the District Judges' Court and Small Claims Courts. The County Court jurisdiction was last raised 16 years ago.

Ministry of Justice Minister, Bridget Prentice MP, said **"This is an important issue and we felt it best to launch the consultation now so that the new Northern Ireland Justice Minister will have the opportunity to take an early decision on a matter which could greatly improve access to justice for court users in Northern Ireland"**.

"The proposal to raise the jurisdictional level would mean cases better suited to a County Court hearing being directed away from the High Court. This would speed up the flow of cases coming to both venues and increase access to justice at a more local level."

ENDS

Notes for the Editor

1. The main work of County Courts in Northern Ireland is the resolution of disputes in contract and tort (eg: where a civil wrong is committed for which a claim of compensation may be sought) up to a maximum value of £15,000.
2. Most of these cases are claims for compensation for personal injury eg arising from road traffic accidents. The current position is that in cases where more than £15,000 is claimed the matter must be dealt with by the High Court sitting in Belfast.

3. The overall aim of the Court Service proposal is to ensure that the jurisdictional limit of the County Courts is set at the most appropriate level for the cases being heard. Such a move would ensure a more efficient flow of business and improve both access to justice and value for money.
4. An increase in County Court business would be of benefit to plaintiffs, defendants, witnesses, the legal profession and other court users in that an enhanced level of access to justice would be possible at a range of convenient court venues across Northern Ireland.
5. The exercise ends on 26th May 2010 and copies of the consultation paper can be accessed from the Northern Ireland Court Service website at: www.courtsni.gov.uk or by writing to:

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