

## 'Over-optimistic' timetable for court reforms, says Commons committee

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**The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has published a report on the court and tribunals reforms, in which it labels the timetable 'over-optimistic' and says that HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) again has fallen behind schedule on the reforms. The PAC also states that the HMCTS has failed to consider the impact changes made in the court and tribunals have had on vulnerable users, and warns that plans to increase police numbers could spike demand, putting greater strain on services that already are stretched. John Gould, senior partner at Russell-Cooke LLP comments on the report, suggesting it might be time 'to go back to the drawing board to re-plan the rest of the strategy'.**

Key findings and recommendations in [the report](#) include:

- the HMCTS should write to the PAC once it has finalised its next business case to set out proposed alternative arrangements if plans cannot be achieved within current timeframes
- HMCTS and the Ministry of Justice should by July 2020 demonstrate to the PAC how evaluations will influence implementation of future services
- HMCTS has failed to adequately consider the impact of previous court systems, and the PAC recommends that HMTCS set out what it will do to ensure the rights of vulnerable people are considered in future decisions on court closures
- despite improvement in HMCTS' communication with stakeholders, many still feel they are not listened to, and the PAC recommends the HMCTS sets out what it will do to shift its stakeholder engagement from broadcasting information to genuinely listening and responding to feedback

Government track record 'not good'

Gould commented:

'The timely introduction of technology was always a key part of a strategy which involved large scale court closures. In the context of greatly reduced legal aid budgets, the effects of delay are likely to go far beyond a postponement of improvements and are a further blow to a struggling system. The government's track record in introducing complex IT systems on time and on budget is not good which might have suggested caution. Perhaps the modernisation was born not so much from ambition as desperation to find ways of dealing with far fewer courts and much reduced funded professional representation. As a gamble, it doesn't look as though it's paying off. It might be time to consolidate the improvements in systems which have been successful and go back to the drawing board to re-plan the rest of the strategy.'

*Written by Aslak Ringhus.*

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*The views expressed by our Legal Analysis interviewees are not necessarily those of the proprietor.*

Source: [Court reforms slow to check impact of changes](#)

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