

State of the courts: solicitors' views on the court infrastructure in 2025

September 2025



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Foreword

Justice is a vital public service, as essential to our society as schools or hospitals. Yet underinvestment has left too many courts struggling to deliver for the community. When buildings fall into disrepair, technology fails and cases are delayed, people are denied timely access to justice.

In 2022, we surveyed solicitors about their experiences of courts and tribunals. Solicitors highlighted systemic issues of delays, deteriorating buildings and unreliable technology. Three years on, we repeated the survey and the results are clear: the same issues continue to plague our courts.

Nearly two-thirds of solicitors have experienced cases being delayed, adjourned, or moved because of the poor state of court buildings. Respondents described unsafe and inaccessible facilities that undermine confidence and trust in the system and leave clients in limbo.

Court technology should be an enabler, not a barrier. Yet one in five solicitors now report that the technology available is 'not at all' fit for purpose. Unreliable and low-quality video hearing systems, uncertainty about what technology will be available, and a lack of power sockets waste valuable hours, strain public resources and frustrate solicitors, judges and parties alike.

Disabled solicitors and clients are disproportionately affected. Broken lifts and inaccessible buildings mean that not everyone can participate on equal terms. A justice system that excludes people cannot be considered fair.

It's not just our members saying this: the Justice Committee's report on the County Court concluded earlier this year that "it is unacceptable that the court estate has been

allowed to enter such disrepair due to years of capital underfunding".¹ Meanwhile, the Crown Court backlog has grown to more than 76,000 cases as of March this year.²

There are some positive signs that point us to what the Government must do. Solicitors reported positive experiences with court staff and highlighted some courts with better conditions – an indication of what is achievable across the country. While we welcome the Government's increased investment in court maintenance and building this year, it will take more than a one-off increase to address the £1.3 billion maintenance backlog.³

The solution is clear. The government must make a sustained investment in both the physical court estate and in reliable technology to ease the backlogs and ensure our courts can better serve the public. Fixing our courts is achievable and a vital step towards restoring our justice system.

Richard Atkinson
President
The Law Society



¹ Justice Committee, *Work of the County Court* (HC 2024-25 677) para 99.

² Ministry of Justice, 'Criminal court statistics quarterly: January to March 2025' (GOV.UK, 26 June 2025).

³ National Audit Office, *Maintaining public service facilities* (HC 2024-25 544) 23.

1. Introduction

In 2022, the Law Society surveyed solicitors about their court and tribunal experiences. The findings highlighted systemic issues including delays, cancellations and deteriorating court conditions, which collectively undermined access to justice and deprived the community of a vital public service.

With increasing court and tribunal backlogs and continued reports from members of issues with the court estate, The Law Society repeated the survey in May 2025 to evaluate progress and capture solicitors' recent experiences and suggestions for improving court accessibility.

The survey was distributed to 10,200 solicitors with Higher Rights of Audience and to relevant Law Society committees, yielding 293 responses. Respondents included solicitors employed by organisations representing people who engage with the justice system, such as victims, defendants or witnesses, as well as those working in third sector organisations, public service bodies, HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS), the Ministry of Justice, and the judiciary.

The report provides a comparative analysis of the 2022 and 2025 findings at both a national and regional level, highlighting statistically significant changes and trends. These findings will support the Law Society's policy work aimed at improving the functioning and accessibility of the justice system.

2. Executive summary

With responses from almost 300 solicitors, the results show little improvement in the state of the courts in either the physical buildings, technology, resulting delays, or the experiences of disabled solicitors.

This is despite the National Audit Office recognising that well-maintained government properties are more cost effective and functional.⁴ Similarly, the Justice Committee has noted that, where capital investment has been made, it has resulted in more positive experiences and greater accessibility measures.⁵

Physical buildings

- The same proportion of solicitors in 2025 as in 2022 considered the physical state of the court fit for purpose only 'to some extent' (55%) or 'to a large extent' (17%).
- The largest increase in the percentage considering the courts' physical infrastructure to be fit for purpose was in the Midlands, increasing by 15 percentage points from 65% to 80% in 2025. The largest decrease was found in the North East, which dropped from 83% in 2022 to 62% in 2025.
- Solicitors mentioned issues with Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) at Doncaster Magistrates Court, Preston and Harrow.
- While HMCTS publishes capital funding figures and has released a ten-year estate strategy, more data is needed to be able to confidently connect recent investments with regional results.
- Most solicitors held positive views on feeling physically secure whilst attending court (72%) and physically safe from harm (68%).
- In comparison, a smaller proportion of solicitors (54%) were able to talk confidentially with their clients, (e.g. using sufficiently soundproofed conference rooms), and felt physically comfortable

⁴ National Audit Office, *Maintaining public service facilities* (HC 2024-25 544) para 1.4.

⁵ Justice Committee, *Work of the County Court* (HC 2024-25 677) para 91.

whilst attending court, reflecting issues with heating, air conditioning, water and drinks facilities (49%).

- The lack of private and properly equipped consultation rooms, the poor building conditions and maintenance (dirty, neglected, in disrepair, filthy) and building temperatures (too hot or too cold) were associated with poor court experiences.

Technology

- A similar proportion of solicitors in 2025 as in 2022 considered the technology at court fit for purpose 'to some extent' (64% compared to 66% in 2022).
- The proportion of solicitors finding the technology fit for purpose 'to a large extent' increased from 13% in 2022 to 16% in 2025.
- The largest increase in the percentage considering the courts' technology fit for purpose was in the Midlands, increasing by six percentage points (from 79% to 85% in 2025). The largest decrease was found in the South East, which dropped from 78% in 2022 to 70% in 2025.
- There were mixed views on access to appropriate technologies whilst at court, such as hearing loops, with 49% of solicitors giving a negative response, and 39% being positive. Poor connection, poor quality of virtual hearings and broken or poor-quality equipment were mentioned. The lack of working plugs in both conference rooms and the court was a concern for many advocates.
- One-third of solicitors with cases moved to a remote hearing considered this inappropriate to the type of case. Solicitors highlighted issues that can reduce the fairness and effectiveness of hearings, including: technical and logistical failures; lack of confidentiality and access to clients, particularly where defendants are in custody; and specific barriers for vulnerable clients.

Delays

- Almost two-thirds of solicitors had experienced delays in cases being heard due to the state of the courts (63%), with cases being adjourned (46%), transferred to a different venue (36% - up from 26% in 2022), or being held remotely (24%).
- These findings echo the Justice Committee's report on the Work of the County Court, which noted that "[t]he condition of the estate, with its collapsing roofs and reliance on buckets, exacerbates delays in County Court hearings", adding that "[t]he cumulative effect is a system increasingly unable to deliver timely outcomes, with staff, already stretched, occupied by maintenance issues."⁶

Experiences of disabled solicitors

- Disabled solicitors were more likely to report the physical state of the courts as being 'not at all' fit for purpose (45%) compared to those with no disability (25%). These solicitors reported inadequate and inaccessible facilities and a lack of reasonable adjustments being made.
- 32% of disabled solicitors reported the technology being 'not at all' fit for purpose, compared to 19% of solicitors without a disability. Solicitors raised that some hearing loops did not work and that remote hearings were not being sufficiently used to support accessibility.

⁶ Justice Committee, *Work of the County Court* (HC 2024-25 677) para 92.

3. Findings

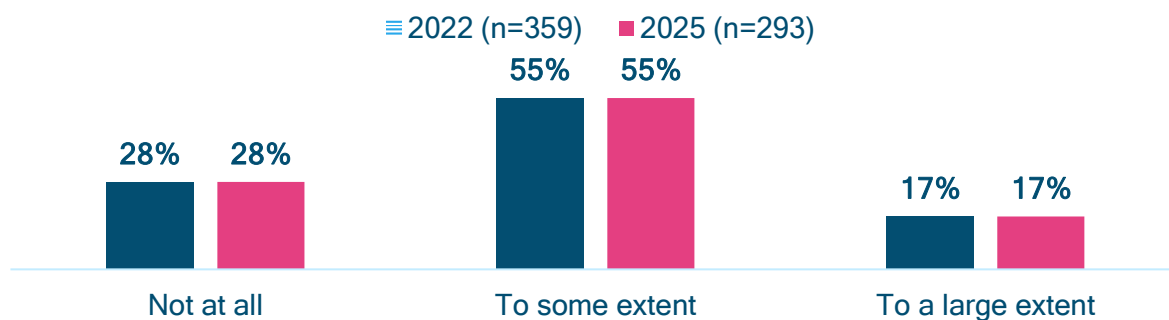
Fit for purpose?

There has been little change in solicitors' views on whether the courts' physical and digital infrastructure are fit for purpose since the 2022 survey. Reflecting on their most recent court experience, the same proportion of solicitors considered the physical buildings fit for purpose 'to a large extent' in both 2025 as in 2022.

The National Audit Office noted in its report on public service facilities that "[w]ell-maintained government properties are more cost effective, less likely to break down, more valuable and longer lasting than poorly maintained buildings", with benefits to the public, employees, and the government alike.⁷

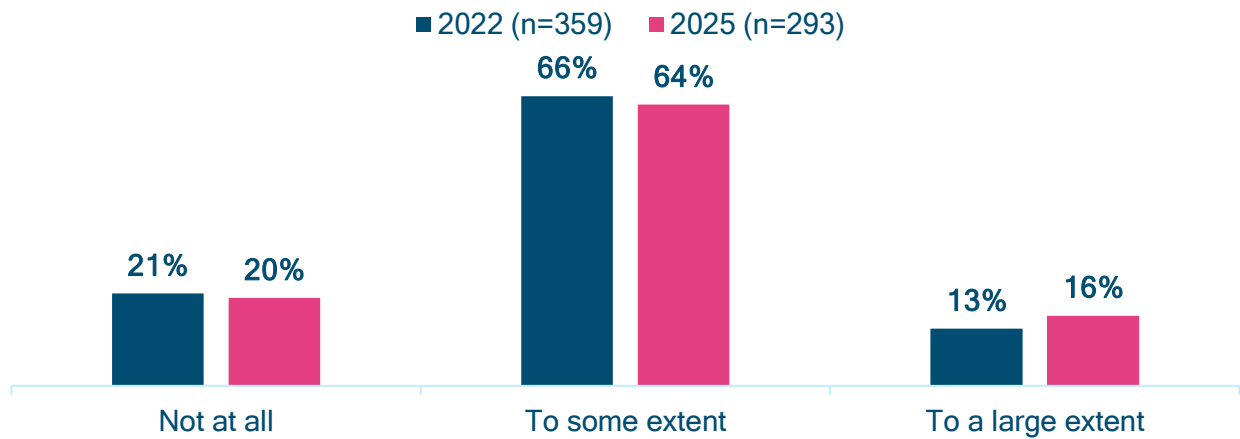
A significantly smaller proportion of solicitors with a disability considered the physical state of the court to be fit for purpose, 'to a large extent' (5%), compared to those without a disability (19%). Similarly, in relation to on-site technology, only 3% of solicitors with a disability considered the technology to be fit for purpose 'to a large extent', compared to 19% of solicitors without a disability.

Chart one: Thinking about your most recent court visit, to what extent do you think the courts' estate is fit for purpose in terms of physical building? (n=361)



⁷ National Audit Office, *Maintaining public service facilities* (HC 2024-25 544) para 1.4.

Chart two: To what extent do you think the courts' estate is fit for purpose in terms of the technology provided on site? (e.g., hybrid cases, open streaming) (n=359)



Regional perspectives

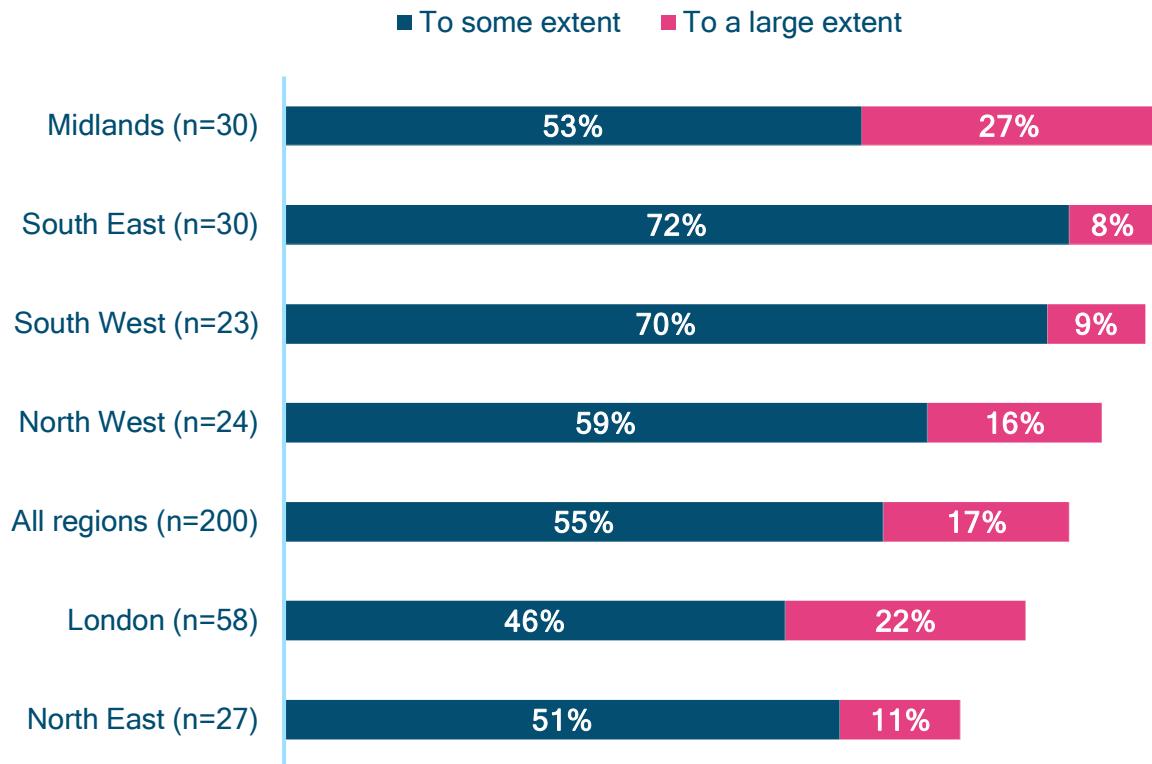
The survey also enabled a comparison of differences in regional results. While HMCTS publishes capital funding figures and has released a ten-year estate strategy, consistent with the Justice Committee's recommendations in relation to the County Court,⁸ more data is needed to be able to confidently connect recent improvements with region-level outcomes.

A higher proportion of solicitors in the Midlands (80%), in the South East (80%) and the South West (79%) considered the physical buildings fit for purpose 'to some extent' or 'to a large extent', compared to solicitors with court experiences in London (68%) and the North East (62%).

The largest improvement in the proportion reporting the physical court estate was fit for purpose 'to a large extent' was in relation to solicitors with court experiences in London, from 9% in 2022 to 22% in 2025. The largest decrease was found in relation to solicitors in the North East, 22% in 2022, compared to 11% in 2025 and the North West, from 24% in 2022, to 16% in 2025.

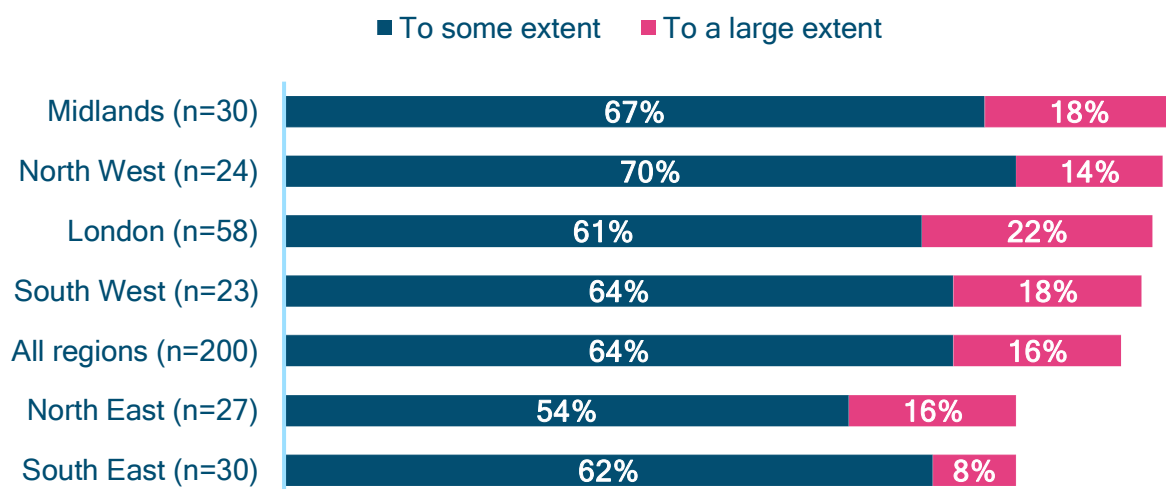
⁸ Justice Committee, *Work of the County Court* (HC 2024-25 677) paras 101-102.

Chart three: Again, thinking about your most recent court visit, to what extent do you think the court estate is fit for purpose in terms of the physical building? (n=361)



In relation to on-site technologies (e.g. hybrid cases, open streaming), a higher proportion of solicitors with court experiences in the Midlands (85%) and the North West (84%) reported the technologies as being fit for purpose, either ‘to some extent’ or ‘to a large extent’, compared to solicitors in the North East (70%) and the South East (70%).

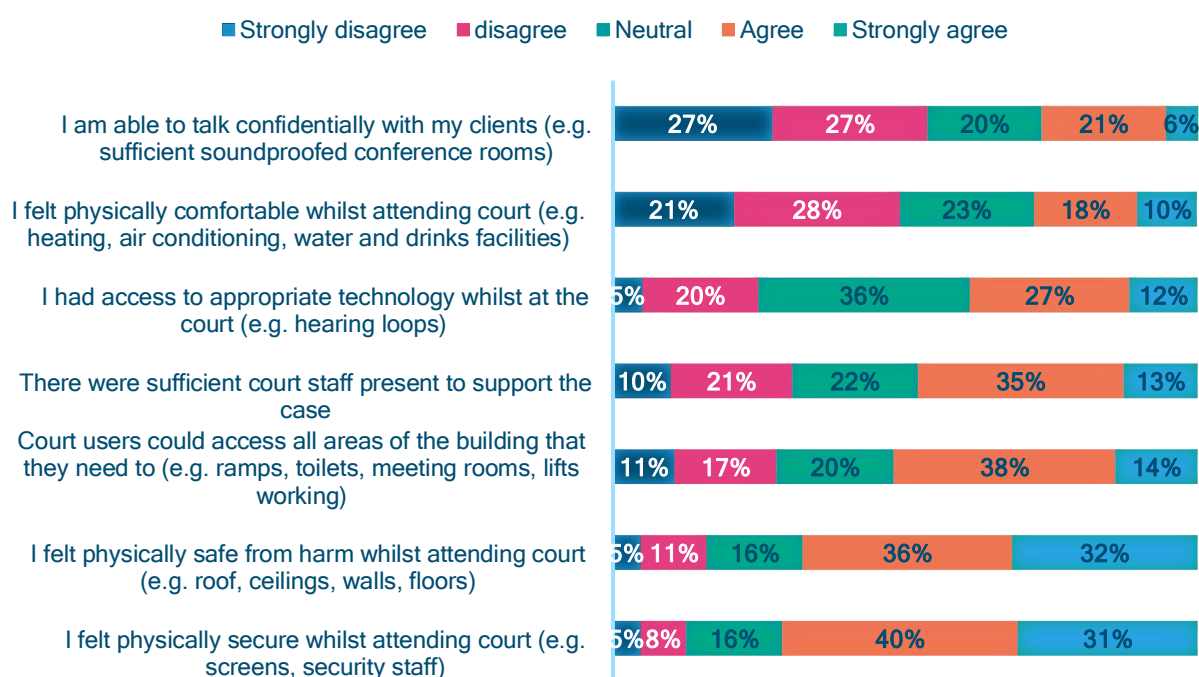
Chart four: To what extent do you think the courts’ estate is fit for purpose in terms of the technology provided on site? (e.g., hybrid cases, open streaming) (n=359)



Solicitors were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about their most recent court experience.

Solicitors' views were more positive in relation to feeling physically secure whilst attending court (e.g. screens, security staff) and feeling physically safe from harm whilst attending court (e.g. the condition of the roof, ceilings, walls, floors), and were more negative in relation to feeling physically comfortable whilst attending court (e.g. heating, air conditioning, water and drinks facilities) and being able to talk confidentially with their clients (e.g. sufficiently soundproofed conference rooms).

Chart five: Thinking about your most recent court attendance, to what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statements?



There was less than a one percent change in average scores for each statement between 2022 and 2025. The only significant difference between 2022 and 2025 responses was in relation to the proportion either strongly agreeing or agreeing that ‘court users could access all areas of the building that they need to (e.g. ramps, toilets, meeting rooms, lifts working), from 47% in 2022 to 52% in 2025, an improvement of five percentage points.

Regional differences can be found in the [Appendix](#).

Perspectives differed significantly between government (civil servants, HMCTS or MoJ employees and judicial office holders) and those representing clients (solicitors, barristers, advocates, lawyers and third sector employees), with a higher proportion of the former agreeing to the statements around having access to appropriate technologies (54% of government employees compared to 35% of those representing clients) and being able to talk confidentially with clients, 33% compared to 25%.

Good court experiences

Around three-quarters (72%) of solicitors indicated overall, the physical state of the court was, either 'to some extent' or 'to a large extent', fit for purpose.

When asked for details of positive court experiences, 37 respondents left a comment. These comments focused on:

- **Helpful, diligent and friendly staff** - including security staff and witness support staff.
- **Facilities and cleanliness** - courts being clean and well maintained.
- **Efficiency and management** - efficient case listings and management of cases.

Comments included:

"Birmingham Civil and Family Justice Centre: Dedicated and diligent Security staff & HMCTS Staff (including managers) doing their very best in deteriorating conditions".

Birmingham Civil and Family Justice Centre

"Milton Keynes Magistrates Court is generally very clean and well looked after. The toilet facilities are also clean. The coffee shop is always clean and provides amazing food - cannot get this at other courts".

Employed by an organisation that represents people who use the justice system, such as victims, defendants or witnesses

"Crewe, Chester and Warrington Magistrates Courts. An absolute pleasure to attend. Efficient listing and management of cases. The ability to discuss with the prosecution and legal advisors who aren't overloaded and can manage the case load".

Employed by an organisation that represents people who use the justice system, such as victims, defendants or witnesses

Ratings for all the statements listed above were combined to produce a composite measure for each court mentioned. The tables below list the highest and lowest rated courts. While HMCTS publishes capital funding figures and has released a ten-year estate strategy, more data is needed to be able to confidently connect recent investments with regional results.

Higher scoring courts

Chart six: Higher scoring courts

Highest rated (35/35)	Grimsby Magistrates
	IAC Birmingham
	Liverpool Crown
	Salisbury
Second highest rated (34/35)	Ipswich Criminal Court
	Lancaster
	Manchester County Court
	Nottingham Magistrates
Third highest rated (33/35)	Bristol Magistrates Court
	Doncaster Crown Court
	High Court admin Division
	Ipswich Magistrates Court
	Royal Courts of Justice
	Cheltenham

Comments included:

“A purpose-built courthouse with multiple private conference rooms. A spacious concourse to avoid conflict between clients and others. Personable and central presence of security. Free car park with an accessible entrance”.

Grimsby Magistrates Court, Employed by a third sector organisation

“There is an obvious need in terms of maintenance. There are aspects of the building that require decorating and upgrading. However, building functions efficiently on a daily basis”.

Liverpool Crown, Civil servant or public servant from another government department or local government

“Bristol Civil Justice Centre and Salisbury County Court are the gold standard, with nothing to fault. Southampton Combined Court and Bristol Magistrates Court are also excellent. Gloucester County Court is also very good, in terms of sufficient private meeting rooms.”

Employed by a third sector organisation

“Clean, tidy and good service from the staff”.

IAC Birmingham. Employed by an organisation that represents people who use the justice system, such as victims, defendants or witnesses

Poor court experiences

In 2025, 17% of respondents reported the physical state of the courts were 'not at all' fit for purpose, the same proportion as 2022. When asked for details of negative court experiences 258 respondents left a comment, the most frequently mentioned issues were:

- **Lack of consultation rooms** – or where rooms were available, these were often locked, not soundproofed and poorly equipped (i.e. too small, not enough chairs, no desk).

*“Oxford Magistrates had four conference rooms which had been built using flimsy plywood”.
Employed by an organisation that represents people who use the justice system, such as victims, defendants or witnesses*

*“Not enough conference rooms, nowhere to work while waiting other than putting your laptop on your knees”.
Employed by an organisation that represents people who use the justice system, such as victims, defendants or witnesses*

*“One small room often houses multiple witnesses”.
Freelance prosecutor*

*“In the cells there is no protection from possibly violent clients in tiny consultation rooms.”
Defence lawyer*

- **Poor building conditions and maintenance** – court buildings were viewed as being 'ram shackled and at best neglected', in a 'poor state of repair', and 'on their last legs'. Despite the best efforts of cleaning staff, courts never looked clean and were viewed as being 'in a desperate need for repair and modernisation'.

In some courts, issues went beyond disrepair, structural issues were making the court dangerous. Incidence of RAAC in ceiling, asbestos in the roofing and radon were cited.

*“It is without hyperbole that I describe this court centre as a disgrace and not fit for purpose. If it wasn't for the excellent court staff holding everything together, this centre couldn't function. To give an example, the court had to close early for two days within the last twelve months or so. This was because dead and rotting seagulls were within the roof insulation. The court had to close because maggots were literally raining down onto the lobby.”
South Shields. Employed by an organisation that represents people who use the justice system, such as victims, defendants or witnesses*

“The robing room had several sewage leaks. The sewage pipe above the room leaked sewage down into the room, spraying personal items, carpet and desks etc. This was a significant health risk which led to several counsel and solicitors being very ill. The room was eventually closed but only after a further leak and is to be repaired at some point, but it took too long to deal with after the first incident.

“We are all now crammed into one tiny room that does not have enough desks or power sockets. It's also floor to ceiling windows so boiling hot in the sun but freezing cold when the sun isn't shining because the heating doesn't work either. You wouldn't expect defendants in cells to put up with this but sadly counsel and solicitors are expected to just put up with it”.

Hull Crown Court. Employed by an organisation that represents people who use the justice system, such as victims, defendants or witnesses

Issues with Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) were mentioned in relation to Doncaster Magistrates' Court, Preston, Lancashire and Harrow:

“The Magistrates` Court has RAAC in the ceiling. Nobody has sought to fix it so the Magistrates` Court has decamped to one half of the Crown Court (the other half occupied by the Coroner`s Court). If I am not in the one available Court with a dock, I am operating in an office room being used as a courtroom with a kitchen as my retiring room”.

Doncaster Crown Court. Judicial Office Holder

“Heating failed Christmas 2023, collapsing trial and retrial October 2024 at another Crown Court. Only at St Albans due to the concrete issues at Harrow. Client in custody throughout. Client acquitted”.

Employed by an organisation that represents people who use the justice system, such as victims, defendants or witnesses

“I have a client who has been committed for sentence to Harrow Crown Court whose case has been adjourned six times firstly due to a lack of pre-sentence report caused by staff sickness within the Probation Service and then due to a lack of court time /capacity caused by the continued closure of Harrow Crown Court due to it being unsafe (RAAC concrete in the roof).”

Employed by an organisation that represents people who use the justice system, such as victims, defendants or witnesses

- **No heating/air conditioning** – A lack of working air conditioning and heating was reported. In winter it was ‘freezing’, in the summer ‘boiling’. Staff at Snaresbrook Crown Court had been unable to turn off the heating until May, making the court “extremely hot and making it difficult to concentrate”.

“We couldn’t sit recently at Croydon CC as temp was too hot in court”.

Employed by an organisation that represents people who use the justice system, such as victims, defendants or witnesses

Other issues mentioned related to serious physical infrastructure problems that hinder both functionality and dignity. Solicitors reported there being not enough courtrooms, and existing courts were often found to be inadequate — cold, uncomfortable, and overcrowded.

Structural issues such as broken ceilings, the presence of RAAC, asbestos, and radon, as well as cells that regularly flood with excrement, pose significant health and safety risks. Broken lifts, unmarked slopes, missing grab rails, and non-functioning audio loops compromise the accessibility of court buildings.

Basic amenities are lacking, with no drink machines, water supplies or rest areas available for court users. Solicitors reported toilets are often in disrepair – dilapidated, out of order, poorly serviced, and unpleasant. These conditions reflect a wider neglect of the physical environment, undermining the justice system and the wellbeing of those who work in or rely on it.

Operational challenges within the court system are compounded by staffing and security issues, with many courts lacking sufficient personnel, having no security presence, or dealing with either inadequate or overly aggressive security measures. Listing practices are similarly strained, with

overburdened schedules, multiple simultaneous listings, and a mix of remands, walk-ins. These systemic inefficiencies contribute to a working environment that is demoralising, leaving staff and court users feeling undervalued and at risk.

Poor experiences of on-site technology

In 2025, 20% of respondents reported the on-site technology in the courts was 'not at all' fit for purpose, a similar proportion to the 21% reported in 2022.

Issues listed included:

- **Poor connection** – Wi-Fi issues
- **Poor quality virtual hearings** or virtual hearings not possible
- **Technology not working** – broken, poor quality equipment
- **Lack of plugs sockets** in courtrooms and in conference rooms
- **Lack of technology** or missing technology
- **Software issues** – problems with the Common Platform or Clickshare
- **Judicial inconsistency** - no use of electronic bundle/when virtual hearings are used
- **Unknown technology** present or lack of support with technology
- **No link booths**, no conference rooms, issues with links to prisons
- **Other** – Impact on clients, poor interoperability with Apple products, too many listings.

Comments included:

“Hardly any of the desks in court have accessible working sockets. The robing room and solicitors' rooms don't have enough sockets”.

Employed by an organisation that represents people who use the justice system, such as victims, defendants or witnesses

“The [Cloud Video Platform (CVP)] architecture is rubbish in the Magistrates Court and could be easily improved with investment in laptops and headphones for the magistrates/judges and court staff. This prevents there from people having to shout over the video link on a delay which leads to frustration and unclear exchanges of words”.

Westminster Magistrates Court. Employed by an organisation that represents people who use the justice system, such as victims, defendants or witnesses

“How are you supposed to work digitally without being able to plug your device in?”

Employed by an organisation that represents people who use the justice system, such as victims, defendants or witnesses

“Lack of ability in the mags court to appear via CVP. If this were to be a blanket allowance for the defence (as there is for the prosecution and probation!) then a lot less delay and issues would take place. Phones into the cells only work on occasion which is problematic”.

Employed by an organisation that represents people who use the justice system, such as victims, defendants or witnesses

“The IT does not connect - the monitors on the bench are broken or have leads missing. There are all sorts of gadgets on the bench with no indication what they are for or how to use them And - not enough available technology to conduct video only or hybrid hearings”.

Judicial Office Holder

“There is insufficient video technology in court rooms. The systems are not well supported. Often the quality of sound or vision is poor. There is only limited capacity, erratically provided, to play electronic recordings”.

Judicial Office Holder

Lower scoring courts

Chart seven: Lower scoring courts

Third lowest rated (9/35)	North Staffordshire Magistrates
	Folkestone Magistrates
	Thames Magistrates
	Ipswich
	South Sheilds
	Manchester Crown Square
Second lowest rated (8/35)	Leeds
	Swindon Crown / Magistrates
Lowest rated (7/35)	Uxbridge Magistrates
	Manchester Magistrates

Comments included:

“The buildings are literally crumbling. Manchester Magistrates Court has a rat infestation. The cells regularly become overwhelmed with vans queued up outside and suspects having to urinated in bags. The whole criminal court estate is not fit for purpose.

"The click share rarely works. The video link system with the prison rarely if ever allows for a pre and post court conference. The prosecution papers are rarely uploaded on time and there are zero consequences when they are not, so the system has been allowed to collapse”.

Manchester Magistrates. Employed by an organisation that represents people who use the justice system, such as victims, defendants or witnesses

“A few examples, no one at front desk as ushers are stretched, no cafes which used to be in every court, The only plugs for laptop users are at the front of court.

“Swindon is not disability compliant, common heating difficulties, old, tired, graffitied buildings, frequent issues with late prisoners, frequent problems with video links, interpreters, late service of prosecution material, Trials and courts being cancelled frequently with often no notice.

“There is more but most court users have to make great efforts to make things work for very little reward. It is very demoralising.”

Swindon Crown/Magistrates Court. Employed by an organisation that represents people who use the justice system, such as victims, defendants or witnesses

“Old, lack of infrastructure, not conducive with the digital age.

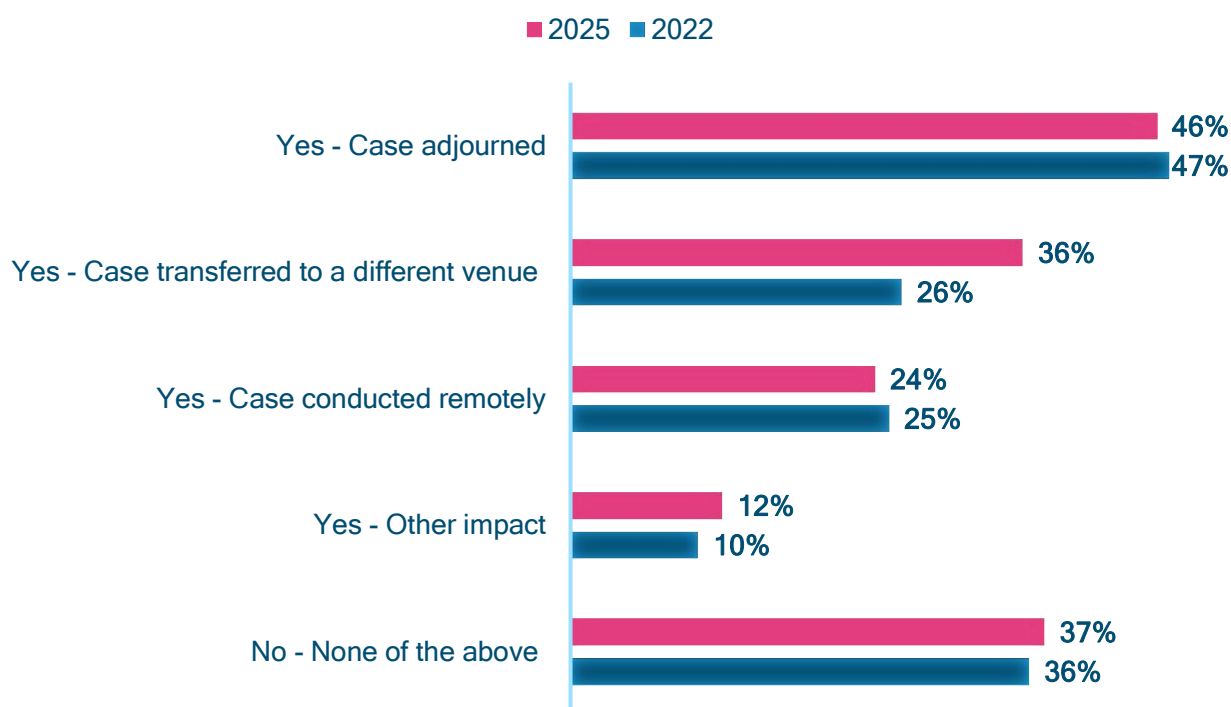
“Intermittent internet, common platform is not fit for purpose. lack of internet, poor state of repair.”

Uxbridge, employed by an organisation that represents people who use the justice system, such as victims, defendants or witnesses

Court delays

Around two-thirds (63%) of respondents had experienced delays in cases being heard due to the state of the court within the past 12 months (62% in 2022). These findings are consistent with the Justice Committee’s report on the Work of the County Court, which noted that “[t]he condition of the estate, with its collapsing roofs and reliance on buckets, exacerbates delays in County Court hearings”. The Committee added that “[t]he cumulative effect is a system increasingly unable to deliver timely outcomes, with staff, already stretched, occupied by maintenance issues.”⁹

Chart eight: Have you experienced delays in cases being heard due to the state of the court during the last 12 months, and what, if any, were the impacts?



Other impacts noted by solicitors included a ‘failure to get one hour hearing for more than six months in the family court’, the impacts on children of huge delays, a prisoner with impaired mobility unable to access the cells, a ‘defendant not produced due to a misunderstanding and trial proceeded in absence’. There were also delays associated with interpreters, including interpreters not being booked, not attending, or being the wrong gender for case.

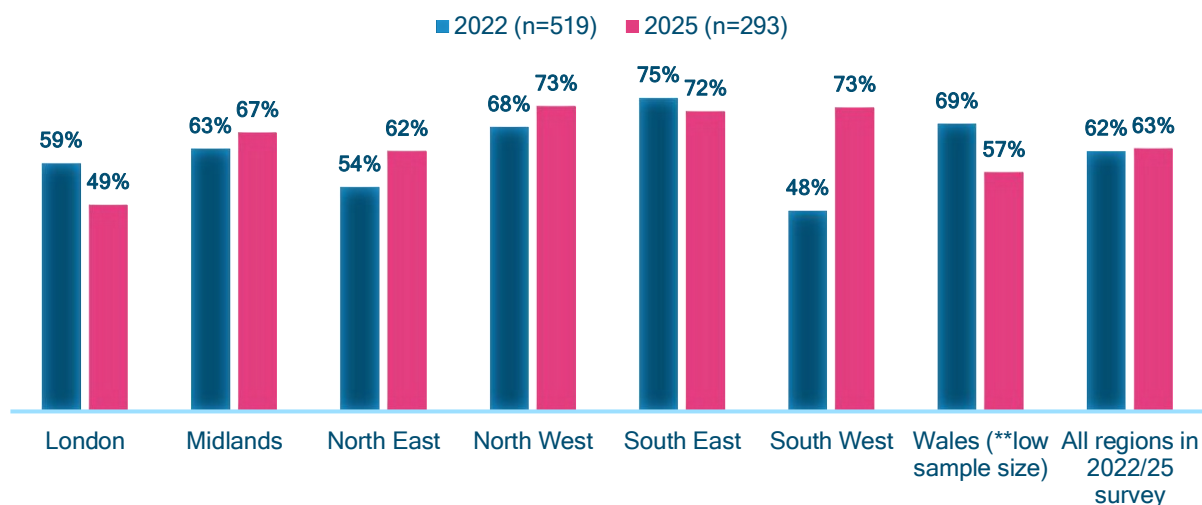
In 2025, a smaller percentage of solicitors in London and the South East reported experiencing delays compared to the 2022 survey. In other regions, delays were more prevalent in 2025 compared to 2022. Regional comparisons should be treated with some caution.

The National Audit Office’s report on *Reducing the backlog in the Crown Court* notes that the case mix is different between regions, so a direct comparison of regional performance does not allow for a direct comparison.¹⁰ Instead, the data may help to identify regional challenges.

⁹ Justice Committee, *Work of the County Court* (HC 2024-25 677) para 92.

¹⁰ National Audit Office, *Reducing the backlog in the Crown Court* (HC 2024-25 634) para 1.7.

Chart nine: Percentage of solicitors in region experiencing a court delay in 2022 and 2025



Courts in London, Harrow, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield, and Swindon were among the most frequently mentioned for delays.

The predominance of London is likely to reflect the higher number of solicitors from the London region participating in the survey, making up 30% of survey respondents.

Remote hearings

Where cases had been moved to a remote hearing (24%), one-third of solicitors considered this inappropriate for the type of case. Remote hearings were considered inappropriate where the defendant is in custody, as prisons often fail to produce individuals on time and do not consistently allow for essential pre- or post-hearing consultations.

Technical and logistical failures are common for remote hearings, including poor sound quality, dropped connections, and delays in virtual lobbies, all of which disrupt proceedings. Confidentiality and client access may also be compromised, with limited or no facilities for private consultations and clients frequently unable to hear or follow the hearing.

These limitations reduce the fairness and effectiveness of the process – remote trials can be perceived to be less serious, especially by litigants in person, and face-to-face interaction is often considered vital for challenging evidence and engaging meaningfully. Constructive discussions with the prosecution are also more difficult to conduct remotely.

Vulnerable clients, including those with mental health issues or requiring interpreters, face additional barriers, making remote hearings particularly challenging and, in some cases, unsuitable.

“Clients need to be confident in the system - remote hearings mean that there is not enough time to spend with the client, the system sometimes doesn't work, necessitating delay”.
Employed by an organisation that represents people who use the justice system, such as victims, defendants or witnesses

“Remote hearings are never helpful in children’s cases, it makes them seem less serious, it leads to delay and less chance of agreement being reached. People can't use the technology

so there are more adjourned hearings”.
Consultant solicitor

Disabled solicitors’ experiences of the courts

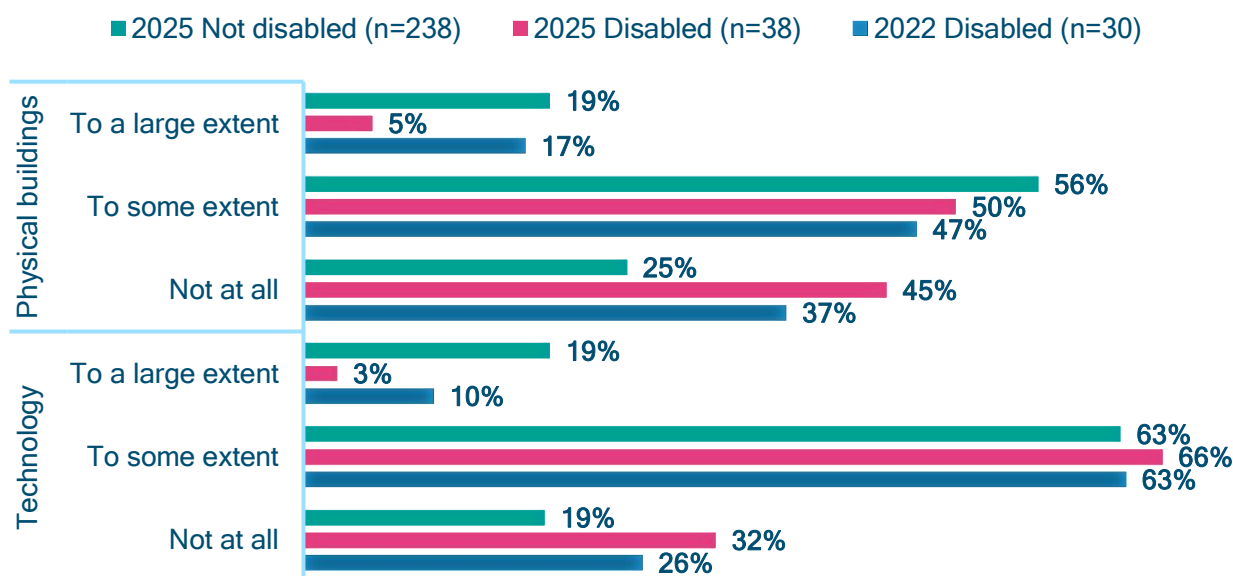
Disabled solicitors (defined by the Equality Act 2010) were more likely to report the physical state of the courts as being not at all fit for purpose (45%) compared to those with no disability (25%).

The same pattern was observed in relation to court technologies: 32% of disabled solicitors reported the technology being ‘not at all’ fit for purpose, compared to 19% of solicitors without a disability.

The proportion of disabled solicitors in 2025 reporting the physical buildings and/or the technology being fit for purpose ‘to a large extent’ is smaller than reported by this group in 2022.

These findings add weight to the recent independent review commissioned by the Victims’ Commissioner, which found that disabled victims are denied equal access to justice by physically inaccessible court buildings and a lack of reasonable adjustments, including issues with remote hearings.¹¹

Chart ten: Extent to which disabled solicitors consider the court physical and technological infrastructure to be fit for purpose? (n=306)



Comments from disabled solicitors included:

“There are steps through the court room limiting disabled access. There are insufficient consultation rooms. The deaf hearing loop assistance didn't work”.

¹¹ Victims’ Commissioner for England and Wales, [Disabled victims’ experiences of criminal justice systems: A systematic literature review](#), 14.

Employed by an organisation that represents people who use the justice system, such as victims, defendants or witnesses

“Lacking any real facilities for disabled people (of whom I am one). Security staff will not intervene if a situation arises unless you are court staff. No separate toilets for lawyers - just prosecuted one and then you have to use same toilet. Uncaring list offices - will not answer in person or on the phone. [District judges (DJs)] go for breaks and expect us to continue working in the meantime. Some DJs will not allow us to drink from water bottles - even though we are hot/tired/exhausted.

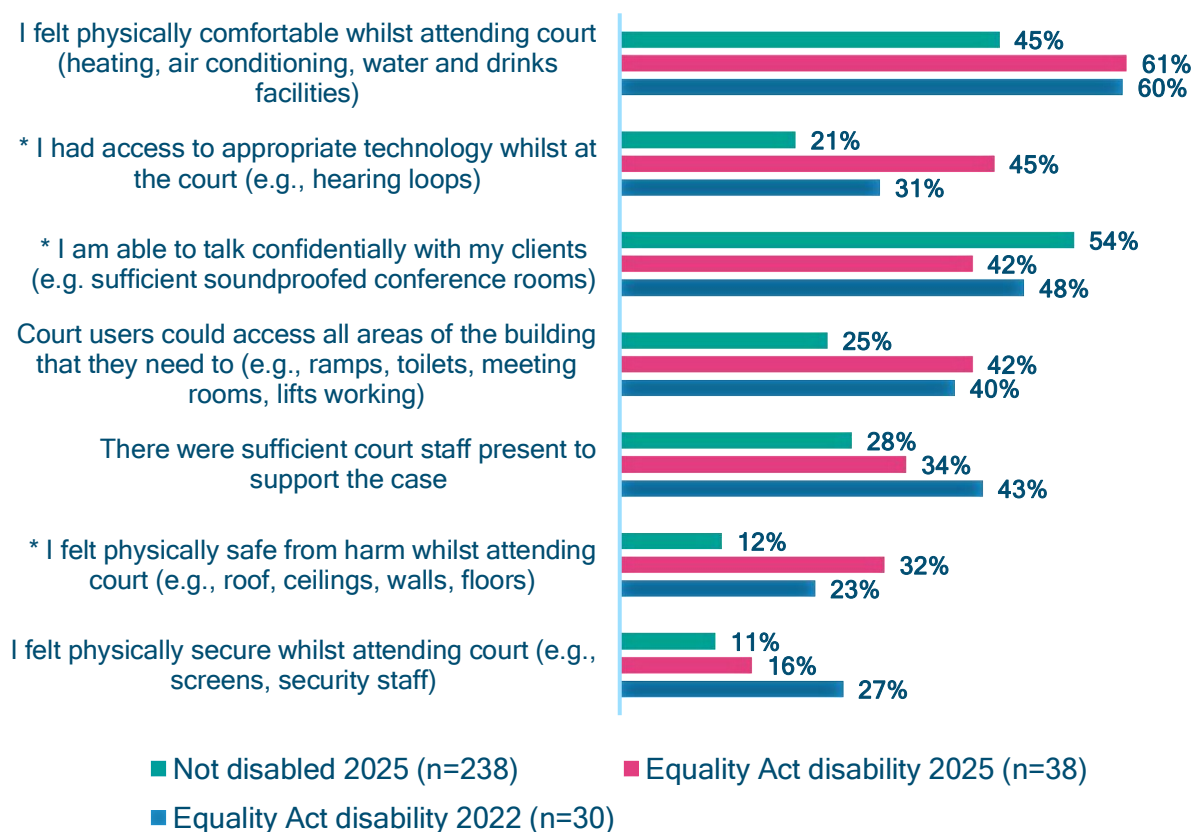
“In some courts the legal advisers will not use any equipment I may have to help me hear and persist in sitting with their backs to me so I cannot hear. Some legal advisers do not present a human attitude to frightened witnesses/victims. Many courts have stairs and no easy way for those in wheelchairs to access the building (its 2025!)”

Employed by an organisation that represents people who use the justice system, such as victims, defendants or witnesses

The proportion of disabled solicitors disagreeing or strongly disagreeing to statements about having access to appropriate technologies, (e.g. hearing loops), or feeling physically safe from harm whilst attending court (e.g. roof, ceilings, walls, floors) was significantly larger in 2025 compared to 2022.

A slightly smaller proportion of disabled solicitors in 2025 than in 2022 disagreed to the statement, ‘I am able to talk confidentially with my clients, e.g. sufficiently soundproofed conference rooms’.

Chart eleven: Thinking about your most recent court attendance, to what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statements? % disagreeing or strongly disagreeing (n=306)



Steps to improve court accessibility

Solicitors using the courts suggested a range of improvements to enhance court accessibility. These included better access to courts, toilets and meeting rooms, for those with a physical impairment (i.e., mobility, vision, hearing issues), through ensuring lifts and ramps are available, well maintained and consistently working, as well as for those court users with mental health, neurodivergence,¹² or learning difficulties.

Reasonable adjustments could be identified through consultation with all court users and disability access reviews.

“Accessibility should be for all court users. There are clear issues for those with restricted mobility in some of the older courts, there are very few staff available to assist. I have seen no assistance for those with learning disability who attend court. The reduction of court staff has meant that the vulnerable witnesses or defendants remain unsupported.”

“Many courts are totally inappropriate for a lot of participants. Gloucester Crown Court has huge barriers to engagement. Even as someone who is not disabled, I find it difficult to hear in the main court.”

“Approximately 20% (likely more) of those defendants in criminal proceedings will have at least one neurodevelopmental disorder; acknowledgement and address this as true reasonable adjustments would be a good starting point, along with adherence to the anticipatory duties set out under the Equality Act. Greater access to advocate, liaison services that similar cater for NDD would also be helpful”.

Solicitors commented on the need to assist disabled defendants in custody, ensuring they had the necessary support, and were able to access the courtroom. Several respondents had experiences of cases where the courts not having secure docks with disabled access meant that hearings must be moved elsewhere, ‘at huge expense,’ sometimes to another county – which did have wheelchair access. The closure and selling off of local courts were viewed as the worst thing to happen for those with physical difficulties.

“Whilst there is concern and consideration shown to victims, witness, and members of the public the same is not extended to defence solicitors or detained persons. It has got to the point now that I cannot do my job properly because I cannot cope with stairs to the extent required. Effectively HMCTS is sending out the message that disabled solicitors need not apply because the building cannot be adapted to assist them.”

More court staff were considered necessary to ensure that disabled users could find out from staff in advance about the courts’ facilities, and recognition that security staff have a ‘dual role’ in supporting court users as well as providing a security presence, ‘court counters should be reopened where possible’.

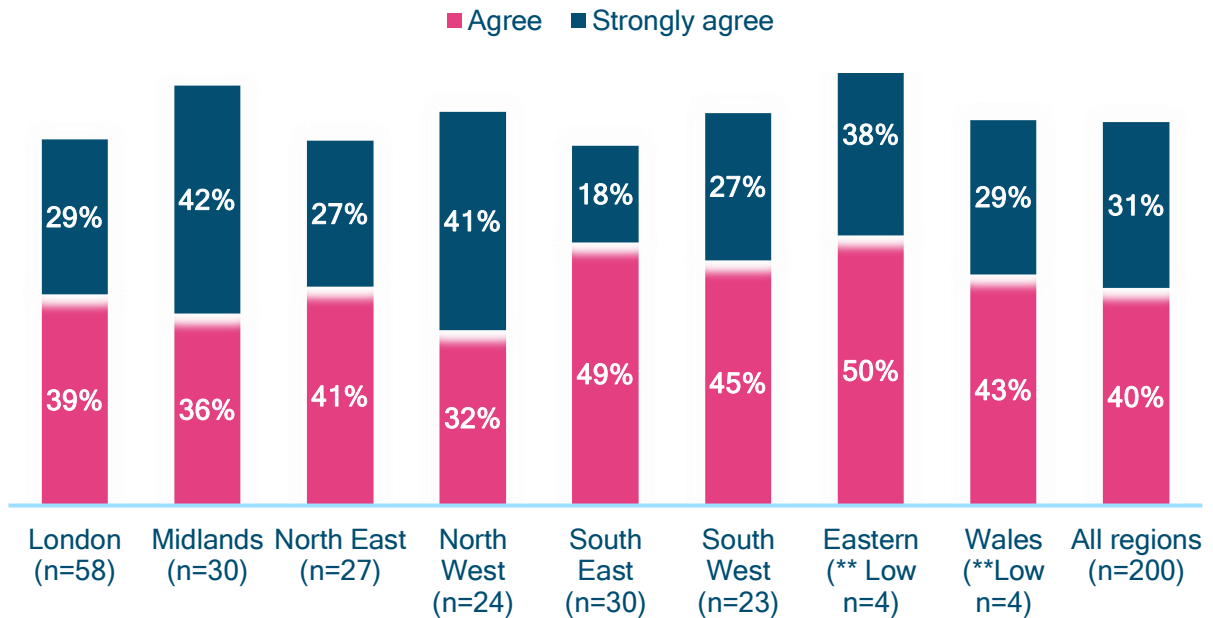
The role of remote hearings – the ‘gold standard of accessibility’, and ‘more digital access’ were discussed by solicitors, with the suggestion of a ‘move to pods to allow secure court access locally.’ To support virtual courts, a national system of interpreters was suggested by one respondent, with cell conferencing facilities for effective remote access saving delay costs and optimising effective client conference time.

¹² For example, <https://neurodiversikey.com/adhdincustody/>

Appendix

Thinking about my most recent court visit...:

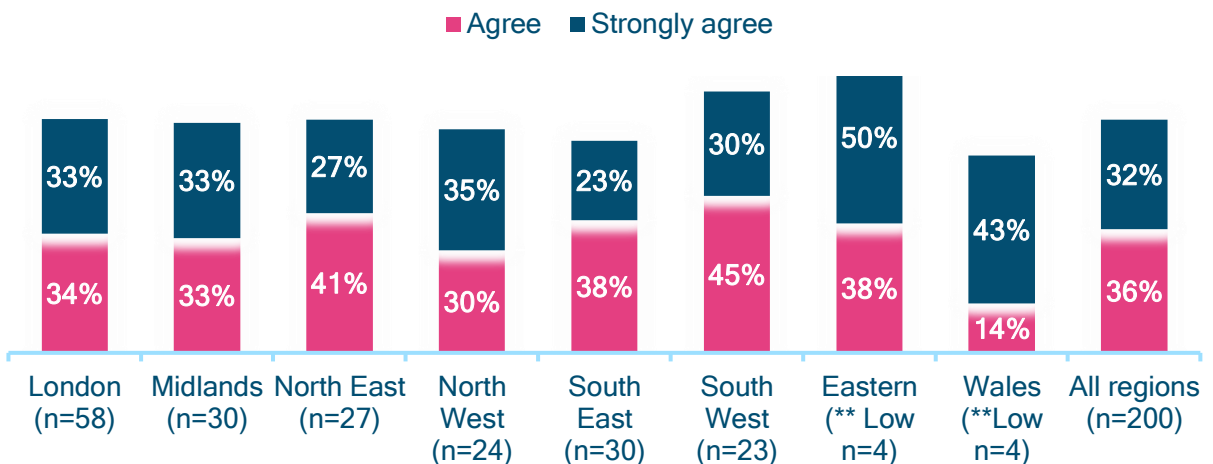
Chart twelve: I felt physically secure whilst attending court (e.g. screens, security staff), (n=200)



Regions associated with the largest change in the % agreeing/strongly agreeing compared to 2022

- Increase = South East (+11pp)
- Decrease = North East (-12pp)

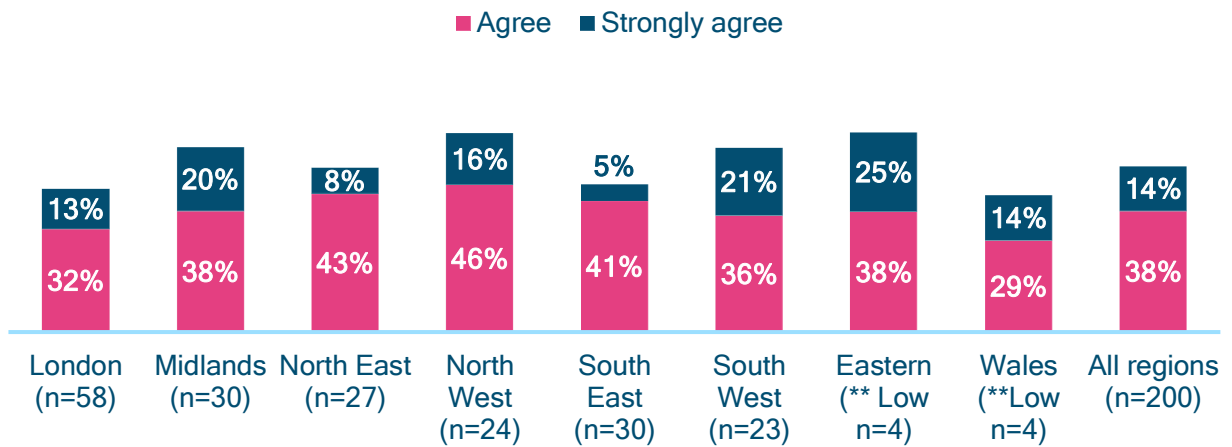
Chart thirteen: I felt physically safe from harm whilst attending court (e.g. roof, ceilings, walls, floors), (n=200)



Regions associated with the largest change compared to 2022, in the % agreeing/strongly agreeing:

- Increase = South West (+19pp)
- Decrease = Wales (-24pp) ** low sample size

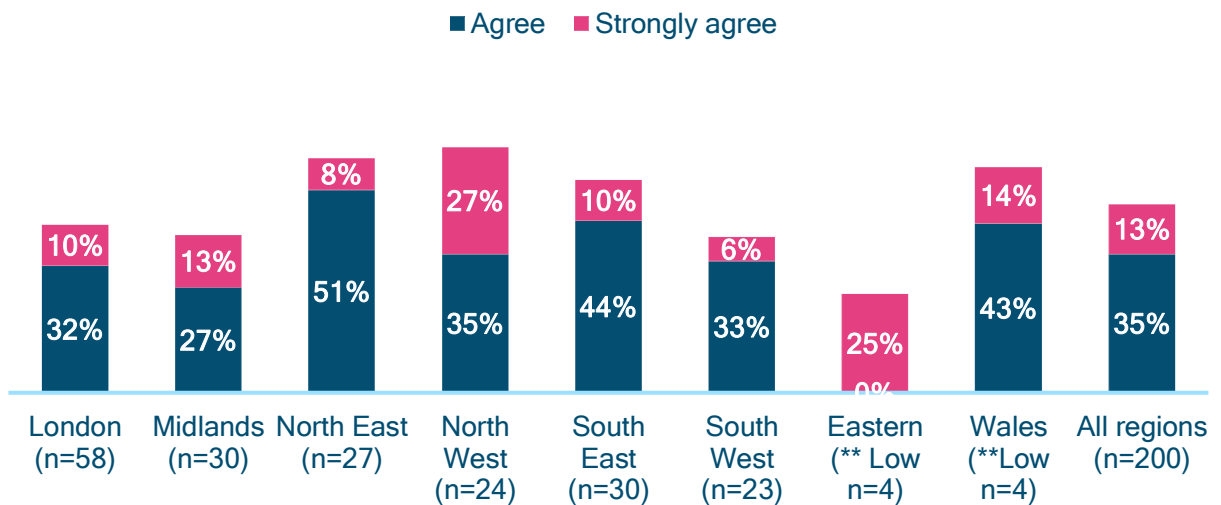
Chart fourteen: Court users could access all areas of the building that they need to (e.g. ramps,



Regions associated with the largest change compared to 2022, in the % agreeing/strongly agreeing

- Increase = London (+6pp)
- Decrease = South East (-9pp)

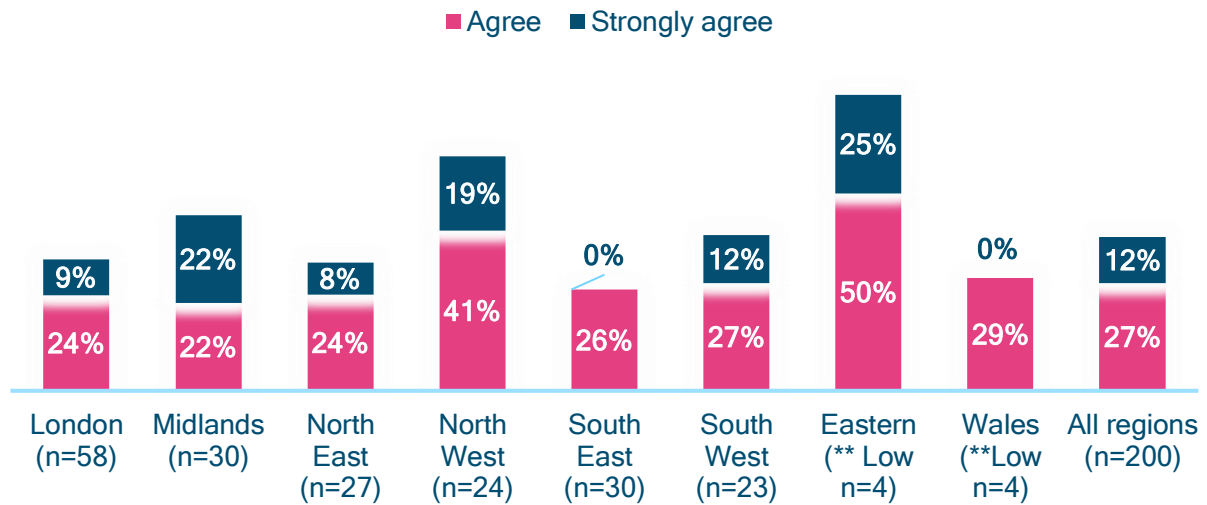
Chart fifteen: There were sufficient court staff present to support the case, (n=200)



Regions associated with the largest change compared to 2022, in the % agreeing/strongly agreeing:

- Increase = South East (+16pp)
- Decrease = South West (-13pp)

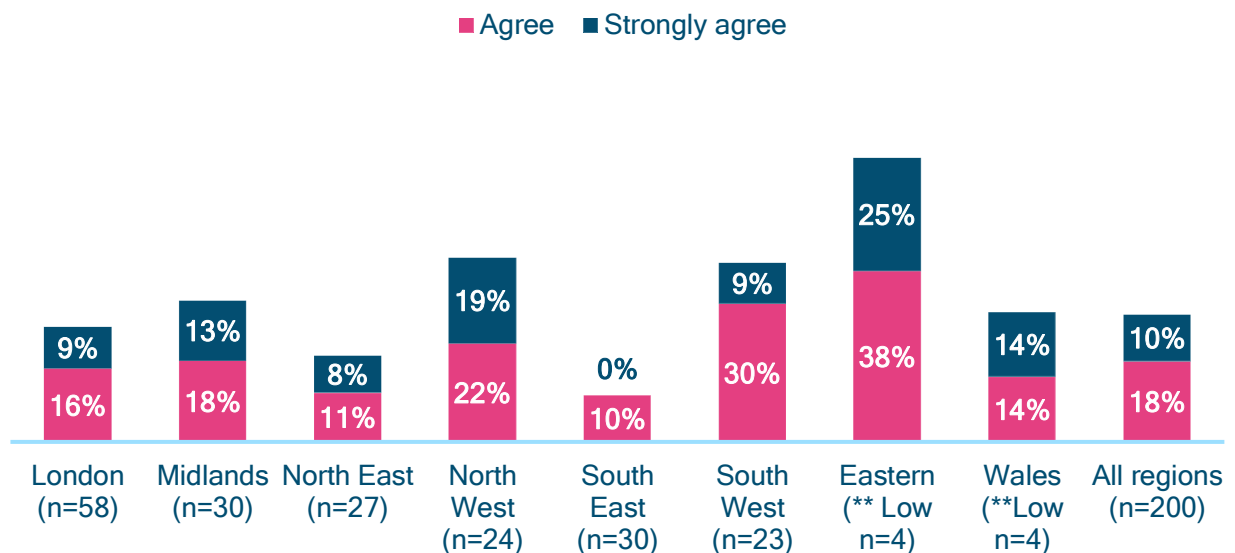
Chart sixteen: I had access to appropriate technology whilst at the court (e.g. hearing loops), (n=200)



Regions associated with the largest change compared to 2022, in the % agreeing/strongly agreeing:

- Increase = North West (+22pp)
- Decrease = Wales (-21pp) ** low sample size

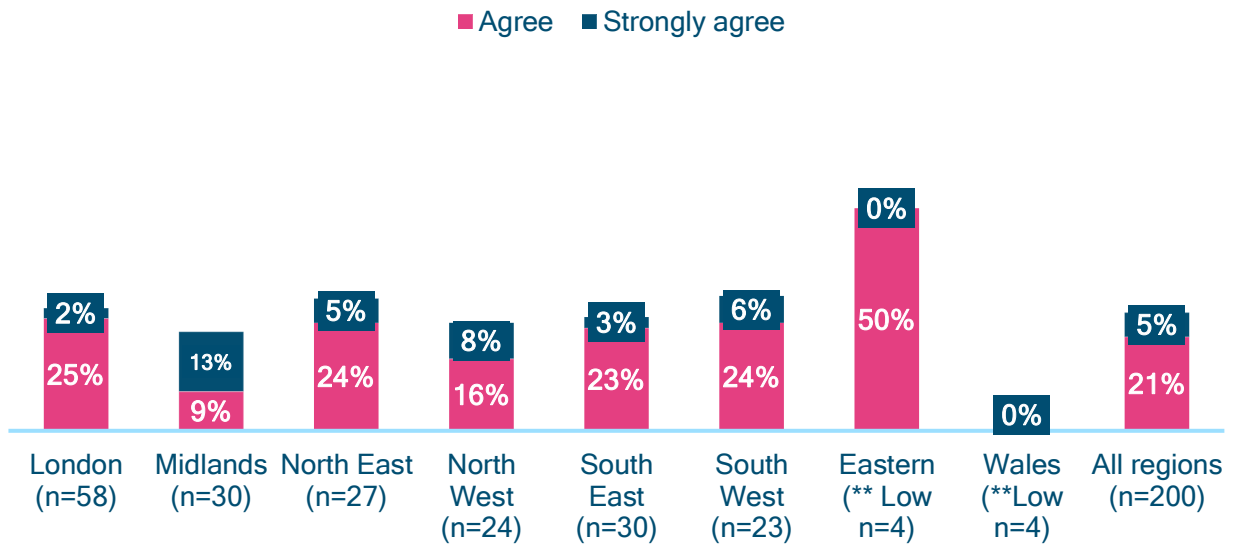
Chart seventeen: I felt physically comfortable whilst attending court (e.g. heating, air conditioning, water and drinks facilities), (n=200)



Regions associated with the largest change compared to 2022, in the % agreeing/strongly agreeing:

- Increase = South West (+11pp)
- Decrease = South East (-15pp)

Chart eighteen: I am able to talk confidentially with my clients (e.g. sufficient soundproofed conference rooms), (n=200)



Regions associated with the largest change compared to 2022, in the % agreeing/strongly agreeing:

- Increase = North East (+12pp)
- Decrease = Wales (-44pp) ** low sample size