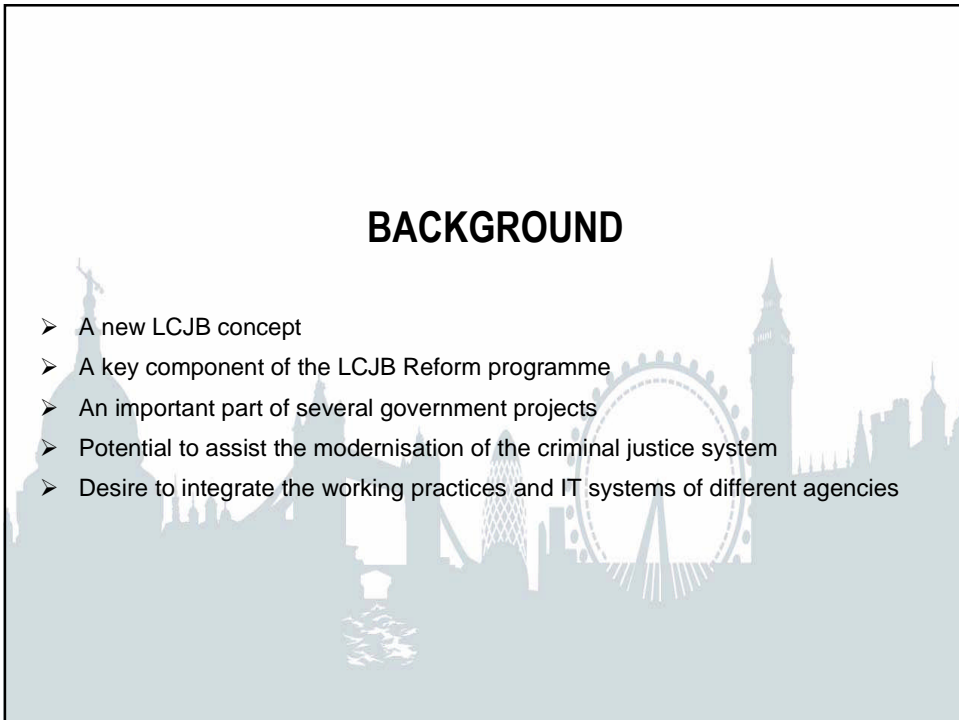


# THE VIRTUAL COURT PROTOTYPE



## BACKGROUND

- A new LCJB concept
- A key component of the LCJB Reform programme
- An important part of several government projects
- Potential to assist the modernisation of the criminal justice system
- Desire to integrate the working practices and IT systems of different agencies



## BACKGROUND

Virtual Courts is linked with a number of other CJS projects, namely:

- ❖ CJSSS
- ❖ Integrated Prosecution Teams
- ❖ Director's Guidance Quick Process [1 simplified case file]



## LEGAL BACKGROUND

**Section 57C Crime and Disorder Act 1998**  
**As amended by**  
**Section 45 Police and Justice Act 2006**


Preliminary Hearings in a magistrates' court

The live link can be used when the defendant:

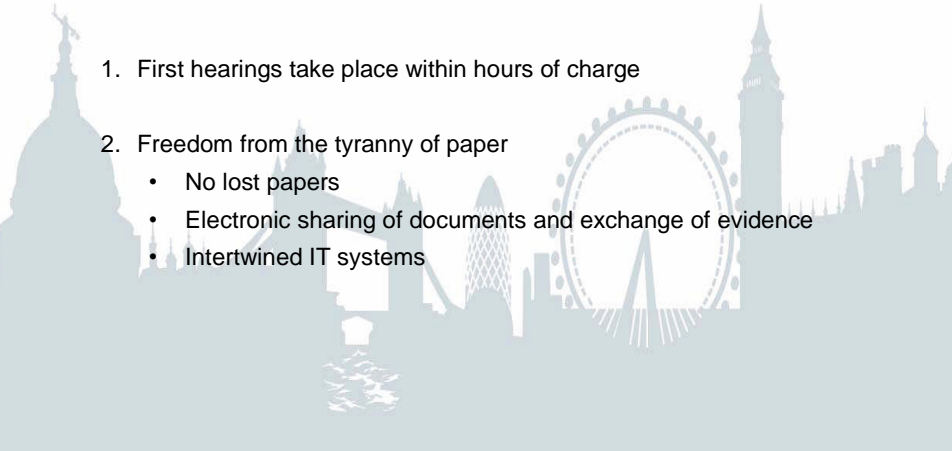
- Remains in police detention after charge and is likely to remain there
- Has been granted bail after charge

The defendant must consent to the use of the video link

## TWO STRANDS OF THE VIRTUAL COURT CONCEPT

- ❑ Video Conferencing Technology deployed between the court and police custody suites
  - ❑ A shared virtual space, for documents to be viewed, shared, amended and downloaded electronically
- 

## ANTICIPATED BENEFITS OF THE TWO STRANDS

1. First hearings take place within hours of charge
  2. Freedom from the tyranny of paper
    - No lost papers
    - Electronic sharing of documents and exchange of evidence
    - Intertwined IT systems
- 

## PHASE II OF THE VIRTUAL COURT IS A PROTOTYPE [Not a Pilot]

- ❖ It is not going to be immediately rolled out
- ❖ It will be closed down and independently evaluated first
- ❖ It is designed to answer two questions
  - Can this be done?And, if so
  - What are the benefits of Virtual Courts in relation to the costs ?

## PHASE II SPECIFICATION

- The end-to-end process from arrest to charge was put together by a multi-agency team
- The team consists of front-line staff from HMCS, Police, CPS, Probation, Legal Services Commission, Defence Solicitors and the Home Office [CJIT]
- Integrated Evaluation Framework from the start

## THE VIRTUAL COURT PROTOTYPE

### Location:

- Camberwell Green Magistrates Court
- Lambeth and Southwark Boroughs
- Brixton, Kennington, Peckham & Walworth Charging Centres

### Scope:

- Phase II will commence on the 29<sup>th</sup> May
- It will run for 12 weeks until 24<sup>th</sup> August
- It will include independent evaluation

The evaluation will conclude before the LCJB make the decision whether to proceed further with the concept

## THE VIRTUAL COURT PROTOTYPE

The Virtual Court prototype will deal with *all* cases, except those involving:

- More than two defendants
- Youths under 18 years

### Hours of operation:

- Initially from 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
- Extending until 9 p.m. for 4 weeks to test the benefits of extended hours

## THE PROCESS

At the Police Station:

- Police Station room set up with live link equipment for Virtual Court
- Defence, Police and CPS on line from the police station from 2 locations

At the Magistrates' Court:

- Adapted Court room set up with live link equipment for Virtual Court
- Magistrates, Legal Advisor and Probation on line from the court

## THE PROCESS

- Defendant is charged with an offence
- Police and CPS confirm appropriate case for Virtual Court
- Live link provision explained to Defendant and consent obtained
- Virtual Court Hearing slot booked for 1-3 hours time
- Advance Information provided for defence, court & probation (via shared virtual space)
- Hearing takes place, plea entered
- Appropriate plea cases can be sentenced over live link



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## POTENTIAL BENEFITS FOR LONDON CJS AGENCIES

### Police:

- less custody congestion
- more efficient throughput
- more efficient custody management and quicker release of front-line staff
- Less paperwork

### NOMs:

- reduction in prisoner transportation costs
- more efficient use of PECS staff/resources

### Courts:

- increased courts capacity
- more flexible use of court time and resources
- reduction in number of outstanding warrants



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## POTENTIAL BENEFITS FOR LONDON CJS AGENCIES

### Prosecution:

- more efficient remand courts
- release of prosecutor resources to implement charging strategy
- more efficient use of prosecutors

### Probation:

- better utilisation of probation resources

## POTENTIAL BENEFITS FOR THE COMMUNITY OF LONDON

- Delivery of speedier justice
- Quicker resolution for victims
- Potential reduction of 'churned' cases
- Improved timeliness in magistrates' courts
- Proportionate response to dealing with offenders
- Improvement in efficiency due to reduction in:
  - ❖ Non-appearance of defendants
  - ❖ Missing papers or personnel

## RISKS AND CHALLENGES

- Technological dependency on video links, secure e-mail, integrated IT
- Legislation currently limits use to defendants who consent
- Constraints of existing accommodation in custody suites
- Defence concerns about legal aid funding in general could lead to reduction in eligible cases.
- Current CJS Industrial action
- Resistance to change in working practices by all agencies
- Intense media interest
- Unrealistic expectations



## WHAT YOU ARE LIKELY TO SEE

- A working custody area
- The Interview Room/ Virtual Courtroom
- The bench/District Judge conducting the hearing
- Sample documentation
- The shared virtual document space
- A hearing in progress

## Brixton Interview Room 3





## Brixton Interview Room 3



## Brixton Interview Room 3



## Brixton Interview Room 3



## Brixton Interview Room 1



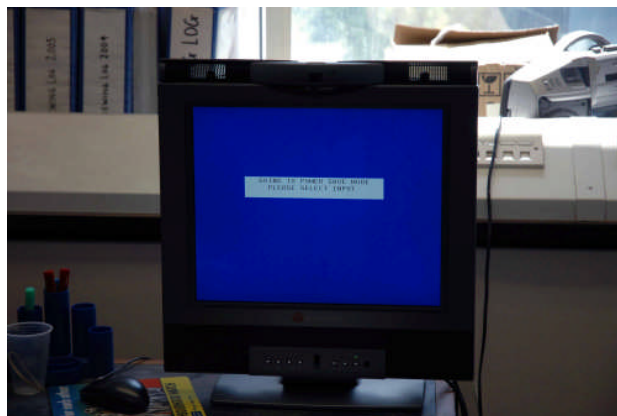
## Brixton Interview Room 1



## Brixton Duty Prosecutor Room



## Brixton Duty Prosecutor Room



Questions?