

GOING TO COURT

If you're a victim of a crime, or a witness to a crime in Hertfordshire, you may have to go to court to give evidence at the trial. We know how distressing this can be. At Beacon, our trained staff are here to help you before the hearing and on the day itself.

Before the trial

When the date of the trial is set, a witness care officer will tell you when and where it will happen. Your witness care officer works for the police and the Crown Prosecution Service and is assigned to look after you throughout the trial process. You can contact the officer at any time for further information and support. This includes any help you may need with childcare and transport.

You can also visit the court before the day of the trial if you wish. You may find this helps you to feel less anxious as it'll mean when the day of the trial arrives, you'll be familiar with the court building. Your witness care officer will be happy to arrange a court visit for you.

If you need any special help, for example if you're disabled and need help getting to court or moving about in the Court building, you should tell the witness care officer who will make the necessary arrangements for you.

Your Beacon contact will also be on hand to provide any help with transportation as well as advice and information. We want to ensure you feel as comfortable and confident with the process as possible, so if you have any questions you can always ask us.

Help with your expenses

Attending a hearing might leave you out of pocket as your employer doesn't have to pay you for the time you'll have to take off work. So, you may be able to claim some expenses which can include your travel to court, meals, loss of earnings and other financials such as childcare when you give evidence at a trial.

Making a claim

You should receive a witness expense claim form, a prepaid envelope and a list of your allowable expenses before the trial. If for any reason you haven't received

these, your solicitor or a court official should provide them for you. At Beacon, if you are eligible, we'll help you complete and submit your expenses claim form. Find out more about [witness expenses and allowances](#).

Reviewing your statement

If you gave a statement to the police at the time of the crime, it's possible that you may not remember it by the time of the trial. That's no problem – you can ask the police to show it to you any time in the days and weeks before the trial.

If you're appearing as a prosecution witness, you can ask the [Crown Prosecution Service](#) to let you see your statement.

At the trial

From the moment you arrive at the court, a member of the Witness Service will support you. They'll be there for you during the whole process, whether you're giving evidence or not.

If you want someone to go into the courtroom with you, the Witness Service will arrange this for you. They'll also provide an interpreter if you asked for one.

Your interpreter will translate what people are saying and help you understand how the trial is going. They can't represent you or give you any legal advice.

Before you're called in

The prospect of facing the defendant as you wait to be called into the courtroom can be traumatic. For this reason, the court should give you a separate waiting room to the defendant and their family and friends.

If there isn't a separate area, the court staff will make sure you're safe. If anyone tries to intimidate you, tell your solicitor or the court staff. They'll report it to the police.

Extra protection in the courtroom

If you're under 18, disabled, afraid to give evidence or a victim of a sexual offence, the court can take extra steps to protect you.

They can put screens up in the courtroom to stop you seeing the defendant. Or they can arrange for you to give evidence via a live CCTV link.

If the case is about a sexual offence, the court may ask the public to leave the courtroom when you give evidence.

These measures are provided to ensure that vulnerable people are protected. If you'd like extra protection, speak to the police officer, witness care officer or the solicitor who asked you to come to court.

Special Measures

Most people don't see the inside of a courtroom unless they're called as a witness or asked to sit on a jury. Courtrooms are formal places, which can make being a witness quite daunting, this is especially true for children, young witnesses and anyone being threatened. If you feel this way, the Witness Care Team can offer assistance to make you feel safe and secure, there are a number of Special Measures that they can ask the court to grant. These include:

- Putting up screens that block you and the defendant from seeing each other
- Letting you give evidence from outside the courtroom through a live video link. This takes away the stress of going to court and having to face the defendant. You'll still be able to see and hear court proceedings while you give evidence, even though you're not in the room. You can have someone from the witness service with you, if you wish
- Pre-recording your evidence on video
- Asking members of the court to remove their gowns and wigs to make them look less formal
- Providing someone to help you give evidence. You may be able to use sign boards if you have difficulty speaking English
- Providing an interpreter if you don't speak English

The Role of the Witness Care Unit

If the CPS decides to prosecute, one of Hertfordshire's Witness Care Unit Officer's will contact you.

From this point onwards, an officer from the WCU will be your single point of contact. Their role is to support you in the days and weeks before the trial.

If you're intimidated, disabled or under 18, you have the right to apply to the court for special measures to be put in place for you. These range from putting a screen between you and the defendant to appointing a specialist to help you give your evidence.

The Role of the Witness Service

The Witness Service is there to provide you with information, practical help and emotional support.

You will be able to speak to them before you go to court. One of their volunteers will also be at court, to help you on the day.

The Ministry of Justice has produced a leaflet called [Information for victims of crime](#). This explains how the criminal justice system works.