

## **2007 Report on the Availability of Special Facilities in County/Combined and Magistrates' Courts**

### **Introduction**

Following on from the 2005 report on the availability of special facilities in county and combined courts in 2004 it was requested by HMICA that a further report on availability be undertaken in 2007. In January 2007, posters were re-distributed to all county/combined and magistrates' courts in England and Wales

When re-distributing the poster, each court was asked if they were displaying the poster and were encouraged again to consider what provisions they have for vulnerable witnesses or victims attending their court and any additional provisions that could be put in place. The following report summarises the responses received.

The 2005 report, poster and checklist can be found at appendices A, B and C, respectively.

### **Quantative Information**

- 264 county/combined courts and 220 magistrates' courts were sent questionnaires;
- 156 returns were received, achieving a 32% response rate in total;
- the response rate from county/combined courts was 52%;
- the response rate from magistrates' courts was 10% (20 responses);
- 15.5% of the returns from county/combined courts were combined courts (21 responses).

A summary table showing data received is set out in appendix D.

98 county courts responded in both 2005 and 2007 and a comparison has been carried out between the two collections of information. A summary of the comparison can be seen further down and also at appendix D.

As with the 2005 report the combined courts have been separated in the following charts in order to prevent misrepresentation of data.

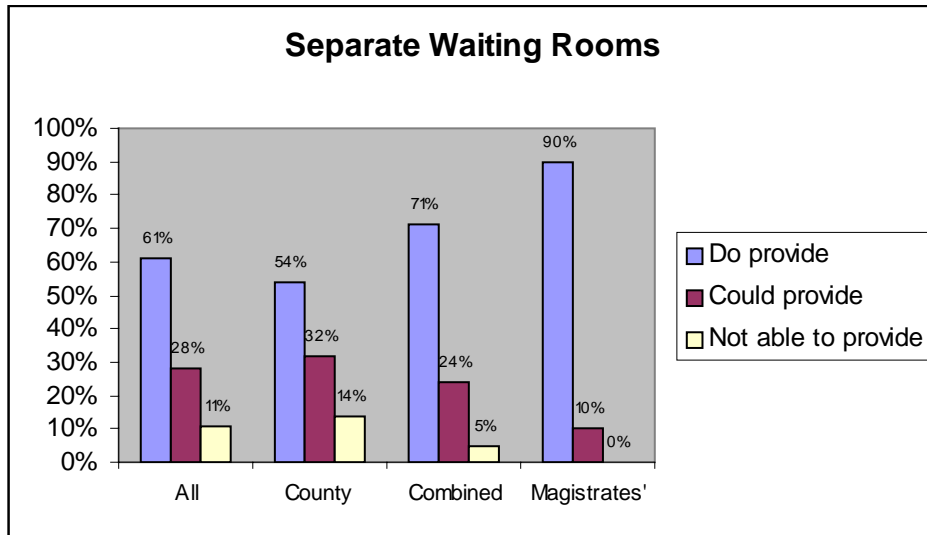
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i) Separate Waiting Rooms

As can be seen from the chart below, separate waiting rooms are provided in:

- 54% of county courts;
- 71% of combined courts; and,
- 90% of magistrates' courts.
- A further 32% of county courts reported that, although not currently provided, they could provide separate waiting rooms if requested.

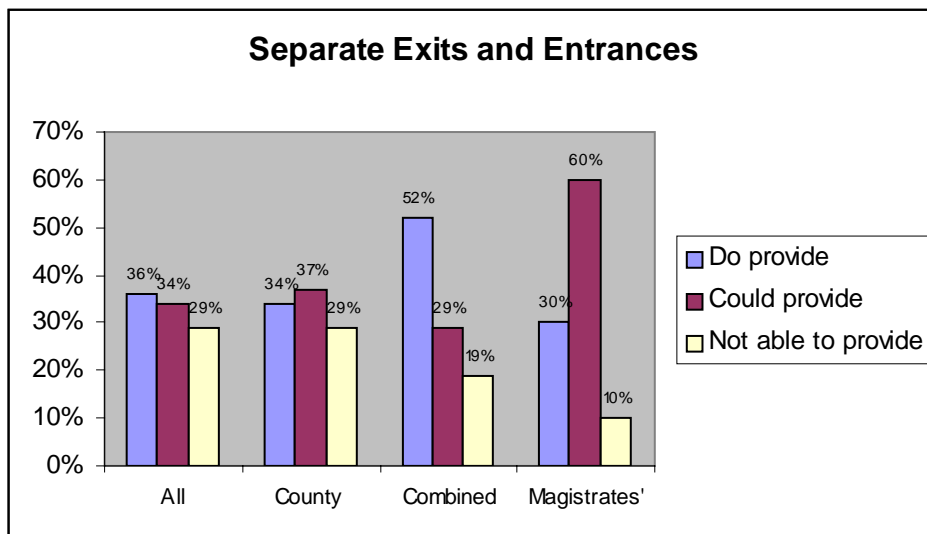
There is still a problem with accommodation restrictions in supplying the facility, especially among smaller county courts.



ii) Separate Exits and Entrances

Provision of special arrangements for separate arrival to, and exit from, the court:

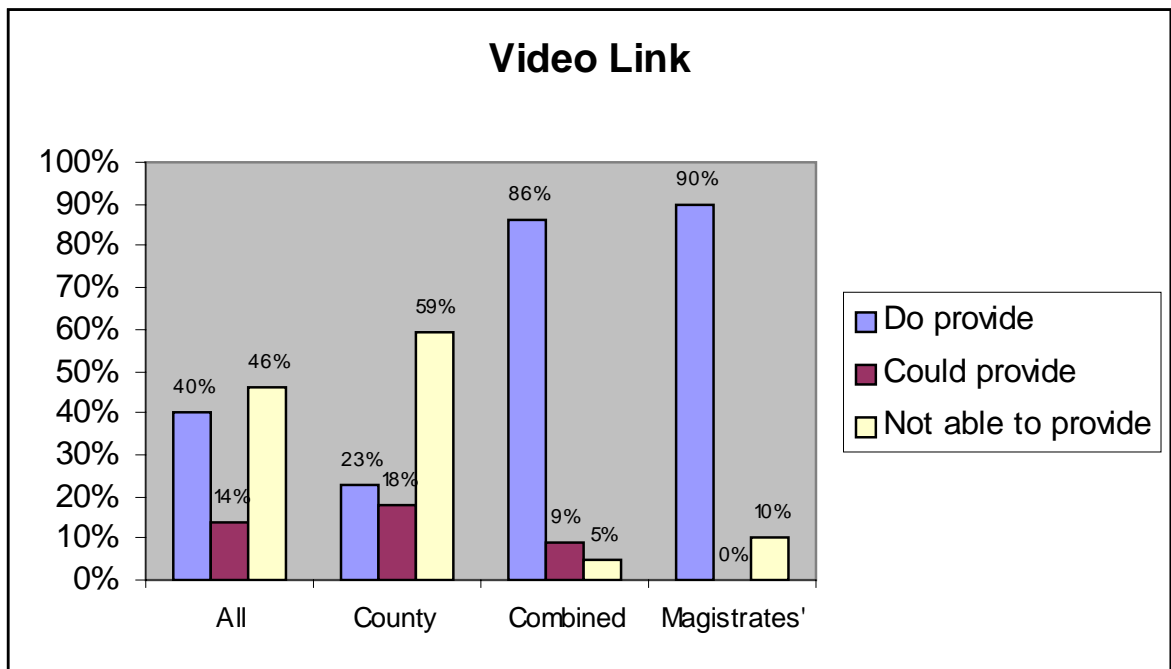
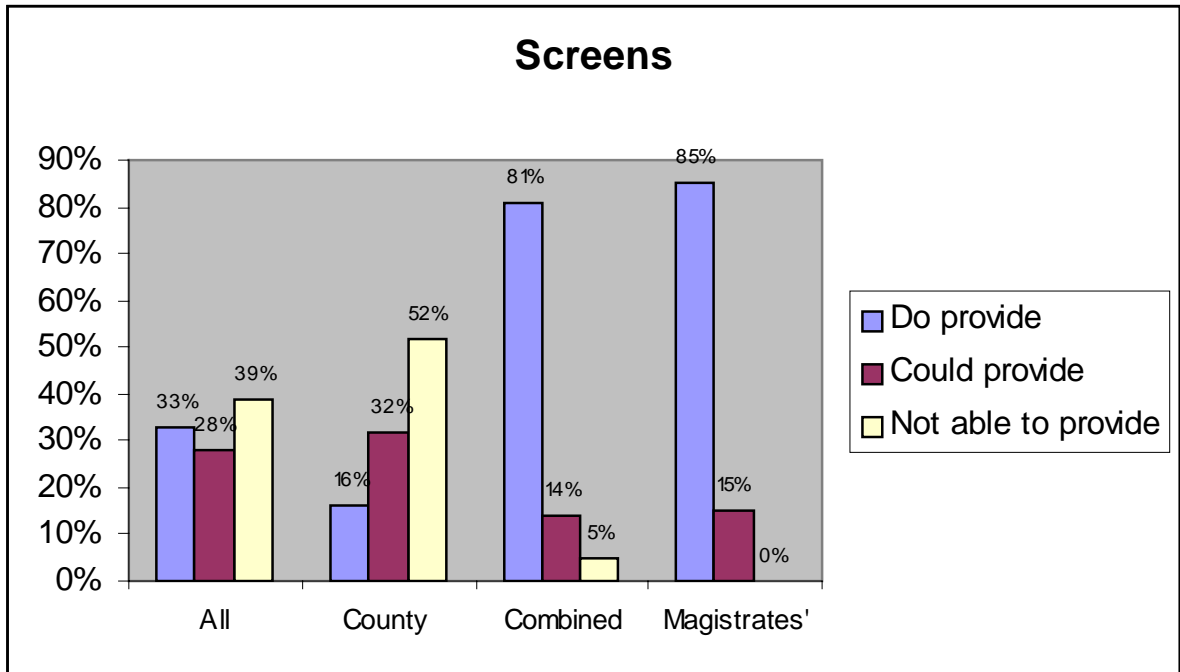
- County courts are consistent with the 2005 evaluation that about a third of all courts are purpose built to provide separate exits and entrances;
- just under a third are unable to provide the facility in county courts;
- provision of combined courts has increased to over half of the courts being able to provide this facility; and
- a tenth are unable to provide this measure.



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iii) Screens in the court and iv) Video Links

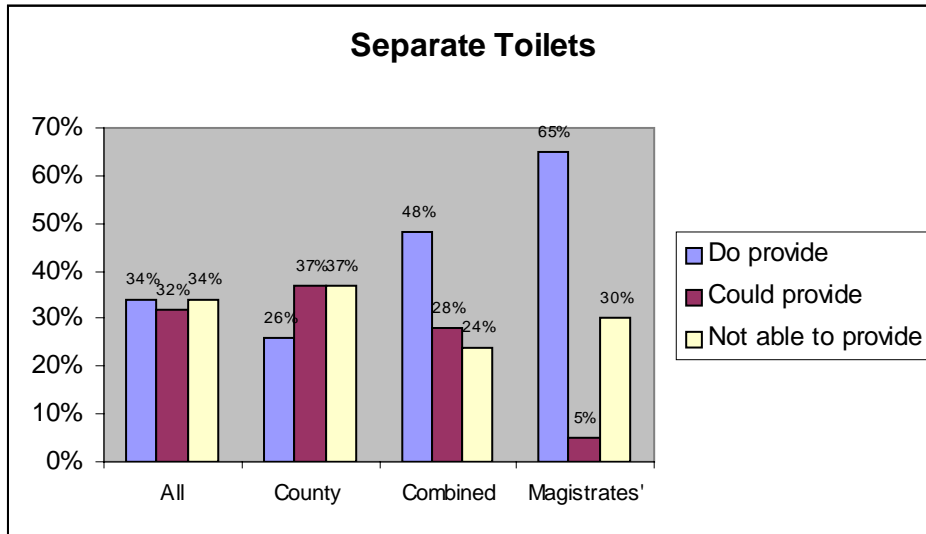
As with the 2005 report these two measures have been considered simultaneously. There is an increase in the availability of both facilities from the 2005 report.



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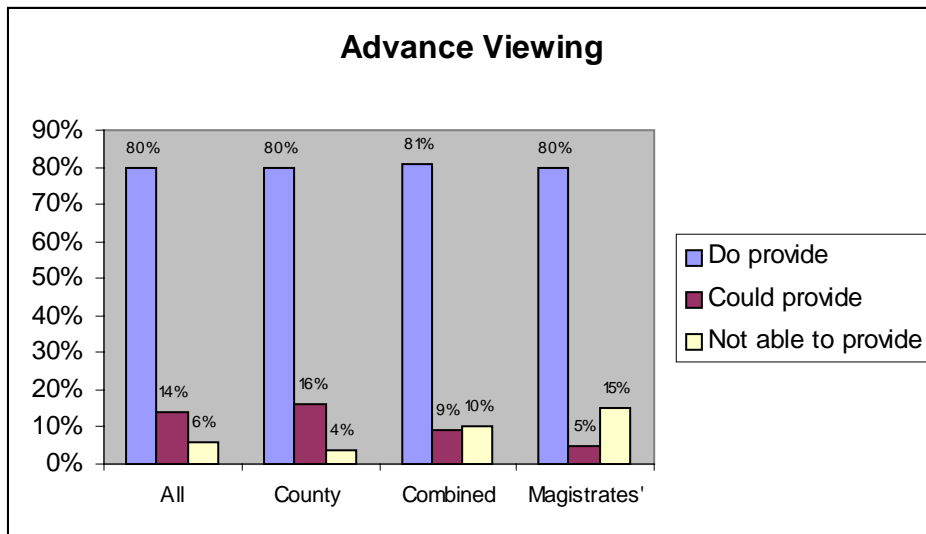
iv) Separate Toilets

There is a slight drop in the number of county courts providing this facility. Combined courts and magistrates appear to be more able to provide this facility.



v) Viewing the court in advance

As with the 2005 report this measure is the most available in all of the courts.



**Comparison between 2005 and 2007 responses from County Courts**

The comparison between 2005 and 2007 consists of results from 98 county courts that responded to both data collections.

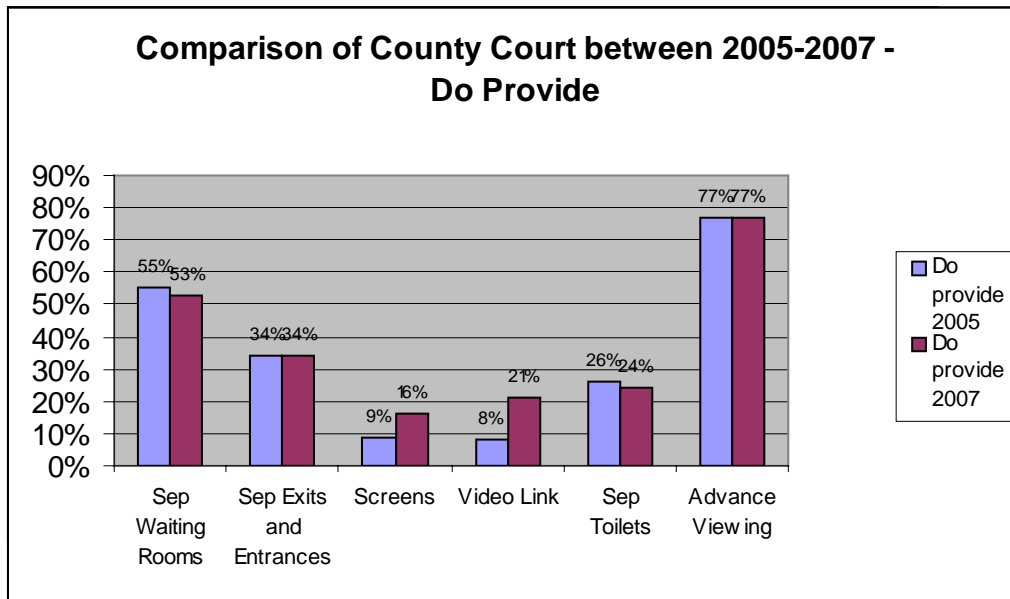
**Do provide special facilities**

As can be seen from the chart below there is a:

- 2% reduction in courts that do provide separate waiting rooms and separate toilets;
- separate exits and entrances and advance viewing remains the same as the 2005 collection; and,

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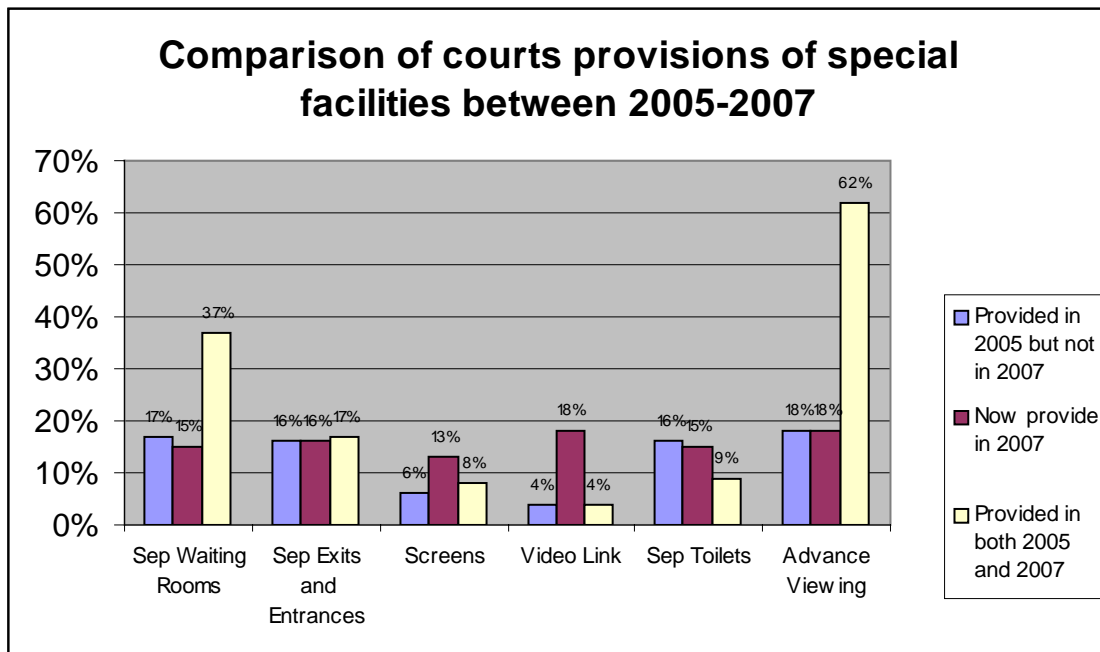
- there is a marked increase in the provision of screens and video links within the county courts.



On the chart below it shows that:

- there are instances where special facilities were provided in 2005 but not in 2007;
- there is a marked increase in the provision of screens and video links in 2007; and
- advance viewing has the highest consistency of provision between 2005 and 2007 as 62% provided in both collections.

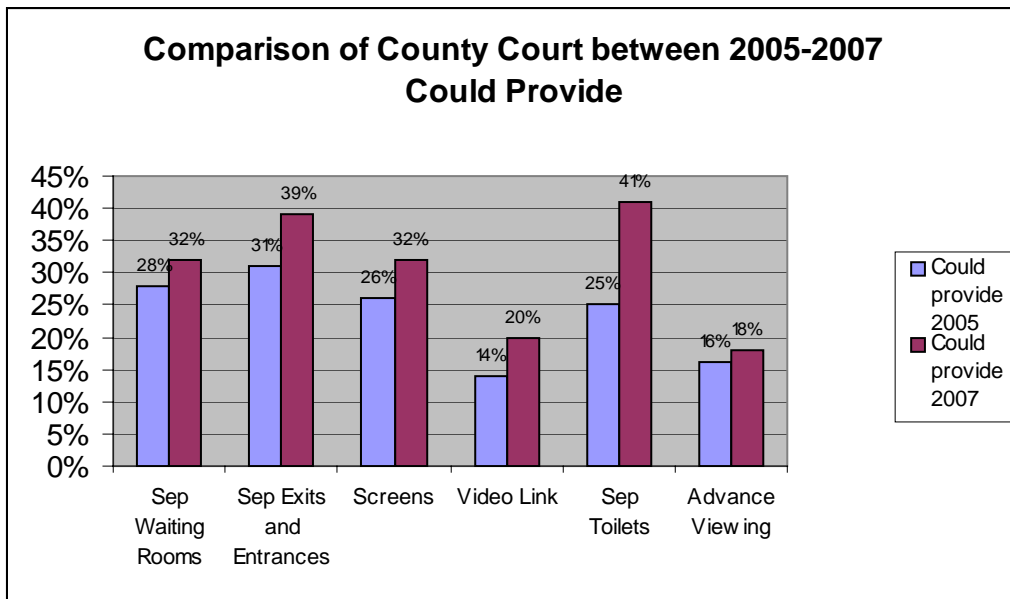
The comparison highlights the need to continue encouraging county courts to provide these provisions where possible.



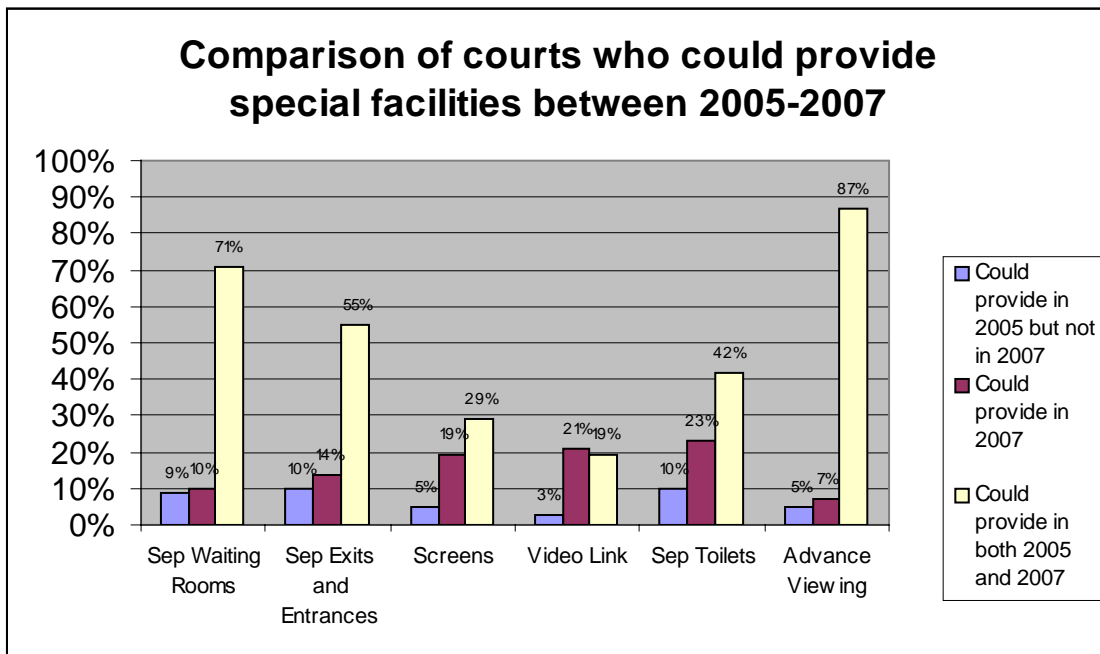
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Could provide special facilities

The chart below indicates that there has been an increase in courts being able to arrange special facilities if needed in 2007.



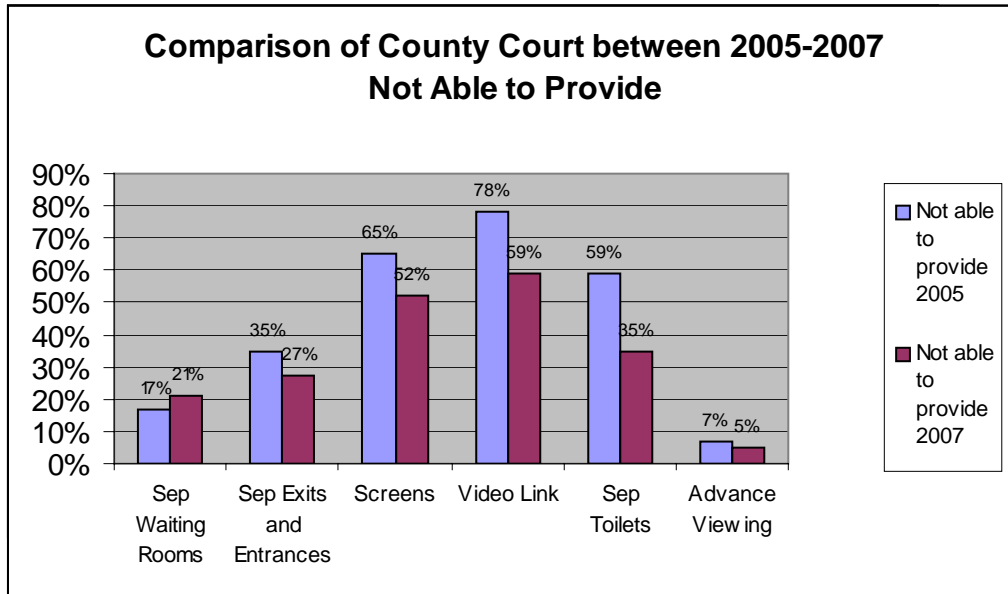
In most cases in the chart below there is an increase in courts that could provide special facilities in 2007. However, as with those courts that provided facilities in 2005 but not in 2007 there are now a small percentage of courts between 3% and 10% that are not able to provide any facilities in 2007 that could provide some sort of service in 2005.



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### Not able to provide special facilities

There is a slight increase in courts that cannot provide separate waiting rooms at all in 2007. In all other areas there has been a decrease in courts that cannot provide the facilities at all.



### Qualitative Responses

As with the 2005 checklist, the 2007 checklist asked respondents to identify any other special facilities they are able to provide for intimidated victims or witnesses that had not already been identified. On analysis of the 2007 collection, there were no new facilities to be added to the list in the 2005 report.

Respondents were given the opportunity again to make other comments regarding special facilities in the court. The comments given reflect those given in the 2005 collection.

### Conclusion

It is clear from the statistics that there is an increase in the provision of special facilities, however, it is also clear that there is some inconsistency in maintaining these facilities. As with the 2005 collection it is clear that combined courts are better equipped to provide special facilities. The extent to which county courts are able to assist vulnerable witnesses or victims is still largely dependent upon the court accommodation, staff resources and funding.

This exercise has again prompted courts to think about special facilities provision and confirmed that the poster is still being used as a useful tool.

It is clear that better promotion of court facilities outside the court is work that could be taken forward as a large number of courts still require advance warning to make arrangements for special facilities.