5. The court process

There are usually several processes to go through, involving more than one visit to the courts.

The date given in the charge sheet is for an initial hearing. This is at a magistrates court.

At the initial hearing the charges are read out and the defendant is given the opportunity to plead guilty or not guilty. If you are not sure about what you want to do, read the article by LDMG or speak to someone at GBC to get support. If you have a solicitor experienced in protest law then they will be able to offer advice. The advice in general is to plead 'not guilty'.

If you plead 'not guilty' then:

- **The magistrate will make arrangements for the trial hearing, i.e. the date, length and place.**
- **Bail will be set again, often the bail conditions will be dropped or changed.**
- **Other dates may be set, e.g. for the CPS (Crown Prosecution Service – they conduct the case for the police) to provide (disclose) their evidence. A date might be set for a case management hearing.**

The next hearing might be what is called a 'case management hearing' (CMH). The cps and your solicitor come back into court to see how the case is progressing. You may or may not, have to appear at his hearing if it happens.

The trial will be held at the date set in the initial hearing. It is often held at the same magistrates court, but if the offence is more severe it will be held in front of a jury at a crown court. If you have any witnesses they will not be required until the trial itself.

If you pleaded guilty, or were found guilty at trial, the next step is for the court to give a sentence, including fines and court costs. Sometimes this will happen at the end of the trial itself, but sometimes the judge or magistrate will ask for a pre sentence report (PSR) (made by the probation service), and a further date is set for a sentencing hearing. If a report is called for you will talk to someone from the probation service to arrange a date and time.