

Town Hall  
Lord Street  
Southport  
PR8 1DA

To: Members of the Cabinet

Date: 1 September 2010

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

**Please contact:** Steve Pearce

**Contact Number:** 0151 934 2046

**Fax No:** 0151 934 2034

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steve.pearce@legal.sefton.gov.uk

Dear Councillor

**CABINET - THURSDAY 2ND SEPTEMBER, 2010**

I refer to the agenda for the above meeting which was previously circulated and wish to advise you that the Chair of the Cabinet has agreed that the following item will be considered as an urgent item at the meeting:

**Agenda No.**

**Item**

12. **Consultation on Proposals to Close Southport (North Sefton)  
Magistrates' Court and Southport County Court**

Report of the Head of Corporate Legal Services

A copy of the resolution of the Southport Area Committee from its meeting held on 1 September 2010 will be circulated at the Cabinet Meeting for consideration.

Yours sincerely,

M. CARNEY

Chief Executive

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# Agenda Item 12

**Committee:** Southport Area Committee  
Cabinet

**Date Of Meeting:** 1 September 2010  
2 September 2010

**Title Of Report:** Consultation on Proposals to Close Southport (North Sefton)  
Magistrates' Court And Southport County Court

**Report of:** Jill Coule  
Head of Corporate  
Legal Services

**Contact Officer:** P.N. Cowley  
Senior Solicitor  
(Telephone No.) 0151 934 2250

|   |     |    |
|---|-----|----|
| This report contains  | Yes | No |
| <b>CONFIDENTIAL</b><br>Information/   |     | ➡➡ |
| <b>EXEMPT</b> information by<br>virtue of paragraph(s) 3<br>and 7 of Part 1 of Schedule<br>12A to the Local<br>Government Act, 1972 |     | ➡➡ |
| Is the decision on this<br>report <b>DELEGATED</b> ?  | ➡➡  |    |

## **Purpose of Report**

- (1) To advise the Area Committee and Cabinet of a consultation on proposals to close certain courts, including Southport (North Sefton) Magistrates' Court and Southport County Court.
- (2) At its meeting on 28 July 2010 the Area Committee requested the Head of Corporate Legal Services to submit a report on the proposed closure to this meeting to enable a response to be submitted by the consultation deadline of 15 September 2010.

## **Recommendations**

The views of the Area Committee and Cabinet are sought on the proposals to close Southport Magistrates' Court and Southport County Court.

## **Corporate Objective Monitoring**

| <b><u>Corporate Objective</u></b> |   | <b><u>Positive Impact</u></b> | <b><u>Neutral Impact</u></b> | <b><u>Negative Impact</u></b> |
|-----------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1                                 | Creating a Learning Community   |                               |                              |                               |
| 2                                 | Creating Safe Communities   |                               |                              |                               |
| 3                                 | Jobs and Prosperity   |                               |                              |                               |
| 4                                 | Improving Health and Well-Being   |                               |                              |                               |
| 5                                 | Environmental Sustainability  |                               |                              |                               |
| 6                                 | Creating Inclusive Communities  |                               |                              |                               |
| 7                                 | Improving the Quality of Council Services and Strengthening local Democracy |                               |                              |                               |
| 8                                 | Children and Young People   |                               |                              |                               |

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## **Financial Implications**

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

## **Departments consulted in the preparation of this report:**

Corporate Legal Services

## **List of Background Papers relied upon in the preparation of this report**

Letter from Area Director HMCS dated 23 June 2010 - Annex A

Consultation Paper CP03/10 23 June 2010 - Annex B

Ministry of Justice Press Release 23 June 2010 - Annex C

## CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS TO CLOSE SOUTHPORT (NORTH SEFTON) MAGISTRATES' COURT AND SOUTHPORT COUNTY COURT

### 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 On 23 June 2010 the Secretary of State for Justice laid a written ministerial statement announcing a consultation on the most strategic locations for Magistrates' and County Courts in England and Wales (see Annexes A and C).
- 1.2 The consultation, which runs until 15 September 2010, invites comments on proposals to close certain courts including Southport (North Sefton) Magistrates' Court and Southport County Court.
- 1.3 The proposals are:
  - (a) to continue to operate a Magistrates' Court in Bootle (South Sefton) but to close Southport (North Sefton) Magistrates' Court and to merge the North and South Sefton Local Justice areas to create a single Sefton Local Justice area.
  - (b) to close Southport County Court and to transfer the bulk of its workload to the Civil and Family Justice Centre in Liverpool, with work in relation to some parishes to the north of Southport being transferred to Preston County Court.
- 1.4 The detailed proposals are set out in Consultation Paper CP03/10 which is attached as Annex B.
- 1.5 The Consultation invites views on the proposals and states that the Secretary of State will "Take all views expressed into account before making any decision on whether or which courts ought to be closed as part of the rationalisation".

### 2. USE OF COURTS BY SEFTON COUNCIL

- 2.1 Sefton Council is a regular user of both North and South Sefton Magistrates' Court for miscellaneous prosecutions. The Council rarely, if ever, uses Southport County Court.
- 2.2 At present, the Council is allocated one half day per week at South Sefton Magistrate' Court and one half day every other week at North Sefton. These are the miscellaneous or non-Crown Prosecution Service Courts.
- 2.3 It is a matter of concern that if the two courts are merged this might result in less court time being allocated to the Council and, accordingly, the Council would like an assurance from HMCS that sufficient court time would be available in the event of a merger taking place.

### 3. RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION

- 3.1 The Area Committee's views are sought on the proposals as outlined in the Consultation Paper and paragraph 1.3 above. The views of the Committee will be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration.

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Ms M Carney  
Chief Executive  
Sefton Council

Our ref: PMcG/ER

Your ref:

23 June 2010

Dear Ms Carney

## HM COURTS SERVICE ESTATES

I am writing to inform you that this afternoon the Secretary of State for Justice laid a Written Ministerial Statement announcing a consultation on the most strategic locations for magistrates' and county courts across England and Wales. Proposals were based on a series of principles around the importance of operating high quality courts within a reasonable travelling distance for communities, while ensuring value for money for taxpayers.

In the North West, the number of magistrates' and county courts does not reflect changes in population, workload or transport and communication links over the many years since they were opened. Many courts are considerably underused because there is insufficient workload for the number of courts in this area. Many others lack appropriate facilities for victims and witnesses, do not have secure facilities for prisoners, or are not accessible to disabled court users. These deficiencies limit the type of case that the judiciary can hear, and brings the standard of facilities below that expected in a modern justice system.

We are therefore inviting comment on the proposal to close the following courts:

### **Magistrates' courts:**

Northwich Magistrates' Court; Southport Magistrates' Court; Knowsley Magistrates' Court; Whitehaven Magistrates' Court; Penrith Magistrates' Court; Rawtenstall Magistrates' Court; City of Salford Magistrates' Court; Rochdale, Middleton and Heywood Magistrates' Court.

### **County courts;**

Northwich County Court; Southport County Court; Penrith County Court; Runcorn County Court; Whitehaven County Court (to be relocated to Workington Magistrates')



# Agenda Item 12

Court); Rawtenstall County Court; Chorley County Court; Salford County Court; Bury County Court.

The consultation also includes proposals to reduce the counter service at Kendal County Court and to remove payment facilities from counters in Greater Manchester and Lancashire magistrates' courts.

In addition, following an earlier consultation, without further delay the Secretary of State has also decided to close Leigh County Court, which hasn't been in use since an arson attack two years ago.

The consultation also sets out proposals on the merger of a number of Local Justice Areas to facilitate the changes. This will allow magistrates in these areas to be deployed more flexibly and give them the opportunity to make their vital expertise and experience available to a wider community.

In the Region, we are consulting on the following mergers:

- Liverpool and Knowsley to create Liverpool and Knowsley Local Justice Area
- North and South Sefton to create a single Sefton Local Justice Area
- Vale Royal and Chester, Ellesmere Port & Neston to create West Cheshire Local Justice Area
- Eden with Carlisle and District to form Carlisle & District and Eden Local Justice Area
- Whitehaven with West Allerdale and Keswick to form Whitehaven, West Allerdale and Keswick Local Justice Area.
- Blackburn, Darwen and Ribble Valley with Hyndburn to create East Lancashire Local Justice Area
- Bury with Rochdale, Middleton and Heywood to create the Bury and Rochdale Local Justice Area
- Manchester City with the City of Salford to create the Manchester and Salford Local Justice Area

It is important that those living in local communities in the area should not have to make excessively long or difficult journeys to attend court. At the same time there must be recognition of the infrequency with which most people need to visit a court, compared to other public services which they use and travel to more regularly.

In addition, geographical proximity for all court users should not and cannot be the sole concern. Providing people with appropriate access to justice does not necessarily mean providing a courthouse in every town or city. I believe the speed of case outcome, the quality and efficiency of the service we provide, and an environment which commands respect for the justice system and the safety and comfort of court users, are much more significant to the delivery of effective local justice across all communities.

Spending money to keep underused and unsuitable courts open where there is no business need is unfair to taxpayers and users of the court, particularly if it means they will receive an inferior service. I have considered the overall courts estate for the area in the context of the increasing amount of civil work resolved before coming into court, the falling numbers of cases heard in magistrates' courts, and the improved efficiency with which the magistrates' courts are dealing with cases. Until we align the number and location of our



courts with the needs of our communities, the taxpayer will continue to pay for their upkeep and all other unnecessary costs being incurred by HMCS and the rest of the justice system.

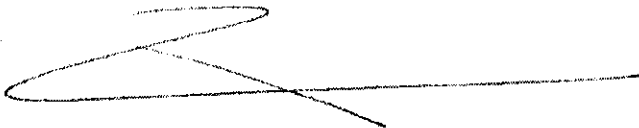
The courts we are consulting on nationally have annual running costs (excluding staffing costs) of around £15m per year and have a maintenance backlog of around £21.5m. Following a full analysis of responses to the consultation, and a decision on whether and which courts to close, we will assess the level of savings that could be achieved and the potential value that could be released from the disposal of the properties. As well as savings to HMCS there will also be savings for other justice agencies by focusing their attendance at a single accessible location within a community.

I believe these proposals would enable HMCS and its partners to provide vital public services that are also cost efficient. I am particularly interested in your views on the proposals set out in the consultation (available at: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/consultations/consultations.htm>) and hope you will be able to respond.

The Secretary of State will take all views expressed into account before making any decision on whether or which courts ought to be closed as part of the rationalisation.

I am keen for this consultation to involve real dialogue and debate with our partners across the Region, and for you to have the opportunity to raise any issues or concerns which we need to take into consideration with me. I would be happy to meet to discuss these issues over the course of the consultation period if you wish.

Yours sincerely



Paul McGladrigan  
Area Director  
Cheshire and Merseyside

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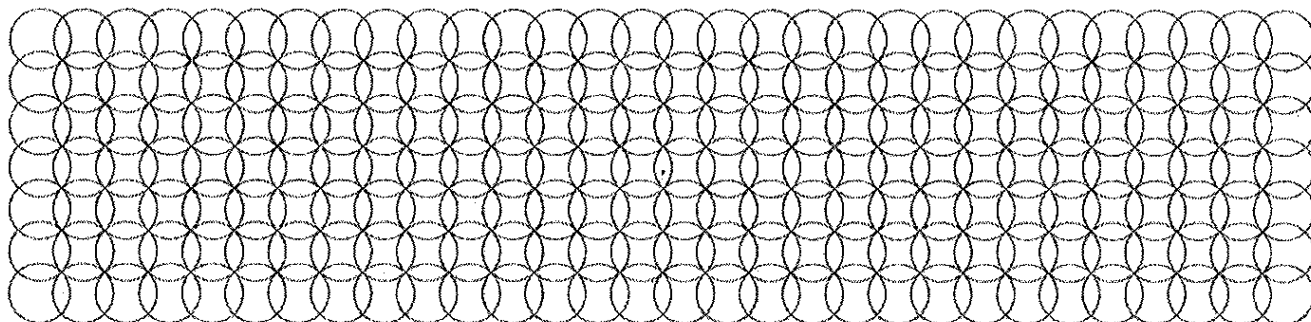


# **Proposal on the provision of courts services in Cheshire and Merseyside**

**Consultation Paper CP03/10**

Published on 23 June 2010

This consultation will end on 15 September 2010



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Ministry of  
**JUSTICE**

## **Proposal on the provision of courts services in Cheshire and Merseyside**

A consultation produced by Her Majesty's Courts Service, part of the Ministry of Justice. It is also available on the Ministry of Justice website at [www.justice.gov.uk](http://www.justice.gov.uk)

HER MAJESTY'S  
COURTS SERVICE  
**hmcs**

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# Agenda Item 12

Proposal on the provision of courts services in Cheshire and Merseyside

## The HMCS national estates strategy

HMCS is committed to providing a high quality courts service within a reasonable travelling distance of the communities that use it, while ensuring value for money for taxpayers.

HMCS currently operates out of 530 courthouses – 330 magistrates' courts, 219 county courts and 91 Crown Court centres.<sup>1</sup> However, the number and location of these does not reflect changes in population, workload or transport and communication links over the years since many of them were opened. This has resulted in some courts sitting infrequently and hearing too few cases. Some buildings do not provide suitable facilities for those attending or are not fully accessible for disabled court users. A number of magistrates' courts do not have secure facilities for prisoners. Other agencies with whom we work across the justice system are also put under strain by the need to work at a number of different courts in the same area, some of which are in close proximity to each other.

When public finances are under pressure, it is vital we eliminate waste and reduce costs. This consultation sets out how we believe we can best meet the justice needs of communities in each area and invites comments on whether work from the courts we propose to close could be moved to nearby courts which have sufficient capacity and, in the majority of cases, better facilities. By using these courts more efficiently we hope to save public money while also improving the services we provide for court users.

We are also consulting on the merger of a number of Local Justice Areas which would enable effective changes to courthouse provision. This will facilitate further efficiency savings in administrative work, whilst ensuring that magistrates continue to provide a vital frontline service to the public.

In order to form the proposals in this document the following principles have been followed:

- improve utilisation to at least 80%;
- provide greater flexibility through co-location of criminal courts and civil courts with tribunal hearing centres;
- plan on a long term basis;
- integrate developing policy and operational changes into estates planning;
- ensure access to courts – enabling the majority of the public to be within a 60 minute commute of their nearest court by public transport;<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A number of courts are co-located or in combined centres.

<sup>2</sup> With consideration given to those who live in rural communities.

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Proposal on the provision of courts services in Cheshire and Merseyside

- ensure the estate supports the challenges of rural access;
- wherever possible centralise back office functions;
- have specialist facilities in large strategic locations only;
- move towards larger courts;
- maintain properties at an appropriate level; and
- share facilities with the Tribunal Service.

Court users should not have to make excessively long or difficult journeys to attend court, but geographical proximity for all court users should not be the sole (or even primary) concern. Providing people with appropriate access to justice does not necessarily mean providing a courthouse in every town or city. The speed of case outcome, the quality and efficiency of the service we provide, and an environment which commands respect for the justice system and the safety and comfort of court users, are much more significant to the delivery of effective local justice across all communities in England and Wales.

We need to ensure that local communities, including those in rural areas, have access to a court and we seek views on this. At the same time we must be realistic about the frequency with which most people need to visit a court, compared to other services which they use and travel to more regularly such as banks, schools, supermarkets or hospitals.

We need to consider the required courts estate in the context of the falling workload which is being dealt with in a more efficient and timely way as a result of close partnership working between HMCS and the judiciary. At the same time, we have been careful to ensure that there remains sufficient capacity within the remaining courts to accommodate any future increases in workload.

This consultation will take account of all of these factors plus any additional relevant considerations which are put forward during the consultation period.



## Introduction

This paper announces proposals that will enable HMCS in Cheshire and Merseyside to provide vital public services whilst reducing the cost for the taxpayer.

Feedback to the questions set out in the consultations will enable us to ensure that courts remain in the most important strategic locations, that communities continue to have access to courts within a reasonable travelling distance, and that cases are heard in courts with suitable facilities which will in turn reduce the overall costs. At the same time, we have been careful to ensure that there would be sufficient capacity within the remaining magistrates' courts should there be a decision to increase their sentencing powers in the future.

The consultation seeks the views of everyone with an interest in local justice arrangements. The Lord Chancellor will take all views expressed into account before making any decision on which courts ought to be closed and when.

This consultation is being conducted in line with the Code of Practice on Consultation issued by the Cabinet Office and falls within the scope of the Code. The consultation criteria, which are set out on page 35 have been followed.

A preliminary Impact Assessment and Equality Impact Assessment initial screening have been completed, which will be developed during the consultation period. A copy of the initial Impact Assessment, the initial screening for an Equality Impact Assessment and the Rural Proofing checklist is available at [www.justice.gov.uk](http://www.justice.gov.uk).

Copies of the consultation paper are being sent to:

- Local MPs;
- Local Constabulary;
- Crown Prosecution Service – Chief Crown Prosecutor;
- Director of Offender Management;
- Civil Court Users Association;
- District and County Councils and Local Authorities;
- Local Courts Board;
- Local Criminal Justice Boards;
- Judicial Issues Group;
- Local Bench Chairs;
- Criminal Defence Service;

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Proposal on the provision of courts services in Cheshire and Merseyside

- Law Society;
- Bar Council;
- Local legal practitioners;
- Senior Presiding Judge;
- Presiding Judge;
- Senior District Judge
- Association of HM District Judges;
- District Judge (Magistrates' Court);
- The Chief Magistrate;
- Magistrates' Association;
- National Bench Chairs Forum;
- Justices' Clerks' Society;
- Lord Lieutenant;
- High Sheriff;
- Witness Care;
- Victim Support;
- Youth Offending Teams;
- Prison Escort and Custody Service;
- The Coroners Service; and
- Trades Unions (PCS, FDA and Prospect).

This list is not meant to be exhaustive or exclusive and responses are welcomed from anyone with an interest in or views on the subject covered by this paper.

This consultation is also available at [www.justice.gov.uk](http://www.justice.gov.uk).

A map of proposals set out in this consultation paper is available at Annex A.

### **Magistrates' courts in Merseyside**

#### **The need for change**

HMCS currently operates magistrates' courts in Liverpool, Wirral, North Sefton (Southport), South Sefton (Bootle), St Helens and Knowsley.

It also operates the North Liverpool Community Justice Centre, which sits five days per week as a Magistrates' Court and once per month as a Crown Court for sentence hearings only.

The location of these seven courts does not reflect changes in population, workload or transport and communication links since they were originally opened. The overall reduction in workload in magistrates' courts has led to a utilisation<sup>3</sup> rate in Merseyside of 59.6% in 2009-10.

There are currently six Local Justice Areas within the LCJB area, each with a separate bench of magistrates as follows:

- The Liverpool bench has 290 magistrates;
- The Wirral bench has 201;
- The North Sefton bench has 72;
- The South Sefton bench has 113;
- The St Helens bench has 134; and
- The Knowsley bench has 104

Through operating out of this number of magistrates' courts HMCS is unable to provide an efficient service in Merseyside. The current justice area structure prevents magistrates from being deployed flexibly or sharing their vital expertise and experience with a wider community that would benefit.

By implementing the proposals set out below we believe that HMCS can make better use of the remaining estate and significantly reduce costs both to HMCS and other agencies within the criminal justice system.

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<sup>3</sup> Courtroom utilisation is the time a courtroom is used, against the hours that a courtroom is available for use.

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Proposal on the provision of courts services in Cheshire and Merseyside

## The proposal

- To continue to operate magistrates' courts in Liverpool, Wirral, South Sefton (Bootle) and St Helens;
- To close the magistrates' courts in North Sefton (Southport) and Knowsley;
- To merge the Local Justice Areas of Liverpool and Knowsley to create Liverpool and Knowsley Local Justice Area; and
- To merge the North and South Sefton Local Justice Areas to create a single Sefton Local Justice Area.

## **North Sefton (Southport) Magistrates' Court**

Southport Magistrates' Court is the only criminal court in the North Sefton Local Justice Area. The court sits three days per week, with hearings covered by magistrates from the local bench and three part-time ushers based on site. The administration of the court is undertaken by a legal advisor and support staff from its linked court at South Sefton (Bootle), 18.7 miles away. A Court Manager, in partnership with a Deputy Justices' Clerk and support team, run both sites from South Sefton, where the court files are retained and all administrative work is handled. Under the proposal, North Sefton would close and all its hearings would transfer to South Sefton Magistrates' Court, which has recently been established as a Model Court.

The proposal would also result in the merger of North Sefton Local Justice Area, which has a bench of 72 magistrates and South Sefton Local Justice Area, which has a bench of 113.

### **Workload**

North Sefton deals with a full range of magistrates' court work. Due to the level of work in the area the court only sits for three days a week and uses only one of its four courtrooms on a regular basis.

### **Accommodation**

The North Sefton court was built between 1917 and 1938. It is shared in part with the Police and joined to the local Police Station. It has four courtrooms, two with secure docks.

The court's witness facilities are described as very poor and, due to the lack of dedicated toilet facilities, witnesses have to be escorted to staff toilets on the secure side of the building. The main issue is the under utilisation of the building resulting in inefficiency and administrative costs. As well as regularly only using a quarter of the courtrooms, the court has vacant space on the ground floor, which is in a state of disrepair.

Plans to integrate Southport County Court into the building were abandoned on cost grounds and that court is now also proposed for closure (see below).

### **Location**

Southport town centre, where North Sefton Magistrates' Court is based, is 18.7 miles from Bootle, where South Sefton Magistrates Court is located. Frequent buses and trains link the two.

A train journey from Southport to Bootle takes 33 minutes (costing £4.40 return) and both stations are in reasonable walking distance of the town centre and courts. The bus journey takes 55 minutes, but involves very little walking

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Proposal on the provision of courts services in Cheshire and Merseyside

as buses stop outside the court in Bootle. Services run every fifteen to 30 minutes daily. The bus costs around £4.20 for an adult day saver ticket.

## **Staff implications**

There are currently three part-time staff based at North Sefton Magistrates' Court.

Other staff who currently work at North Sefton on a rota basis are based at South Sefton Magistrates' Court.

HMCS will engage with staff and the Trades Unions throughout the consultation process.

## **Cost implications**

The 2009/10 operating cost<sup>4</sup> of North Sefton (Southport) Magistrates' Court was £161,435. The closure of Southport court house would also remove the need for HMCS investment in backlog maintenance of around £285,000.

## **Implementation**

Should the decision to close North Sefton (Southport) Magistrates' Court be taken, a full implementation plan will be produced to ensure the smooth transfer of work

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<sup>4</sup> 2009/10 HMCS operating costs (excluding staff and non cash costs).

## **Merger of North and South Sefton Local Justice Areas to form Sefton Local Justice Area**

There are currently 72 magistrates on the North Sefton Bench and 113 magistrates on the South Sefton Bench.

By merging the Local Justice Areas and Benches Sefton will have a larger pool of magistrates through which to undertake their vital role and to fulfil all of the necessary statutory positions.

As part of the Sefton Bench, magistrates would have greater scope to deal with a variety of work, broadening their experience and making it easier for them to maintain their range of competencies.

A merger of the benches would also reduce the amount of administrative work involved in organising and attending separate bench and committee meetings. This would facilitate further efficiency savings whilst enabling an effective service to continue to be provided with increased flexibility.

## **Southport County Court**

Southport County Court has jurisdiction for the full range of civil and family work except for bankruptcy. Under this proposal Southport would close and the bulk of its workload would transfer to the modern Civil and Family Justice Centre in Liverpool. As some parishes to the north of Southport are closer to neighbouring Preston, the small proportion of work associated with these areas would be transferred to Preston County Court, which belongs to the Cumbria and Lancashire HMCS Area. Further work is being undertaken to determine the proportions of work that would be transferred to each of these two locations.

### **Workload**

The court operates five days per week with one full-time District Judge and a second District Judge for approximately half of the time available.

### **Accommodation**

Southport County Court is a minor occupier in a shared 1960s building, which is in a poor condition (although Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant). The main occupier is seeking to vacate the building putting the continued occupancy of HMCS under threat. The current lease arrangement, which is renewed every five years, is due to expire in 2011. The court has two civil hearing rooms and occasionally uses a courtroom in Southport Magistrates' Court, which is also proposed for closure.

### **Location**

Liverpool Civil and Family Justice Centre is 21.3 miles from Southport town centre. There are good transport links between Southport town centre and Liverpool city centre. The train journey between the two takes 42 minutes and the train station is adjacent to the court in Liverpool. An alternative bus service takes one hour nine minutes. Both services run daily every fifteen to 30 minutes. The train costs £4.40 return and day bus pass costs approximately £4.20.

### **Staff implications**

There are currently nine staff based at Southport County Court.

HMCS will engage with staff and the Trades Unions throughout the consultation process.



## **Cost implications**

The 2009/10 operating cost<sup>10</sup> of Southport County Court was £162,819?. The closure of Southport court house would also remove the need for HMCS investment in backlog maintenance of around £50,000.

## **Implementation**

Should the decision to close Southport County Court be taken, a full implementation plan will be produced to ensure the smooth transfer of work.

## **Counter Services**

The proposed closure would also involve the loss of the counter service currently offered at Southport County Court between 10.00am and 4.00pm every day. Alternative counter services are available at Liverpool Civil and Family Justice Centre between 10.00 am and 4.00pm daily.

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<sup>10</sup> 2009/10 HMCS operating costs (excluding staff and non cash costs).

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## Consultations on local courts published

23 June 2010

**Ministers announced today proposals to modernise and improve the use of courts in England and Wales.**

The consultations published today seek to enable HMCS to better provide vital services for local communities. They ask for views on whether to close 103 magistrates' and 54 county courts that are underused and inadequate in England and Wales.

HMCS currently operates out of 530 courts, some of which do not fit the needs of modern communities. Their number and location does not reflect recent changes in population, workload or transport and communication links over the many years since they were originally opened. Views are now invited on how we can improve the services courts provide.

If implemented, running cost savings of around £15.3m per year could be achieved along with a saving of £21.5m on maintenance costs that could be avoided. There will also be savings for other justice agencies by focusing their attendance at a single accessible location within a community.

**Courts Minister Jonathan Djanogly said:**

'When public finances are under pressure, it is vital to eliminate waste and reduce costs. The Government is committed to supporting local justice, enabling justice to be done and seen to be done in our communities. Magistrates hear the majority of criminal cases and this voluntary contribution will continue to be strongly supported by the government as the bedrock of our justice system.'

'The arrangements we have are historical and now need to be re-assessed to ask whether they properly meet the needs of communities as they are today – we increasingly use the internet and email to communicate and access services and we travel further to work, for leisure and to do our weekly shop. We now have the opportunity to think afresh about how we can create a more modern fit-for-purpose justice system in line with the way we live our lives today.'

'Not all disputes need to be resolved in court. I want to explore whether more people can resolve their disputes in a way that leads to faster and more satisfactory solutions. Across the civil, family and criminal courts I want to explore ways we can harness technology more effectively so people don't necessarily have to physically attend court when they give evidence or access court services.'

'We should not think about access to justice as simply a question of length of the journey to the nearest court. In the future, we need to look at whether through the more effective use of video and telephone links and other technology including online services, we can improve the public's experience of the justice system.'

A full list of the courts being consulted on can be found in the notes to editors at the end of this press release.

**Jonathan Djanogly continued:**

'The Lord Chancellor and I are keen to hear the views of everyone with an interest in local justice arrangements. He will take all views into account before making any decision on which courts ought to be closed and when.'

'As well as consulting on the courts we need today I want to begin a conversation about how the courts service could be modernised to improve the justice system as well as reduce its costs.'

In order to facilitate the proposed changes, the merger of a number of Local Justice Areas is also being consulted upon. This would allow magistrates in these areas to be deployed more flexibly and allow them the opportunity to provide their expertise and experience to a wider community.'

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Following an earlier consultation the decision has been taken to close Leigh County Court. Since an arson attack two years ago, all cases that would have been heard in Leigh are being heard in Wigan or Warrington, only seven and ten miles away respectively. This has not caused any disruption to the delivery of justice in Greater Manchester.

## Notes to editors

1. The consultation papers published today apply to the following HMCS regions and courts in England and Wales:

### North West

#### Magistrates' courts:

Northwich Magistrates' Court, Southport Magistrates' Court, Knowsley Magistrates' Court, Whitehaven Magistrates' Court, Penrith Magistrates' Court, Rawtenstall Magistrates' Court, Salford Magistrates' Court, Rochdale Magistrates' Court.

#### County courts:

Northwich County Court, Southport County Court, Penrith County Court, Runcorn County Court, Whitehaven County Court, Rawtenstall County Court, Chorley County Court, Salford County Court, Bury County Court.

### North East

#### Magistrates' courts:

Guisborough Magistrates' Court, Bishop Auckland Magistrates' Court, Tynedale Magistrates' Court, Alnwick Magistrates' Court, Blaydon Magistrates' Court, Gosforth Magistrates' Court, Houghton Le Spring Magistrates' Court, Goole Magistrates' Court, Skipton Magistrates' Court, Selby Magistrates' Court, Batley And Dewsbury Magistrates' Court, Keighley Magistrates' Court Sitting At The Bingley Court House, Pontefract Magistrates' Court.

#### County courts:

Bishop Auckland County Court, Consett County Court, Barnsley County Court, Goole County Court, Skipton County Court, Pontefract County Court, Keighley County Court, Dewsbury County Court.

### Wales:

#### Magistrates' courts:

Barry Magistrates' Court, Aberdare Magistrates' Court, Llwynypia Magistrates' Court, Ammanford Magistrates' Court, Cardigan Magistrates' Court, Llandovery Magistrates' Court, Denbigh Magistrates' Court, Pwllheli Magistrates' Court, Flint Magistrates' Court, Chepstow Magistrates' Court, Abertillery Magistrates' Court, Abergavenny Magistrates' Court, Llangefni Magistrates' Court.

#### County courts:

Chepstow County Court, Aberdare County Court, Rhyl County Court, Pontypool County Court, Llangefni County Court.

### Midlands

#### Magistrates' courts:

Halesowen Magistrates' Court, Sutton Coldfield Magistrates' Court, West Bromwich Magistrates' Court, Rugby Magistrates' Court, Stoke Magistrates' Court, Tamworth Magistrates' Court, Ludlow Magistrates' Court, Market Drayton Magistrates' Court, Oswestry Magistrates' Court, Ilkeston Magistrates' Court, Newark Magistrates' Court, Worksop Magistrates' Court, Retford Magistrates' Court, Coalville Magistrates' Court, Market Harborough Magistrates' Court, Melton Mowbray Magistrates' Court, Spalding Magistrates' Court, Towcester Magistrates' Court, Daventry Magistrates' Court, Rutland Magistrates' Court, Kettering Magistrates' Court.

#### County courts:

Rugby County Court, Stourbridge County Court, Stratford-Upon-Avon County Court, Newark County Court, Worksop County Court, Melton Mowbray County Court, Wellingborough County Court, Grantham County Court, Skegness County Court, Tamworth County Court, Oswestry County Court, Ludlow County Court, Shrewsbury County Court, Evesham County Court, Redditch County Court, Burton-Upon-Trent County Court, Kidderminster County Court.

## South West

### Magistrates' courts:

Frome Magistrates' Court, Bridgwater Magistrates' Court, Liskeard Magistrates' Court, Newton Abbot Magistrates' Court, Camborne Magistrates' Court, Totnes Magistrates' Court, Honiton Magistrates' Court, Penzance Magistrates' Court, Blandford Forum Magistrates' Court, Wimborne Magistrates' Court, Coleford Magistrates' Court, Cirencester Magistrates' Court, Stroud Magistrates' Court, Andover Magistrates' Court, Alton Magistrates' Court, Lyndhurst Magistrates' Court.

### County courts:

Cheltenham County Court, Penzance County Court, Trowbridge County Court, Poole County Court.

## South East

### Magistrates' courts:

Grays Magistrates' Court, Harlow Magistrates' Court, Epping Magistrates' Court, Ely Magistrates' Court, Wisbech Magistrates' Court, Thetford Magistrates' Court, Cromer Magistrates' Court, Swaffham Magistrates' Court, Sudbury Magistrates' Court, Ashford Magistrates' Court, Sittingbourne Magistrates' Court, Epsom Magistrates' Court, Woking Magistrates' Court, Mid-Sussex Magistrates' Court, Lewes Magistrates' Court, Bicester Magistrates' Court, Hemel Hempstead Magistrates' Court, Witney Magistrates' Court, Amersham Magistrates' Court, Newbury Magistrates' Court, Didcot Magistrates' Court.

### County courts:

Ashford County Court, Gravesend County Court, Haywards Heath County Court, Epsom County Court, Huntingdon County Court, Harlow County Court, Lowestoft County Court, Newbury County Court, Hitchin County Court.

## London

### Magistrates' courts:

Acton Magistrates' Court, Haringey Magistrates' Court (Highgate), Harrow Magistrates' Court, Sutton Magistrates' Court, Barking Magistrates' Court, Brentford Magistrates' Court, Kingston Magistrates' Court, Woolwich Magistrates' Court, Balham Youth Court, Waltham Forest Magistrates' Court, Tower Bridge Magistrates' Court.

### County courts:

Ilford County Court, Mayor's And City Court.

2. The consultation documents are available in the [consultation section of the Ministry of Justice web site](#).
3. The closing date for consultation responses is 15 September 2010.
4. You can view and download the consultation paper and response paper on the [proposed closure of Leigh County Court](#).
5. For more information please call the Ministry of Justice Press Office on 020 3334 3536.

## Contact us

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