

Committee: SOUTHPORT AREA COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 1 SEPTEMBER 2010

Title of Report: CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS TO CLOSE SOUTHPORT (NORTH SEFTON) MAGISTRATES' COURT AND SOUTHPORT COUNTY COURT

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

Purpose of Report

- (1) To advise the Area Committee 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 are sought on the proposals to close Southport Magistrates' Court and Southport County Court.

Corporate Objective Monitoring

<u>Corporate Objective</u>		<u>Positive Impact</u>	<u>Neutral Impact</u>	<u>Negative Impact</u>
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			

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

SEFTON M.B.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.