



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.'

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.

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