



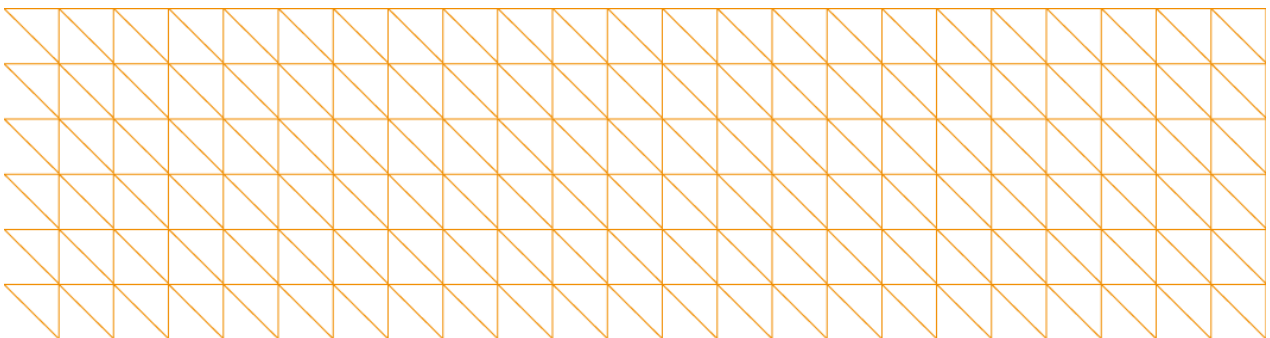
Ministry
of Justice



HM Courts &
Tribunals Service

Response to the proposal on the provision of court and tribunal services in the London region

This response is published on 11 February 2016





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Tribunals Service

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Response to consultation carried out by HM Courts & Tribunals Service, part of the Ministry of Justice. This information is also available at www.gov.uk/moj

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Introduction and contact details

This is the response to the consultation: Proposal on the provision of court and tribunal services in the London region.

It will cover:

- the background to the consultation
- a summary of the responses to the consultation
- a detailed response to the points raised in response to the consultation
- next steps following this consultation.

Further copies of this report and the consultation paper can be obtained by contacting **HMCTS Consultation** at the address below:

HM Courts & Tribunals Service
Post Point 1.13, 1st Floor
102 Petty France
London SW1H 9AJ
Telephone: 0161 240 5021

Email: estatesconsultation@hmcts.gsi.gov.uk

This report is also available at www.gov.uk/moj

Alternative format versions of this publication can be requested from the contact details above.

Complaints or comments

If you have any complaints or comments about the consultation process you should contact HM Courts & Tribunals Service at the above address.

Foreword

On the 16 July 2015 the national consultation on the provision of court and tribunal estate in England and Wales was launched and put forward proposals to close 10 courts in the London region.

Working with the judiciary, we want to reform our services so that they better meet the needs of the public in the modern age. The consultation put forward proposals to make changes to our estate where buildings are no longer able to provide a modern service due to poor facilities, where usage is low and where sites no longer provide value for money.

A total of 126 consultation responses were received for the London region. As the Delivery Director responsible for managing the operations of HM Courts & Tribunals Service in the London region, I am very grateful to everyone for taking the time to provide their views on our proposals to help us reach the best solutions. It is clear from the responses that our courts and tribunals continue to be valued by society and that it is important to maintain effective access to justice.

The Lord Chancellor has agreed to close 10 courts and tribunals in the London region. Eight sites will close as proposed in the consultation, with a further two taking place but with changes to the original proposal. These changes, many suggested by respondents, include the establishment of suitable alternative venues, such as the use of local civic buildings, or different venues in the HM Courts & Tribunals Service estate to those originally proposed. Further details are included on a court-by-court basis in the summary of responses.

The decision to close a court or tribunal will mean that in some cases court users will need to travel further to attend court. We have modified some of our plans using the local knowledge provided in responses to the consultation, to reduce the travel time impact to court users. We will continue to investigate and develop alternative ways for users to access our services to improve access to justice.

Staff and judiciary who work hard to deliver our justice system will obviously be affected by these changes. I am committed to working closely with the judiciary on the implementation of these changes. I am also committed to supporting our staff through these changes and ensuring the transition to the new arrangements takes place in a fair and transparent manner in line with the Managing Organisation Change Framework and in consultation with the Departmental Trade Union.

Attached with this document is an indicative timetable for implementation. Please note this timetable is subject to change as the programme progresses.

Sheila Proudlock

**Delivery Director
HM Courts & Tribunals Service**

Background

The consultation paper *'Proposal on the provision of court and tribunal services in the London region'* was published on 16 July 2015. It invited comments from anyone with an interest in local justice to ensure that courts and tribunals continue to be aligned to workload; that communities continue to have access to court and tribunal buildings where they need to attend or through alternative methods; and that cases are heard in buildings with suitable facilities.

This consultation proposes the closure of the following courts and tribunals: ¹

- Bow County Court
- Feltham Magistrates' Court
- Greenwich Magistrates' Court
- Hammersmith County Court (formerly West London County Court)
- Lambeth County Court
- Pocock Street Tribunal Hearing Centre
- Richmond-upon-Thames Magistrates' Court
- Tottenham Magistrates' Court
- Waltham Forest Magistrates' Court
- Woolwich County Court

Integrations

To provide users with an overview of all proposed change to the estate, the consultation also included information on where HM Courts & Tribunals Service plan to integrate courts within the same town or city. Local stakeholders will be notified of these changes when they take place.

An integration is when HM Courts & Tribunals Service moves work to allow jurisdictions to operate from fewer locations in a local area. This allows the closure of a building or buildings while retaining local jurisdictions, with a limited impact on service provision.

¹ reference in this document to magistrates' courts, county courts, crown courts and combined courts refers to buildings (a singular structure providing the physical hearing rooms for criminal, civil, family and tribunal cases) which house that activity in a particular location. Strictly, legislation provides that there is a single crown court, county court and family court.

Integrations are managed by HM Courts & Tribunals Service operational leads as part of the normal running of the business.

There are no proposed integrations for the London region.

County court utilisation

The county court utilisation figures provided in the site by site consultation proposals used sitting hours workload data as a share of total court room capacity. HM Courts & Tribunals Service is aware that some county courts occasionally use chambers and informal rooms to hear county court work and this may not be recorded in the workload data for some of these courts. A number of responses highlighted that work heard in county court chambers should also be considered as part of the overall usage of the court therefore supplementary data on judicial work held in chambers and informal rooms was considered before final decisions were made.

Operating costs

The operating costs included in this document have been updated from those published in July. They have been adjusted to reflect current prices.

The consultation closed on 8 October 2015 and this report summarises the responses, including how the consultation process influenced the final shape/further development of the policy/proposal consulted upon.

The Impact Assessment accompanying the consultation was updated to take account of evidence provided by stakeholders during the consultation period. The updated Impact Assessment is attached.

A list of respondents is at Annex A.

Summary of responses

Summary of responses on the proposal on the provision of court and tribunal services in the London region

The majority of consultees responded to proposals on specific courts rather than the whole regional consultation document.

A total of 126 individual responses to the London region consultation paper were received. Of these:

- 54 were from professional users
- 23 were from members of the public
- 14 were from magistrates
- 14 were from other public sector bodies
- eight were from members of the judiciary
- six were from Members of Parliament
- three were from criminal justice partners
- three were from a union or staff group
- one was from a staff member

Some respondents commented on more than one proposal and so their views have been considered for each of the sites mentioned within their response.

Of the responses received only 13 related to the region as a whole. These responses were both opposed and supportive of the proposals and raised the following points:

“There should be a positive environmental impact and improved sustainability through the closure of obsolete courthouses” (Magistrate)

“Yes, there could be increased use of telephone hearings and online dispute resolution. Rooms could be equipped in public buildings with video conferencing facilities, but this equipment would incur cost which would be offset against savings. Confidentiality and security of communication would have to be ensured. There is likely to be demand for remote access to the Court system. This is already demonstrated through the growth of ADR and ODR illustrated by the ADR Directive and new providers of dispute resolution services, like ProMediate (UK) Limited, offering online and telephone ADR” (Judiciary)

“it would encourage consideration of shared-use activities and events such as opening concourse areas outside normal court operating times (evenings/weekends) to other users to maximise the effective use of resources. It

should also be pointed out that with the Transforming Summary Justice as well as other initiatives to reduce unnecessary delays in dealing with cases". (Magistrates Association)

"Our experience of successfully delivering the policing of London highlights that three areas are key to making these changes; managing services and demand differently reinvestment of capital receipts to improve delivery... It is essential that the savings made from the London court closures are used to drive improvements within the Criminal Justice System in London". (Mayor of London, Office for Policing and Crime)

"The LCCSA understands that court facilities can be poor and some buildings are no longer fit for purpose. There is an argument for rationalisation of the court estate and the costs of the CJS cannot be ignored. Yet the principle of local justice should not be overlooked and there must be regard for the impact on court users of any closures especially as many are drawn from the most deprived and vulnerable sections of the community". (London Criminal Courts Solicitors Association)

"The proposals are too driven by the need to cut costs rather than any desire to improve access to justice. We believe that the closures will restrict access to courts and tribunals for many court users. The difficulty in reaching alternative courts is likely to increase the risk of delays and may lead to more miscarriages of justice due to the longer journey times acting as a deterrent to victims and witnesses". (PCS)

These points and the rest of the responses are considered in the remaining sections of the document for each court.

Decision

After careful consideration, the Lord Chancellor has decided the following courts will close, though with changes to the original proposals in the consultation. We have identified alternative venues to receive the workloads in order to reduce the impact of the closure on court users. Further details are included on a court-by-court basis in the responses to individual proposals:

- Bow County Court
- Lambeth County Court

The following courts will close as proposed:

- Feltham Magistrates' Court
- Greenwich Magistrates' Court
- Hammersmith County Court (formerly West London County Court)
- Pocock Street Tribunal Hearing Centre
- Richmond-upon-Thames Magistrates' Court
- Tottenham Magistrates' Court
- Waltham Forest Magistrates' Court
- Woolwich County Court

Responses to individual proposals

Bow County Court

The Lord Chancellor has decided that Bow County Court should be closed and its workload and hearings moved to Clerkenwell and Shoreditch County Court with housing possession hearings moved to Stratford Magistrates' Court.

A total of 22 responses were received which related to Bow County Court. Of these:

- 14 were from professional users
- three were from other public sector bodies
- two were from Members of Parliament
- two were from a union or staff group
- one was from a judicial team

Of these responses 20 were opposed to the proposals and two were neutral.

Access to justice

Bow County Court is approximately six miles from Clerkenwell and Shoreditch County Court. The travel links between the two courthouses are good. By car the journey takes approximately 20 minutes. By public transport the journey time from Bow County Court to the nearest station to Clerkenwell and Shoreditch which is Barbican underground takes on average 30 minutes.

It was stated in the consultation that Barbican underground station was zone 2, this was incorrect, it is zone 1. HM Courts & Tribunals Service apologises for the error made.

21 responses made in reference to access to justice.

“People with disabilities will find it difficult to travel to courts that are further away from their home.” (Legal Centre)

“ will drastically reduce access to justice. The travelling times and costs will put off people appearing. In particular housing cases will be heard in absence of the tenant and lead to evictions.” (Professional User)

It is acknowledged and accepted that some people will need to travel further to reach their nearest court and for some the journey, if made by public transport, may be over an hour, for the majority of people the closure will have little impact. We are mindful of the infrequency with which people need to attend court and the small proportion of people who would use public transport to reach court. Journey times indicate that 83% of users will be able to reach Clerkenwell and Shoreditch within an hour by public transport.

HM Courts & Tribunals Service acknowledges that Bow County Court serves a diverse community, the availability of interpreters to support users in attendance will continue and will not be affected by the closure. The changes we are making to our service will mean fewer people needing to physically go to a court, thus reducing the impact of attendance on those in precarious and irregular employment. Using modern technology, as we do for many other services, will make access to justice easier. Most people who live and work in London are used to travelling by public transport to access an array of public services. We need to balance the impact the additional travel might have with the (in) frequency with which most members of the public have to visit a court.

Value for money

The 2014-15 operating cost for Bow County Court was approximately £361,000.

No responses made reference to value for money.

The relative close proximity and the available capacity at Clerkenwell and Shoreditch County Court requires consideration. Clerkenwell and Shoreditch County Court is a modern 12 court centre, the increased usage as a result of Bow County Court relocating will increase the value for money to the taxpayer by reducing the running costs of a separate building.

Operational efficiency

During 2014-15, Bow County Court was used to approximately 47% of its capacity.

Seven responses made reference to operational efficiency.

“Courts such a Clerkenwell & Shoreditch CC are already very busy and there is already a lack of space and privacy on occasions. We would note with some nervousness how courts and court offices would cope with the increasing numbers of users.” (Barrister)

“The length of time that a case will take to progress through the court system will increase.” (Law Centre)

“I understand Romford County Court is serving at almost full capacity and am concerned closure of Bow will see Clerkenwell and Shoreditch extremely stretched.” (MP)

The underuse of the receiving court, Clerkenwell and Shoreditch County Court, offers the opportunity to make efficiencies whilst providing a high level of service. Larger buildings can facilitate more flexible and efficient listing of cases and give users more certainty of when their case will be heard. Combining the workload into one location will improve efficiency and enable savings to be made increasing court utilisation to a more acceptable level.

The 2014-15 courtroom utilisation of Bow County Court was based on the workload profile which dictates judicial deployment at the court.

Alternative provision of services

Four responses made reference to an alternative provision of services.

“Weekly or fortnightly sittings could be held in more local buildings, including magistrates’ courts, local council offices or even community settings. These should be set aside for those clients who face significant challenges in attending.”
(Professional user)

“We believe that a strategy of using other public buildings such as Magistrates Courts or Town Halls has the potential to offer the public local centres of justice.”
(Solicitor)

HM Courts & Tribunals Service has considered whether the use of a civic building should be explored. Following a further review of the existing court estate near to Bow County Court, it is proposed that the housing possession hearings are relocated to Stratford Magistrates’ Court. Stratford Magistrates’ Court is approximately a 10 minute walk from Bow County Court and is served by the same transport links.

Other considerations

One response made reference to the closure of Ilford County Court, five years ago where work was dispersed between Bow County Court and Romford County Court. Romford County Court is not part of the consultation and will remain open to serve the community.

One response made reference to the Office of National Statistics prediction that the population of Newham will rise from 330,000 currently to 376,000 by 2025. Projected workloads are regularly reviewed and any changes to workload as a result of a population increase would be handled through the flexible use of the court capacity at the time.

One response made reference to the inaccuracy of the facilities for customers with disabilities noting that the entrance and the ground floor courtrooms are accessible with the provision of an accessible toilet. HM Courts & Tribunals Service is committed to ensuring the facilities provided at court are fully accessible. Bow County Court is not fully compliant with the Equality Act 2010. The courtrooms on the ground floor are accessible however the five formal courtrooms and public consultation rooms on the first floor are not accessible for any user, including judiciary and staff as there is no passenger lift.

Decision

All the points raised by respondents to the consultation have been analysed and following careful consideration, the Lord Chancellor has decided to close Bow County Court and move its workload and hearings to Clerkenwell and Shoreditch County Court, with the housing possession hearings moving to Stratford Magistrates’ Court.

Implementation

Consultation with the Departmental Trade Union on staffing impacts will take place over the coming months. There are a number of factors to consider before Bow County Court can close. An indicative timetable of implementation is attached to this document. Please note this timetable is subject to change as the programme progresses.

Feltham Magistrates' Court

The Lord Chancellor has decided that Feltham Magistrates' Court should be closed and its hearings split between Ealing Magistrates' Court, Willesden Magistrates' Court and Uxbridge Magistrates' Court. Hearings will now not relocate to Hammersmith Magistrates' Court.

A total of 12 responses were received which related to Feltham Magistrates' Court. Of these:

- six were from magistrates
- two were from criminal justice partners
- two were from professional users
- one was from a Member of Parliament
- one was from a union or staff group

Of these responses five were in support of the proposals, whilst five were opposed and two were neutral.

Access to justice

Several responses made reference to access to justice.

“The train journey from Feltham to Hammersmith is approximately 40 minutes factoring in waiting time during station changes, finding parking in and around stations. There is no direct journey.” (Local respondent)

“Having looked at the current listing pattern, there is scope to consider creating a Youth Centre at Uxbridge for all youth work.” (Judiciary)

HM Courts & Tribunals Service has considered the responses suggesting that the hearings should be relocated to Uxbridge Magistrates' Court and Ealing Magistrates' Court. A review of court capacity has been undertaken for the courts in the North West and West London Local Justice Areas.

The review has concluded that between Ealing Magistrates' Court, Willesden Magistrates' Court and Uxbridge Magistrates' Court, the Feltham Magistrates' Court hearings can be split and absorbed.

Ealing Magistrates' Court is approximately eight miles from Feltham Magistrates' Court. The travel links between the courts are sufficient and by car the journey takes 40 minutes. By public transport the journey takes 50 minutes and the nearest station to Ealing Magistrates' Court is West Ealing (zone 3).

West Ealing station is served by the London overground. The courthouse is approximately an eight minute walk from the station.

Willesden Magistrates' Court is approximately 14 miles from Feltham Magistrates' Court. The travel links between the courts are sufficient and by car the journey takes 48 minutes.

By public transport the journey takes 66 minutes and the nearest station to Willesden Magistrates Court is Neasden (zone 2).

Neasden is served by the London underground (Jubilee line). The courthouse is approximately a 10 minute walk from the station.

Uxbridge Magistrates' Court is approximately 10 miles from Feltham Magistrates' Court. The travel links between the courts are sufficient and by car the journey takes 40 minutes. By public transport travelling by bus the journey takes approximately an hour and 15 minutes.

The relocation of the hearings to Ealing Magistrates' Court, Willesden Magistrates' Court and Uxbridge Magistrates' Court are deemed to be within the local area, with the courts continuing to hear cases from Heathrow (Polar Park), Hillingdon, Acton and Hounslow Police Stations. Analysis has been undertaken of the journey times from the police stations. Users will experience longer journeys where cases emanate from Heathrow and Hillingdon with no direct route to Willesden Magistrates' Court compared to users for hearings from Acton and Hillingdon where there is a direct route.

It is therefore proposed that HM Courts & Tribunals Service works with the Judicial Liaison Group to agree a suitable listing pattern taking into account journey times to absorb the work, splitting it into Ealing Magistrates' Court, Willesden Magistrates' Court and Uxbridge Magistrates' Court. This will include the youth work currently heard at Feltham Magistrates' Court.

Value for money

The 2014-15 operating cost for Feltham Magistrates' Court was approximately £232,000.

One response made reference to value for money.

"It follows that if Feltham Magistrates' court house is not compliant with the Equality Act 2010 and, taking into account that the cost of making it compliant would be prohibitive, we cannot object to its' closure." (Judiciary)

"At Uxbridge, however, there is former office area that is currently being used as storage. It is likely that the number of staff working at Uxbridge on a daily basis will reduce with different ways of working post digitalisation. There is capacity to create 2 additional courtrooms in space that is currently utilised by administrative staff." (Judiciary)

Consideration has been given to the level of investment required at Feltham Magistrates' Court against the enabling works needed at Ealing Magistrates' Court, Willesden Magistrates' Court and Uxbridge Magistrates' Court. Little investment is required to relocate the hearings with no enabling works required. HM Courts & Tribunals Service needs to reduce the cost of its estate and reinvest the savings.

Operational efficiency

During 2014-15, Feltham Magistrates Court was used to approximately 45% of its capacity.

Seven responses made reference to operational efficiency.

“I would envisage a longer trial listing period should Feltham close, given that Hammersmith would not immediately be able to accommodate all the work that Feltham currently takes” (Prosecutor)

Court utilisation figures are calculated using 2014-15 sitting hours workload data from the HM Courts & Tribunals Service performance database for the magistrates’ court as a share of total hearing room capacity. Capacity is based on an assumption of 248 sitting days per year and five hours per day for each room. HM Courts & Tribunals Service is confident that Ealing Magistrates’ Court, Willesden Magistrates’ Court and Uxbridge Magistrates’ Court have capacity to accommodate the hearings of Feltham Magistrates’ Court. Combining the workload will lead to court utilisation levels increasing to more acceptable levels and improved efficiency.

Alternative provision of services

One response made reference to an alternative provision of services.

“Hounslow Council is currently planning a new civic centre which will be five minutes’ walk from the main police station. Possibility of designing some justice work at the new building.” (MP)

HM Courts & Tribunals Service welcomes the suggestion made of possibly designing some justice work at the new building, however as there is sufficient capacity within Ealing Magistrates’ Court, Willesden Magistrates’ Court and Uxbridge Magistrates’ Court this does not need to be explored.

Alternative proposal

Two responses made reference to alternative proposals.

“Crown Court in Isleworth has 14 courts and one wonders if they are all working to capacity. I would suggest that it is looked at as a possible way of meeting local demand for a lower court and in an efficient way.” (Local respondent)

The use of Isleworth Crown Court has been explored, however there is no spare courtroom capacity for the hearings and it was therefore discounted at an early stage. One response made reference to the use of Uxbridge and Ealing Magistrates’ Court. This response has been considered as part of the review of the court capacity in the North West and West Local Justice Areas.

Other considerations

HM Courts & Tribunals Service acknowledges the reference made in relation to the removal of Local Justice Areas, however this does not form part of this consultation.

Furthermore HM Courts & Tribunals Service acknowledges the reference made in relation to waiting times before court. It is recognised that court attendance is a time consuming and often inefficient process for everyone involved. A more proportionate approach to court attendance would eliminate wasted time and enhance confidence in the administration of justice.

Decision

All the points raised by respondents to the consultation have been analysed and following careful consideration, the Lord Chancellor has decided to close Feltham Magistrates' Court and split the hearings between Ealing Magistrates' Court, Willesden Magistrates' Court and Uxbridge Magistrates' Court.

Implementation

Consultation with the Departmental Trade Union on staffing impacts will take place over the coming months. There are a number of factors to consider before Feltham Magistrates' Court can close. An indicative timetable of implementation is attached to this document. Please note this timetable is subject to change as the programme progresses.

Greenwich Magistrates' Court

The Lord Chancellor has decided that Greenwich Magistrates' Court should be closed and its hearings moved to Bromley Magistrates' Court.

A total of nine responses were received which related to Greenwich Magistrates' Court. Of these:

- three were from magistrates
- two were from professional users
- one was from a member of the public
- one was from a Member of Parliament
- one was from another public sector body
- one was from a union or staff group

Of these responses seven were opposed to the proposals, one was in favour and one was neutral.

Access to justice

Bromley Magistrates' Court is located five miles away from Greenwich Magistrates' Court.

Travel links between the courthouses are good. By car the journey takes approximately 20 minutes and by public transport approximately one hour.

Six responses made reference to access to justice issues.

"Bromley and Bexley are distant indeed from Greenwich and Woolwich. They do not form part of the old Inner London Estate. For local court users, witnesses, defendants, staff to reach them, is costly and time-consuming." (Magistrate)

"I am concerned that only 33% of court users would have access to service within 30-80 minutes." (MP)

A number of magistrates' courts within London routinely list work from across several Inner London boroughs and court users attend these hearing with little reported difficult or impact, Greenwich and Bromley Magistrates' Courts are two examples of this. Users already travel to Bromley (and Bexley) Magistrates' Court for the first and some final hearings, Greenwich is used for trial hearings on two days per week only, the remainder of the week the work is listed at Bromley (or Bexley) Magistrates' Court.

Value for money

The 2014-15 operating cost for Greenwich Magistrates' Court was approximately £335,000.

Two responses made reference to value for money.

“Before the recent amalgamation... Greenwich at last stood near the top of the estates list to be extended to 10 courts in a high-crime area.” (Magistrate)

HM Courts & Tribunals Service acknowledges that Greenwich Magistrates’ Court has previously been subject to plans for extensive redevelopment, however plans have not progressed as there has been suitable spare court accommodation available elsewhere. Refurbishment of Greenwich Magistrates’ Court would require huge investment and involve demolishing all but the Grade II listed parts of the building.

The building is in a poor condition and requires significant expenditure to bring it up to acceptable standards. Facilities for victims and witnesses and the general public are insufficient.

HM Courts & Tribunals Service needs to reduce the cost of its estate and reinvest the savings. The close proximity of the receiving court, its size, good condition and underuse are factors in the decision to close Greenwich Magistrates’ Court.

Operational efficiency

During 2014-15, Greenwich Magistrates’ Court was used to approximately 12% of its capacity.

Four responses made reference to operational efficiency.

“We should not ignore the cost and security issues involved with moving prisoners to and from court; prison vans get delayed, prisons don’t present defendants, prisoners may be held at locations a long way from court buildings. Nor should we ignore the cost of bringing other agencies to court (e.g. Probation, Witness Service, Fines Collection).” (Magistrate)

To enable efficiency in the longer term HM Courts & Tribunals Service needs to increase the efficient use of the estate where possible. As there is such a low level of hearings at Greenwich Magistrates’ Court there is unlikely to be significant impact on other agencies. It is not possible to quantify any potential increase in costs for other bodies as a result of the hearings relocating to Bromley Magistrates’ Court, there may equally be efficiencies in that all activity occurring at one site in Bromley Magistrates’ Court may in fact reduce the costs of contracts by serving fewer sites. HM Courts & Tribunals Service has considered whether further courtroom capacity needs to be created and is confident that the hearings can be absorbed into Bromley Magistrates’ Court with the current capacity.

Alternative provision of services

Three responses made reference to an alternative provision of service.

“Some traffic offences can be dealt with in an admin setting, such as we do currently with applications. This could take place in a public building other than a courthouse. Video links are still patchy and unreliable. Reliable, secure and resilient technology solutions are vital to using physical buildings or alternatives.” (Magistrate)

“My constituency boasts a number of civic and public buildings that I believe could be used flexibly.” (MP)

HM Courts & Tribunals Service has considered whether the use of a civic building should be explored, however the security requirements needed for crime hearings in civic buildings compared to improving the use of court capacity within Bromley Magistrates' Court does not make this a viable option.

A national programme is underway to renew the department's video link equipment and related infrastructure and this will lead to a more reliable system being available to court users. HM Courts & Tribunals Service will explore using modern technology not just to make the justice system more accessible but to reduce the costs of the whole justice system.

Decision

All the points raised by respondents to the consultation have been analysed and following careful consideration, the Lord Chancellor has decided to close Greenwich Magistrates' Court and move its hearings to Bromley Magistrates' Court.

Implementation

Consultation with the Departmental Trade Union on staffing impacts will take place over the coming months. There are a number of factors to consider before Greenwich Magistrates' Court can close. An indicative timetable of implementation is attached to this document. Please note this timetable is subject to change as the programme progresses.

Hammersmith County Court (formerly West London County Court)

The Lord Chancellor has decided that Hammersmith County Court should be closed and its workload and hearings moved to Wandsworth County Court.

A total of 16 responses were received which related to Hammersmith County Court. Of these:

- eight were from professional users
- two were from members of the judiciary
- two were from magistrates
- one was from a Member of Parliament
- one was from another public sector body
- one was from a member of the public
- one was from a union or staff group

Of these responses two were in support of the proposals, whilst 14 were opposed.

Access to justice

Wandsworth County Court is approximately six miles from Hammersmith County Court.

Travel links between the courthouses are good. By car the journey takes approximately 20 minutes and by public transport the journey time from Hammersmith County Court takes on average 35 minutes.

It was stated in the consultation that the nearest London underground station was Putney Bridge, this was incorrect, it is East Putney (zone 2). HM Courts & Tribunals Service apologises for the error made.

All responses made reference to access to justice issues.

“We believe that the proposals will adversely (affect a) defendant’s ability to gain access to justice.” (Housing Association)

“Access to justice is a cornerstone of a democratic society. One aspect of access to justice is being able physically able to attend court locally. Closing local courts mean that people have to travel long distances.” (Barrister)

Two responses made reference to the gang injunction work. HM Courts & Tribunals Service has reviewed the current locations for the designated centres in London and has concluded that there needs to be an increase and a better spread of the centres across London. We will work with the judiciary and the Metropolitan Police to design a strategy to improve this. It is not intended that these hearings are relocated to Wandsworth County Court.

HM Courts & Tribunals Service acknowledges and accepts that some people will have to travel further to reach Wandsworth County Court, the journey is not excessive and 56% of users will be able to reach the court by public transport within an hour. For the majority of people the closure will have little impact. We are mindful of the infrequency with which people need to attend court.

One response made reference to the duty solicitor scheme. There is no intention to cease the scheme as a result of this closure.

Value for money

The 2014-15 operating cost for the venue as a whole was approximately £1.2million.

Three responses made reference to value for money.

“The value for money argument falls by the wayside in the case of Hammersmith as it is not proposed that the building be closed, merely that the existing county court be replaced by the Feltham Magistrates Court.” (Judiciary)

HM Courts & Tribunals Service needs to reduce the cost of its estate and reinvest the savings. The closure of Hammersmith County Court makes use of spare capacity within Wandsworth County Court where levels of court use are low.

The spare capacity created by moving out of Hammersmith County Court would be used by the Local Justice Area to cope with an increase in a specific area of magistrates' court work.

Operational efficiency

During the 2014-15 Hammersmith County Court was used to approximately 62% of its capacity.

Six responses made reference to operational efficiency.

“The closure of the Court will create a capacity problems at Wandsworth County Court... It is a successful court which is used at a rate of 62% - higher than the national average of 46% as cited in the Ministry of Justice's own document” (MP)

“the manner in which usage figures have been compiled and which are, at best, misleading,... HMCTS must establish a 21st century IT system that is proved to work, then assess impact on workload and working practices and then determine how many courtrooms are required and where” (Judiciary)

The underuse of the receiving site at Wandsworth County Court offers the opportunity to make efficiencies while still providing access to justice. Combining the workload of Hammersmith County Court and Lambeth County Court (also part of this consultation) into Wandsworth County Court will lead to increases in court utilisation to a more acceptable level and improved efficiency. Larger buildings can facilitate more flexible and efficient listing of cases and give users more certainty of when their case will be heard.

The court utilisation of Hammersmith County Court was referred to in the consultation document and has been considered along with the projected workloads in the county

courts. Any exceptional changes to workload would be handled through the flexible use of the court capacity at that time.

Court utilisation figures are calculated using 2014-15 sitting hours workload data from the HM Courts & Tribunals Service performance database for the county courts as a share of total hearing room capacity. Capacity is based on an assumption of 248 sitting days per year and five hours per day for each room.

HM Courts & Tribunals Service are building a justice system which is simpler, swifter and more efficient. By using modern technology we can meet the needs of everyone who uses our services now and in the future.

Alternative provision of services

No responses made references to an alternative provision of services.

Other considerations

One response made reference to the accessibility provision currently at Wandsworth County Court. The building is not fully compliant with the Equality Act 2010, however, capital investment to further improve accessibility will be delivered during the next financial year, enabling Wandsworth County Court to become fully compliant.

One response made reference to the level of judicial deployment required at Wandsworth County Court. HM Courts & Tribunals Service has to have due regard to ensure its estate is utilised to deliver justice efficiently and effectively while providing value for money to the public purse. Judicial deployment will be integral to the operational running of Wandsworth County Court.

Decision

All the points raised by respondents to the consultation have been analysed and following careful consideration, the Lord Chancellor has decided to close Hammersmith County Court and move its workload and hearings to Wandsworth County Court.

Implementation

Consultation with the Departmental Trade Union on staffing impacts will take place over the coming months. There are a number of factors to consider before Hammersmith County Court can close. An indicative timetable of implementation is attached to this document. Please note this timetable is subject to change as the programme progresses.

Lambeth County Court

The Lord Chancellor has decided that Lambeth County Court should be closed and its workload and hearings moved to Wandsworth County Court with housing possession hearings moved to Camberwell Green Magistrates' Court.

A total of 55 responses were received which related to Lambeth County Court. Of these:

- 32 were from professional users
- 16 were from members of the public
- two were from Members of Parliament
- two were from other public sector bodies
- one was from a judicial team
- one was from a magistrate
- one was from a union or staff group

Of these responses 54 were opposed to the proposals and one was neutral.

Access to justice

Wandsworth County Court is approximately six miles from Lambeth County Court.

Travel links between the courthouses are good. By car the journey takes approximately 20 minutes. By public transport the journey time from Lambeth County Court to the nearest station to Wandsworth County Court takes on average 40 minutes.

It was stated in the consultation that the nearest London underground station was Putney Bridge, this was incorrect, it is East Putney (zone 2). HM Courts & Tribunals Service apologises for the error made.

47 responses made reference to access to justice.

"The closure of Lambeth County court will have a disproportionate impact on tenants living in Southwark subject to eviction applications. They already have to travel into Lambeth (several buses for most) as Southwark does not have its own County Court. It is now proposed that they should travel to East Putney to get to Wandsworth County Court. East Putney is virtually inaccessible to anyone without a car or who lives in south west London." (Member of the public and Magistrate).

"Will further restrict access to justice for the most vulnerable. Travelling further to court will affect the elderly, disabled, poor and single parents the most." (Unknown respondent).

"I do not think this court should be shut. I practice in chambers nearby and would have to travel further." (Unknown respondent).

“This will have an impact on the service users and I will have a greater distance to journey.” (Unknown respondent).

“Lambeth benefits from DJs and DDJs with local knowledge of landlord, tenant and local authority practices in the area. This would be lost or diluted. I do not want the dedicated staff (ushers, security etc) to lose their jobs.” (Barrister)

HM Courts & Tribunals Service has considered carefully the weight of responses in relation to access to justice. Many of the responses cite that travel times will be significantly increased for a large proportion of those before the court, that funding for those who are already on a low income will make the journey impossible and that users will simply not attend, thereby increasing the number of homes repossessed. HM Courts & Tribunals Service has reviewed the court estate near to Lambeth County Court to understand whether there is another option for the hearing of housing possession cases. The review has identified some court capacity available at Camberwell Green Magistrates' Court.

Camberwell Green Magistrates' Court is approximately two miles from Lambeth County Court and the journey time by car is approximately 20 minutes. By public transport the journey time is approximately 30 minutes either by overground train or bus.

Camberwell Green is served by one overground train station, Denmark Hill, which links into central London. Numerous bus routes also serve the area.

In terms of the impact on travel distances for professional users and the supporting organisations who are affected by the closure, particularly the duty solicitor scheme, HM Courts & Tribunals Service has no intention to reduce the level of support provided at any court by a closure and will work with organisations to ensure that support is maintained at any location where cases are heard.

Value for money

The 2014-15 operating cost for Lambeth County Court was approximately £289,000.

Six responses made reference to value for money.

“MOJ/HMCTS are not the freeholder of Lambeth CC. There are 9 years to run on the lease. There will therefore be no capital gain if the court is closed... the running cost savings will be minimal.” (Judiciary)

There are 460 buildings in England and Wales, costing taxpayers £500 million per year. Last year, a third of those buildings sat empty for more than half their available hearing time. HM Courts & Tribunals Service has to have due regard to ensure its estate is utilised to deliver justice efficiently and effectively while providing value for money to the public purse. The operating costs for the operating year 2014-15 does not represent value for money to the taxpayer given the level of utilisation at the court. If Lambeth County Court remained open, investment would be required to bring the court up to the required standard. The costs of the enabling works at Wandsworth County Court are still to be determined.

Operational efficiency

During 2014-15, Lambeth County Court was used to approximately 39% of its capacity.

19 responses made reference to operational efficiency.

“...highly competent local court, and will threaten further the overall efficiency of what is already an under-pressure court system.” (Solicitor)

“Concerned that other courts in the area would find it difficult to absorb Lambeth's case load.” (Unknown respondent).

“The utilisation figure quoted is based on flawed assumptions, does not take account of the work that the judges undertake in their chambers preparing judgements and reviewing cases.” (MP)

The underuse of the receiving site at Wandsworth County Court offers the opportunity to make efficiencies while still providing access to justice. Larger buildings can facilitate more flexible and efficient listing of cases and give users more certainty of when their case will be heard. Combining the workload of Hammersmith County Court (also part of this consultation), Wandsworth County Court and Lambeth County Court will lead to court utilisation levels increasing to more acceptable levels and improved efficiency. It is not agreed that this closure will contribute to an under pressure court system.

Court utilisation figures are calculated using 2014-15 sitting hours workload data from the HM Courts & Tribunals Service performance database for the county courts as a share of total hearing room capacity. Capacity is based on an assumption of 248 sitting days per year and five hours per day for each room and does not include work outside of the courtroom, preparing judgements and reviewing cases.

HM Courts & Tribunals Service is confident that the work from Lambeth County Court will fit into Wandsworth County Court and the housing possession hearings into Camberwell Green Magistrates' Court.

Alternative provision of services

Seven responses made reference to an alternative provision of services.

“we are concerned about the detrimental impact the closure and relocation will have on the community.” (Professional user)

“I foresee families and children put to great disadvantage with a knock on effect in hardship and crime.” (Local respondent)

The changes we are making to our service will mean fewer people needing to physically go to a court, thus reducing the impact of attendance on those in precarious and irregular employment. Using modern technology, as we do for many other services, will make access to justice easier. Most people who live and work in London are used to travelling by public transport to access an array of public services. We need to balance the impact the additional travel might have with the (in) frequency with which most members of the public have to visit a court.

HM Courts & Tribunals Service takes into account that Lambeth County Court serves some of the most vulnerable who are before the civil courts. Following a meeting between Shailesh Vara MP and Helen Hayes MP, HM Courts & Tribunals Service made contact with the London Borough of Southwark to discuss the potential use of space within their civic building to hold housing possession hearings. The London Borough of Southwark have carried out a feasibility of their civic building and have confirmed that there is no space within the civic building which could be considered.

Alternative proposal

Three responses made reference to an alternative proposal.

“and the Woolwich work (and maybe some Bromley work) is transferred to Lambeth. Lambeth has 2 courtrooms to accommodate this.” (Judiciary)

HM Courts & Tribunals Service has considered whether this is an option however the investment required to upgrade the facilities at Lambeth County Court is not economically viable.

Decision

All the points raised by respondents to the consultation have been analysed and following careful consideration, the Lord Chancellor has decided to close Lambeth County Court and move the workload and hearings to Wandsworth County Court, with housing possession hearings moving to Camberwell Green Magistrates' Court.

Implementation

Consultation with the Departmental Trade Union on staffing impacts will take place over the coming months. There are a number of factors to consider before Lambeth County Court can close. An indicative timetable of implementation is attached to this document. Please note this timetable is subject to change as the programme progresses.

Pocock Street Tribunal Hearing Centre

The Lord Chancellor has decided that Pocock Street Tribunal Hearing Centre should be closed and its hearings moved to Fox Court Tribunal Hearing Centre.

A total of three responses were received which related to Pocock Street Tribunal Hearing Centre. Of these:

- one was from a member of the judiciary
- one was from a professional user
- one was from a union or staff group

Of these responses, all were opposed to the proposals.

Access to justice

Three responses made reference to access to justice.

“The consultation should also note that the aim in [Special Educational Needs and Disability] SEND hearings is to limit travelling for parties to no more than one and a half hours each way to a suitable venue.” (Judiciary)

The consultation sought response on the most suitable hearing centre for the relocation of the hearings currently heard at Pocock Street Tribunal Hearing Centre. The response received detailed the accommodation requirements for the judiciary, staff and users.

HM Courts & Tribunals Service has considered the requirements and the available estate in central London. The location chosen to enable the closure of Pocock Street Tribunal Hearing Centre is Fox Court Tribunal Hearing Centre.

Fox Court Tribunal Hearing Centre is two miles from Pocock Street Tribunal Hearing Centre. Travel links between the centres are good. By car between buildings the journey takes approximately 10 minutes and by public transport the journey time from Pocock Street takes approximately 30 minutes.

Both courts are served by the London Underground (zone 1). The nearest station to Fox Court Tribunal Hearing Centre is Chancery Lane on the Central Line.

It is acknowledged and accepted that some people will need to travel further to reach their nearest court and for some the journey, if made by public transport, may be over an hour, for the majority of people the closure will have little impact. We are mindful of the infrequency with which people need to attend court and the small proportion of people who would use public transport to reach court.

Value for money

The 2014-15 operating cost for Pocock Street Tribunal Hearing Centre was approximately £438,000.

Two responses made reference to value for money.

“Losing access to local HMCTS premises is also likely to increase the costs by use of venues such as hotels and conference centres.” (Judiciary)

It is not intended that there will be an increase in the use of hotels and conference centres in central London. The receiving court has available capacity and there is little justification in keeping Pocock Street Tribunal Hearing Centre open.

HM Courts & Tribunals Service needs to reduce the cost of its estate and reinvest the savings. The close proximity of the receiving court, its size, good condition and underuse require consideration.

Operational efficiency

During 2014-15, Pocock Street Tribunals Hearing Centre was used to approximately 49% of its capacity.

Two responses made reference to operational efficiency.

“The consultation should take into account the likely impact of increased competition and pressures on the many jurisdictions which list into hearings rooms nationally such as SEND who do not have dedicated venues.” (Judiciary)

The receiving court, Fox Court Tribunal Hearing Centre has sufficient capacity to absorb the hearings and accommodation requirements of Pocock Street Tribunal Hearing Centre with limited enabling works. Combining the workload to one location would improve efficiency and enable savings to be made.

Alternative provision of services

No responses made reference to an alternative provision of services.

Other considerations

HM Courts & Tribunals Service acknowledges the specific judicial, staff and stakeholder accommodation requirements detailed within the response and will work with those to ensure appropriate facilities available within Fox Court Tribunal Hearing Centre.

Decision

All the points raised by respondents to the consultation have been analysed and following careful consideration, the Lord Chancellor has decided to close Pocock Street Tribunal Hearing Centre and move its hearings to Fox Court Tribunal Hearing Centre.

Implementation

Consultation with the Departmental Trade Union on staffing impacts will take place over the coming months. There are a number of factors to consider before Pocock Street Tribunal Hearing Centre can close. An indicative timetable of implementation is attached to this document. Please note this timetable is subject to change as the programme progresses.

Richmond-upon-Thames Magistrates' Court

The Lord Chancellor has decided that Richmond-upon-Thames Magistrates' Court should be closed and the crime work should relocate to other courts within the South West Local Justice Area. The immigration and asylum hearings will relocate to the Immigration and Asylum Centre at Hatton Cross.

A total of three responses were received which related to Richmond-upon-Thames Magistrates' Court. Of these:

- two were from magistrates
- one was from a union or staff group

Of these responses two were in support of the proposals and one was opposed.

Access to justice

Richmond-upon-Thames Magistrates' Court is approximately six and a half miles from the Immigration and Asylum Centre at Hatton Cross.

Travel links between the courthouses are good. By car the journey takes approximately 40 minutes and by public transport the journey time from Richmond takes, on average 60 minutes to Hatton Cross. Three bus routes pass Hatton Cross, from Richmond, Kingston and Northolt. Routes serve Feltham and Hatton Cross stations.

No responses made reference to access to justice.

Value for money

The 2014-15 operating cost for Richmond-upon-Thames Magistrates' Court was approximately £205,000.

One response made reference to the crime work. Following realignment of the criminal work within the South West London Local Justice Area, Richmond-upon-Thames Magistrates' Court has been a hearing centre for criminal work when required.

“The courthouse at Richmond was in a poor state of repair and the facilities available at the two other locations were superior.” (Magistrate)

No responses made reference to the immigration and asylum hearings relocating to the Immigration and Asylum Centre at Hatton Cross.

HM Courts & Tribunals Service needs to reduce the cost of its estate and reinvest the savings. The crime work has already relocated to other courts within the South West Local Justice Area, the court capacity is no longer required. For the immigration and asylum hearings, the close proximity of the receiving court at Hatton Cross, its size, good condition and underuse requires consideration.

Operational efficiency

During 2014-15, Richmond-upon-Thames Magistrates' Court was used to approximately 65% of its capacity.

No responses made reference to operational efficiency.

One response made reference that the other courts within the South West Local Justice Area - Wimbledon Magistrates' Court and Lavender Hill Magistrates' Court have suffered from insufficient estate expenditure. HM Courts & Tribunals Service needs to reduce the current and future cost of running the estate and to maximise the capital receipts from surplus estate for reinvestment.

The crime work has already relocated. The receiving court for the immigration and asylum hearings can absorb the hearings without any enabling works. Combining the workload into one location will improve efficiency and enable further savings to be made.

Alternative provision of services

No responses made reference to an alternative provision of services.

Other considerations

HM Courts & Tribunals Service acknowledges that there are several artefacts at Richmond-upon-Thames Magistrates' Court and will ensure that these items are relocated.

Decision

All the points raised by respondents to the consultation have been analysed and following careful consideration, the Lord Chancellor has decided to close Richmond-upon-Thames Magistrates' Court, moving the crime hearings to the South West Local Justice Area and the immigration and asylum hearings to the Immigration and Asylum Centre at Hatton Cross.

Implementation

Consultation with the Departmental Trade Union on staffing impacts will take place over the coming months. There are a number of factors to consider before Richmond-upon-Thames Magistrates' Court can close. An indicative timetable of implementation is attached to this document. Please note this timetable is subject to change as the programme progresses.

Tottenham Magistrates' Court

The Lord Chancellor has decided that Tottenham Magistrates' Court should be closed and its hearings moved to Highbury Corner Magistrates' Court.

A total of 10 responses were received which related to Tottenham Magistrates' Court. Of these:

- four were from professional users
- two were from individuals
- two were from magistrates
- one was from another public sector body
- one was from a union/staff group

Of these responses two were in support of the proposals, whilst seven were opposed and one was neutral.

Access to justice

Highbury Corner Magistrates' Court is located five miles away from Tottenham Magistrates' Court.

Travel links between the courthouses are good. By car the journey takes approximately 15 minutes and by public transport the journey takes on average 30 minutes.

Eight responses made reference to access to justice.

“To get to Highbury would involve two or three buses and be a very long journey for my residents.” (MP)

“You need to seriously consider Police time it takes to travel to court.” (Barrister)

HM Courts & Tribunals Service has considered the travel times users will experience, particularly those attending court from the London Boroughs of Ponders End and Edmonton for council tax hearings, however the times are not deemed excessive. It is further noted that although significant numbers of council tax summonses are issued each month, a large proportion result in an out of court settlement and less than 1% over a 10 month period for this year resulted in an adjournment.

For those court users who anticipate that they will experience problems in travelling, the courts will consider applications to conduct business with the court by alternative means, where possible. In exceptional cases start times of hearings may be delayed to allow later attendance due to travel difficulties but this would be considered on a case by case basis.

It is noted that users attending Tottenham Magistrates' Court are drawn from some of the most deprived and vulnerable sections of the community. It is acknowledged and accepted that some people will need to travel further to reach their nearest court and for some the journey if made by public transport, may be over an hour, for the majority of people the closure will have little impact. We are mindful of the infrequency with which

people need to attend court and the small proportion of people who would use public transport to reach court.

One response made reference to the parking at Tottenham Magistrates' Court and the free public car parking in the surrounding area and the lack of such parking at Highbury Corner Magistrates' Court. Both courts only provide public parking at the court by prior arrangement.

One response made reference to the increase in travelling time of local authority employees and the resulting increase in cost. HM Courts & Tribunals Service accept that there will potentially be increased costs for other court users, but also efficiencies from agencies dealing with fewer sites. Due regard must be had to ensure our estate is utilised to deliver justice efficiently and effectively while providing value for money.

Value for money

The 2014-15 operating cost for Tottenham Magistrates' Court was approximately £340,000.

No responses made reference to value for money.

HM Courts & Tribunals Service needs to reduce the cost of its estate and reinvest the savings. The close proximity of the receiving court, its size and good condition requires consideration.

Operational efficiency

During 2014-15, Tottenham Magistrates' Court was used to approximately 22% of its capacity.

Three responses made reference to operational efficiency.

"in addition to the enabling works for Court 12, a further courtroom and a meeting room need to be created within Highbury Corner Magistrates' Court to fully accommodate the closure of Tottenham Court." (Magistrate)

"Highbury is run like a factory with overloaded lists. I can only see that getting worse if you shut Tottenham." (Barrister)

HM Courts & Tribunals Service has considered whether further court capacity above what is planned needs to be created and is confident that the hearings can be relocated to Highbury Corner Magistrates' Court with the appropriate level of enabling works.

Alternative provision of services

One response made reference to an alternative provision of services.

"This could either be at the Civic Centre (which would be most convenient for many residents and for the Council staff, but might be thought an inappropriate venue); the Dugdale Centre in Enfield Town (owned by LBE, but not so clearly identified with it as the Civic Centre) or Edmonton County Court which is on a bus route serving the main axis of eastern Enfield which is the most deprived part of the borough." (Councillor)

HM Courts & Tribunals Service has considered whether the use of a public or civic building is suitable for the work currently heard at Tottenham Magistrates' Court. In light of the relative close proximity of Highbury Corner Magistrates' Court and the investment required to upgrade security means that the use of a civic building is not an economically viable option.

Alternative proposal

Three responses made reference to an alternative proposal.

"Travel from Ponders End, one of the more deprived parts of the borough (where most of the cases come from) is more likely to be by public transport and transport links from Ponders End to Highbury are particularly poor." (Local Authority)

"Another possibility is to move the Edmonton County Court to the Tottenham Magistrates building. Tottenham currently runs two CPS courts 3x a week and local authority prosecutions take place in Court 3." (Barrister)

Edmonton County Court relocating to Tottenham Magistrates' Court was not part of this consultation. HM Courts & Tribunals Service has considered whether Tottenham Magistrates' Court could relocate to Edmonton County Court, however there is insufficient courtroom capacity for this to be a viable option. One response made reference to making use of police stations and remote locations for search warrants and statutory declarations. HM Courts & Tribunals Service acknowledges the suggestion made, however this will have limited impact on the court utilisation.

One response made reference to making better use of technology. Progress towards a modernised service is being made, Wi-Fi and digital screens have been introduced into many court buildings and a digital case management system for the administration of criminal cases is well underway.

Other considerations

One response made a suggestion that the Tottenham Magistrates' Court building should be retained and converted into flats. HM Courts & Tribunals Service acknowledges the suggestion made, however this will be a matter for the new owner.

Decision

All the points raised by respondents to the consultation have been analysed and following careful consideration, the Lord Chancellor has decided to close Tottenham Magistrates' Court and move its hearings to Highbury Corner Magistrates' Court.

Implementation

Consultation with the Departmental Trade Union on staffing impacts will take place over the coming months. There are a number of factors to consider before Tottenham Magistrates' Court can close. An indicative timetable of implementation is attached to this document. Please note this timetable is subject to change as the programme progresses.

Waltham Forest Magistrates' Court

The Lord Chancellor has decided that Waltham Forest Magistrates' Court should be closed and its hearings moved to Stratford Magistrates' Court.

A total of eight responses were received which related to Waltham Forest Magistrates' Court. Of these:

- two were from Members of Parliament
- two were from professional users
- one was from a member of the public
- one was from a magistrate
- one was from an other public sector body
- one was from a union or staff group

Of these responses one was in support of the proposals, whilst five were opposed and two were neutral.

Access to justice

Stratford Magistrates' Court is approximately seven miles from Waltham Forest Magistrates' Court.

Travel links between the courthouses are good. By car the journey takes approximately 25 minutes and by public transport the journey time from Waltham Forest takes on average 35 minutes to Stratford.

Six responses made reference to access to justice.

“Currently all our prosecution trials are held at Waltham Forest M.C. We have been notified that these trials will be transferred to Stratford M.C which is nearer and more convenient to travel to.” (Local Authority)

“I would be incredibly concerned about the abilities of many of my constituents to attend court and the impact that this could have on the justice system locally.” (MP)

“New technology in this area would have to be compatible with users own ICT and in the interest of justice should be reliable and easy to access.” (Legal and Democratic Services, Local Authority)

It is acknowledged and accepted that some people will need to travel further to reach their nearest court, however for the majority of people the closure will have little impact. We are mindful of the infrequency with which people need to attend court, 76% will be able to reach Stratford Magistrates' Court within an hour. We are reforming the system so that fewer people will need to physically go to court.

In an increasingly digital age, users will not always need to attend hearings in person in order to access the justice system and whilst we have already established alternative ways users can interact with our services, we are looking to expand these provisions to provide more choice than is currently available. For example through making better use of technology, including video conferencing.

Value for money

The 2014-15 operating cost for Waltham Forest Magistrates' Court was approximately £358,000.

No responses made reference to value for money.

HM Courts & Tribunals Service needs to reduce the cost of its estate and reinvest the savings. The close proximity of Stratford Magistrates' Courts which has some capacity, along with enabling works to create further capacity requires consideration.

Operational efficiency

During 2014-15, Waltham Forest Magistrates' Court was used to approximately 32% of its capacity.

No responses made reference to operational efficiency.

Combining the workload of Waltham Forest Magistrates' Court and Stratford Magistrates' Courts to one location will improve efficiency and enable further savings to be made. Larger buildings can facilitate more flexible and efficient listing of cases and give users more certainty of when their case will be heard.

Alternative provision of services

Two responses made reference to an alternative provision of services.

"Most local authorities have been undergoing efficiency savings for several years and as part of this are rationalising their office accommodation and public buildings. The Council has serious concerns with this proposal as it considers it could not make available accommodation for use as a court on a regular basis."
(Local authority)

It is not intended that this closure will require those facilities. The judiciary, staff and hearings can all be accommodated in Stratford Magistrates' Court.

Other considerations

One response made reference to the court being used as a meeting venue for the Gangs Prevention Programme's Bronze Group and Operation Payback. This response also made reference to police IT infrastructure within the court building being used for Integrated Offender Management case review panels.

"...consequential reduced visible enforcement presence in the Borough. The closure would particularly impact on the council's work on gangs reoffending and restorative justice." (MP)

A review has been undertaken of the meetings which take place in the magistrates' court building and the IT infrastructure. It is assumed that these meetings and the police IT infrastructure are all within the National Probation Service who occupy a large part of the building under a Memorandum of Terms of Occupation (MOTO).

HM Courts & Tribunals Service welcomes the suggestion in the national response from the National Offender Management Service to consider a joint approach to estates strategy for the National Probation Service and will engage fully with the London Community Rehabilitation Company.

Decision

All the points raised by respondents to the consultation have been analysed and following careful consideration, the Lord Chancellor has decided to close Waltham Forest Magistrates' Court and move its hearings to Stratford Magistrates' Court.

Implementation

Consultation with the Departmental Trade Union on staffing impacts will take place over the coming months. There are a number of factors to consider before Waltham Forest Magistrates' Court can close. An indicative timetable of implementation is attached to this document. Please note this timetable is subject to change as the programme progresses.

Woolwich County Court

The Lord Chancellor has decided that Woolwich County Court should be closed and its workload and hearings moved to Bromley County Court, with housing possession hearings being heard within a civic building in the Woolwich area.

A total of nine responses were received which related to Woolwich County Court. Of these:

- three were from another public sector body
- two were from professional users
- one was from a judicial team
- one was from a magistrate
- one was from a member of the public
- one was from a union or staff group

Of these responses all were opposed to the proposals.

Access to justice

Bromley County Court is approximately eight miles from Woolwich County Court.

Travel links between the courthouses are good. By car the journey takes approximately 35 minutes and by public transport the journey time from Woolwich takes on average one hour and 10 minutes to Bromley.

All responses made reference to access to justice.

“It is a matter of concern that, should the proposals be implemented, there would be no magistrates' court or county court in the Royal Borough of Greenwich.”
(Head of Legal Department)

“they will regularly face travel times of upwards of an hour and a half with the distinct possibility of delays caused by heavy traffic and other forms of disruption.”
(Greenwich Housing Rights)

It is acknowledged and accepted that some people will need to travel further to reach their nearest court. Most people who live and work in London are used to travelling by public transport to access an array of public services. Accessibility in terms of the speed at which a case can be dealt with, the quality and the efficiency of the service is as important if not more important than the geographical location.

HM Courts & Tribunals Service acknowledges the reference to the attendance of those users in receipt of benefits, the increasing cost of transport to Bromley County Court and the consequence of non-attendance to a hearing which could lead to the loss of a home. We are committed to providing alternatives to travel. In exceptional cases start times of hearings may be delayed to allow later attendance due to travel difficulties but this would be considered on a case by case basis.

Value for money

The 2014-15 operating cost for Woolwich County Court was approximately £165,000.

No responses made reference to value for money.

HM Courts & Tribunals Service needs to reduce the cost of its estate and reinvest the savings. The relative close proximity of Bromley County Court, its capacity and low levels of utilisation at Woolwich County Court require consideration.

Operational efficiency

During 2014-15, Woolwich County Court was used to approximately 40% of its capacity.

Three responses made reference to operational efficiency.

“We do not agree that the court’s case load should be transferred to Bromley County Court as proposed” (Councillor)

The current utilisation rate is very low and does not justify keeping the court open. The receiving court can absorb the workload from Woolwich County Court with some enabling works to increase the storage areas. Combining the workload to one location would improve efficiency and enable savings to be made.

One response made reference to the workload at Bromley County Court and that there is insufficient capacity to relocate the Woolwich County Court work. HM Courts & Tribunals Service has considered this point carefully and is confident that the hearings could be relocated with the appropriate level of judiciary appointed and some enabling works undertaken.

Alternative provision of services

Five responses made reference to an alternative provision of services by making use of a civic or public building or developing a local hearing centre within the Woolwich area.

HM Courts & Tribunals Service met with the local authority to discuss potential locations for housing possession hearings in civic buildings. This is a viable option and will be discussed in more detail with key stakeholders and the local authority.

Users will not always need to attend hearings in person in order to access the justice system and whilst HM Courts & Tribunals Service has already established alternative ways users can interact with our services, further work to expand these provisions to provide more choice than is currently available is ongoing. For example through making better use of technology, including video conferencing.

Alternative proposal

Three responses made reference to an alternative proposal.

“Could something not be done with the Crown Court at Belmarsh to make it a combined Crown and County Court. It is much better appointed and would be far superior to Bromley.” (Local respondent)

The use of Woolwich Crown Court has been explored, however there is no spare courtroom capacity for the hearings and it was therefore discounted at an early stage.

Further suggestions were made to relocate to Dartford County Court which is viewed as an easier journey for some users to the east of the borough, however there is no spare courtroom capacity for the hearings.

Decision

All the points raised by respondents to the consultation have been analysed and following careful consideration, the Lord Chancellor has decided to close Woolwich County Court and move its workload and hearings to Bromley County Court, with housing possession hearings heard within a civic building in the Woolwich area.

Implementation

Consultation with the Departmental Trade Union on staffing impacts will take place over the coming months. There are a number of factors to consider before Woolwich County Court can close. An indicative timetable of implementation is attached to this document. Please note this timetable is subject to change as the programme progresses.

Consultation principles

The principles that Government departments and other public bodies should adopt for engaging stakeholders when developing policy and legislation are set out in the consultation principles.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance>

Annex A – List of respondent

In addition to the 22 members of the public who responded to the consultation, the following named individuals and organisations provided a response:

Andy Slaughter, Member of Parliament for Hammersmith	Councillor Simon
Area Housing Manager, Epping Forest District Council	Deputy Head of Housing, Community Care and Public law
Assistant Director, Legal and Democratic Services, Hackney Council	District Judges at Bow County Court
Associate Prosecutor, Feltham Magistrates Court	District Judge Burn, Lambeth County Court
Associate Solicitor, Wainwright & Cummins Solicitors	District Judge Langley
Bench Chairman of the Central London Magistrates Bench	District Judge Nicholson, Hammersmith County Court
Bench Chairman of the North London Bench	District Judge Ryan, Hammersmith County Court
Bench Chairman of the South West London Bench	District Judge Vokes, Bow County Court
Bench Chairman of the West London Bench	District Judge Worthington, Lambeth County Court
Bids & Funding Manager, London Borough of Hounslow	Edwards Duthie Solicitors
BPP University Law School Pro bono Centre	Enfield Legal Services
Cambridge House Law centre	Family Court Judge Redgrave, Woolwich County Court
Chairman of West London LJA	Five Paper Chambers
Cllr Southward Council Leader	Garden Court Chambers
Community Links	Goodwin & Co Solicitors
Conservative Councillor for Coldharbour, Mottingham & New Eltham	Greenwich Housing rights
	GT Stewart Solicitors
	Hammersmith and Fulham Law Centre
	Hansen Palomares Solicitors

Response to the proposal on the provision of court and tribunal services in the London region

Haringey Council Legal Services	Local Solicitors firms
Harriet Harman, Member of Parliament for Camberwell and Peckham	London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham
Head of Law and Governance, Royal Borough of Greenwich	London Criminal Courts Solicitors' Association (LCCSA)
Head of law and governance, Royal Borough of Greenwich	London South Bank University Legal Advice Clinic
Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Barking and Dagenham	Magistrate, Greater London Family Panel
Helen Hayes, Member of Parliament for Dulwich and West Norwood	Mary Ward Legal centre, Housing / Debt advice organisation
HH Judge Redgrave, Family Court Judge	Matthew Pennycook, Member of Parliament for Greenwich and Woolwich
HH Judge Sycamore, President First-tier Tribunal Health Education and Social Care Chamber	Member of the Law Society's Children Panel
HMCTS Staff	Notting Hill housing trust
Hockfield & Co Solicitors	Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS)
Housing Legal Adviser	PCS London Courts branch
Iain Duncan-Smith, Member of Parliament for Chingford and Woodford Green	Philcox Gray solicitors
Judge Hildebrand	Police Liaison Officer, Feltham Magistrates Court
Judge Potter, Regional Employment Judge, London Central Employment Tribunals	Mr Roy Pershad, Senior Crown Prosecutor
Lamb Chambers	Rushanara Ali, Member of Parliament for Bethnal Green and Bow
Lambeth County Court User Group	Seema Malhotra, Member of Parliament for Feltham
Lambeth Law Centre	Shepherds Bush Housing Association
Legal and Democratic Services, Hackney Council	Solicitor, London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Lewisham Homes Ltd	South East London Bench
Local Magistrates	South London Law Society
Local practicing Barristers	Southwark Group of Tenants Organisation

Southwark Law Centre

The Magistrates Association

Steel and Shamash Solicitors

Tower Hamlets Law Centre

Stella Creasy, Member of Parliament for
Walthamstow

Wainwright & Cummins Solicitors

Stephen Greenhalgh, Deputy Mayor for
Policing and Crime



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