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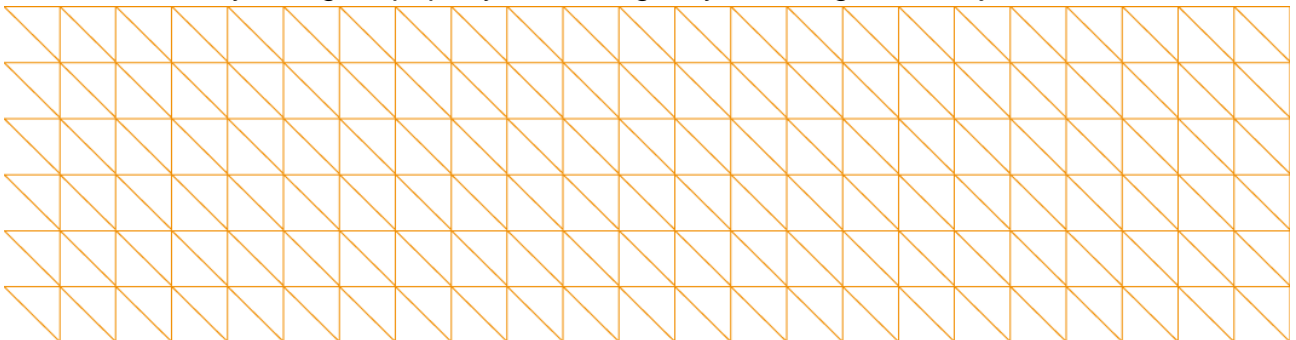
HM Courts &
Tribunals Service

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

This response is published on 11 February 2016

A Welsh language version can be found at: www.gov.uk/moj

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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

Contents

Introduction and contact details	3
Foreword	4
Background	5
Summary of responses	7
Decision	9
Responses to individual proposals	18
Consultation principles	57
Annex A – List of respondents	58

Introduction and contact details

This document is the post-consultation report for the consultation paper, '*Proposal on the provision of court and tribunal services in Wales*'.

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:

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A Welsh language version of this response and a Welsh Language Impact Assessment can be found at www.gov.uk/moj

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 11 courts (and integrate two courts) in Wales. Working with the judiciary, we want to reform our services so that they better meet the needs of the public in the modern age. These proposals outlined changes to our estate where buildings are no longer able to provide a modern service due to poor facilities, and/or where usage is low, and/or where sites no longer provide value for money.

A total of 152 consultation responses were received for Wales. As the Delivery Director responsible for managing the operations of HM Courts & Tribunals Service in Wales, I am very grateful to everyone who took the time to provide their views on our proposals and help us to 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 Wales and retain one. Five sites will close as proposed in the consultation, with a further five 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 and provide value for money. We will continue to investigate and develop alternative ways for users to access our services to improve access to justice.

Respondents to the consultation expressed concern about the impact of changes to our estate on the use of the Welsh language in courts and tribunals and about the possible wider impact on Welsh speaking communities. We are mindful of the concerns expressed and remain committed to treating both Welsh and English languages on a basis of equality and delivering our services through the medium of Welsh. We will continue to respond to the needs of our users as we did before the consultation took place. A Welsh Language Impact Assessment is published with this response document.

We are mindful that there are challenges in Wales concerning the rural nature of much of the country and the sometimes poor public transport links between population centres. We are committed to working with communities in those areas where poor public transport gives rise to concerns about access to justice, to explore alternatives to users attending court.

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

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

Luigi Strinati
Delivery Director
HM Courts & Tribunals Service Wales

Background

The consultation paper *'Proposal on the provision of court and tribunal services in Wales'* 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.

The consultation proposed the closure of the following courts and tribunals: ¹

- Brecon Law Courts
- Bridgend Law Courts
- Carmarthen Civil, Family, Tribunal and Probate Hearing Centre
- Carmarthen Law Courts (The Guildhall)
- Dolgellau Crown and Magistrates' Court
- Holyhead Magistrates' Court
- Llangefni Civil and Family Court
- Neath and Port Talbot Civil and Family Court
- Pontypridd Magistrates' Court
- Prestatyn Magistrates' Court
- Wrexham Tribunal and Hearing Centre (Rhyd Broughton)

The proposals also included that the Crown Court would no longer sit at the following two sites, the buildings of which would be retained for civil, family, tribunals and magistrates' work:

- The Crown Court at Haverfordwest
- The Crown Court at Welshpool

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

To provide users with an overview of all proposed changes to the estate, the consultation also included information on where HM Courts & Tribunals Service plan to integrate courts and tribunals 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. Integrations are managed by HM Courts & Tribunals Service operational leads as part of the normal running of the business.

The two integrations proposed in Wales were:

- **Caernarfon Civil and Family Court to be integrated within Caernarfon Criminal Justice Centre**

Investigations are taking place regarding enabling work as Caernarfon requires four civil, family and tribunal courtrooms to be constructed.

- **Swansea Crown Court (Guildhall) to be integrated within Swansea Crown Court (St Helen's)**

A change request has been submitted to decommission the IT, although no date has been fixed for the integration to be completed.

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 Wales

The majority of consultees responded to both the proposals on specific courts and the regional consultation document as a whole.

A total of 152 individual responses to the HM Courts & Tribunals Service Wales consultation paper were received. Of these:

- 44 were from another public sector body
- 23 were from magistrates
- 21 were from professional users
- 19 were from members of the public
- 13 were from members of the judiciary
- 11 were from Members of Parliament or Assembly Members
- eight were from staff members
- six were from criminal justice partners
- four were from a union or staff group
- three were from others

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 overall responses, six were supportive of the closure proposal in Wales, the main themes being:

- the estate is under used and utilisation should be increased
- the development of digital services is the way forward
- in the current financial climate it is important that efficiencies are made where possible

131 were opposed to the closure proposal in Wales, the main themes being:

- additional travelling time
- availability and cost of transport to alternative venues
- access to justice
- flawed data in the consultation paper and travel-related impact assessment
- lack of strategic direction or IT provision before the decision is made

15 respondents were neither in favour nor opposed to the proposals.

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 courtroom 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.

Decision

After careful consideration, the Lord Chancellor has decided to retain the following court:

- Carmarthen Civil, Family, Tribunal and Probate Hearing Centre

The following courts will close, though with changes to the original proposals in the consultation. Work will either move to an alternative HM Courts & Tribunals Service site or a decision has been taken to establish suitable alternative local provision, in some cases, before a court will close. Further details are included on a court-by-court basis in the responses to individual proposals:

- Dolgellau Crown and Magistrates' Court
- Holyhead Magistrates' Court
- Llangefni Civil and Family Court

The following courts will close. We have identified alternative venues to receive the workloads in order to reduce the impact of the closure on court users:

- Carmarthen Law Courts (The Guildhall)
- Prestatyn Magistrates' Court

The following courts will close as proposed:

- Brecon Law Courts
- Bridgend Law Courts
- Neath and Port Talbot Civil and Family Court
- Pontypridd Magistrates' Court
- Wrexham Tribunal and Hearing Centre (Rhyd Broughton)

General responses

Of the responses received 41 related to Wales overall and raised the following points:

“Some politicians and lawyers in Wales are now, vociferously, in favour of a separate Welsh jurisdiction. My view is that Wales would be disadvantaged if such an eventuality were to come to pass. There can be no doubt, however, that further impetus will be afforded to those in favour of a separate Welsh jurisdiction if there is a perception that court closures are being dictated by central government using generalised criteria which take no account of the fact that Wales is a separate country, with its own language and traditions and with acute geographical difficulties to overcome if rural courts are closed.” (Presiding Judge for Wales)

“Withdrawing provision in the circumstances proposed is totally unacceptable. Justice should be available at a local level for all. Plaid Cymru has long called for the court and justice system to be devolved to Wales. Due to the unreasonable proposals we call for this devolution.” (Plaid Cymru)

The consultation was not intended to consider devolution of justice to Wales.

“There is little information about the impact on HMCTS staff located at courts proposed for closure. We estimate about 61 posts will be affected.” (Welsh Government)

We acknowledge some staff may be affected, although many of the courts and tribunals we consulted upon do not have staff permanently based there. Where there are staff, we anticipate that many will wish to transfer to a receiving site. Any transition to new arrangements will take place in a fair and transparent manner in consultation with the Departmental Trade Union following an agreed Managing Organisational Change process. Detailed implementation plans on a site by site basis will now be developed.

“The Welsh Government strongly opposes proposals for rationalisation of the HMCTS estate being implemented prior to the publication of proposals and analysis about alternative ways of working. It is entirely unsatisfactory and obstructive to have piecemeal and fragmented consultation on proposed substantial and radical changes to the justice system.” (Welsh Government)

In conjunction with addressing our estate, we are looking to modernise our practices and adopt more streamlined ways of working. We have already established alternative ways of working such as police using live links, digital screens plus digital case management system and will continue to develop our systems so fewer people will physically go to court, therefore, allowing us to reduce our estate. Whilst we accept that in some cases, physical attendance at court is necessary, it is also true that in an increasingly digital age, users will not always need to attend hearings in person in order to access the justice system. Provisions are already in place to enable some categories of victims and witnesses to give evidence using screens, in private or by video link without having to come to court, and we are looking to expand these provisions to provide more choice.

“The MA believes the review in Wales is flawed, and cannot be completed, fair or equal, as the five most expensive pieces of estate in Welsh HMCTS have not been

included within the review, specifically Cardiff LJA and Crown Court buildings have been omitted.” (Magistrates’ Association)

Our proposals were not solely based on cost, but about addressing areas where we have surplus estate. The five sites in Cardiff were not proposed for closure because three of the five are large buildings which can be used more flexibly to increase their capacity for multifunctional court space. The consultation document also recognised that there is a need to find a longer term solution in Cardiff where there are five court and tribunal buildings in use. We continue to review our estate across Wales to assess how we can best meet the needs of users in this area.

Access to justice

“The closure of Brecon magistrates court, Dolgellau magistrates court, Holyhead and Llangefni Magistrates court raises very real concerns about access to justice.” (Academic)

We appreciate that these courts are in rural parts of Wales and suffer from poor public transport links. To ensure that access to justice is maintained, even in more rural locations, we are committed to providing alternative ways for users to access our services. In an increasingly digital age, the need for users to attend hearings in person in order to access the justice system will reduce.

“These proposals are made in advance of any proposals regarding the establishment of new ways of doing court business virtually or the establishment of ‘as needed’ hearing rooms in civic buildings or similar. As things stand, this proposal is for the closure of a number of County Courts with court business being moved to selected, alternative remaining County Courts.” (Charity)

In conjunction with reducing our estate, we are looking to modernise our practices and adopt more streamlined ways of working, using our estate more intelligently and flexibly to reduce running costs and to increase the multifunctional court space, which will allow different court and tribunal jurisdictions to share locations. We already have some established alternative ways of working such as “*Making a Plea*” on line, case management hearings in the civil courts being conducted by telephone, police using live links and digital case management and will continue to develop our systems so fewer people will physically need to go to court.

“We would refute the suggestion that “greater use of technology and modernising of practice and process and improving services for users” can adequately compensate for the proposed closure of Dolgellau and Brecon Magistrates Courts. The closure of these courts would achieve directly the opposite to that which HMCTS sets out to suggest is its objective, not to make journeys excessive or difficult.” (Mid Wales Law Society)

We understand that in some remote areas, IT services can be limited. We remain committed to providing an efficient service to all our users. For instance, we are exploring whether we can appropriately make use of civic buildings for certain types of hearing, and in some cases start times of hearings may be delayed to allow later attendance due to travel difficulties. In both Dolgellau and Brecon we are exploring options for alternative provision.

“Issues have also been raised with me about the prospect of defendants, witnesses and magistrates, who could well find themselves on the same bus to court, thus creating an environment where intimidation is a possibility.” (Member of Parliament)

The possibility of some or all parties in the same case travelling by the same form of public transport is one that exists at present. Concerns such as this may be addressed in advance through contact by victims’ services and witness care units or by application to the court or tribunal. In practice, many people attending court do so by way of private transport. For those who anticipate difficulties, we would continue to consider applications which assist in overcoming this difficulty.

“I do not feel that telephone hearings or paper-based hearings are appropriate in any but the most basics of cases. The majority of human interaction is non-verbal, and therefore to deny the court the opportunity of seeing defendants, witnesses, and victims in person is a retrograde step.” (Assembly Member)

We are looking to expand the range of alternative ways in which court users can access the justice system. We will make better use of technology, including video conferencing, but we are also exploring whether we can appropriately make use of civic buildings for certain types of hearing.

“We are firmly behind the Minister’s vision of a justice system fit for the 21st century. Many processes and courthouses are far from fit for purpose and we welcome the moves underway elsewhere to digitalise the entire process where possible. However, access to justice must remain at the heart of any system.” (Wales Bench Chair Forum)

In today’s digital age, spending almost a third of the entire budget of HM Courts & Tribunals Service – that is around £500 million per year – on maintaining an ageing and deteriorating estate can no longer be justified. We will provide better access to justice if we reduce the cost of our estate and reinvest the savings in increasing digital access, and improving the accessibility and facilities in the development of our core court and tribunal venues.

“Impact assessment 130 (Rural Proofing Impact Test) specifically recognises that travel duration increases are more likely in Wales. The travel analysis used is based on current service provision but it is a fact that the public funding devoted to transport by both the Welsh Government and Welsh Local Authorities is set to decline, and hence the decrease in future of public transport provision. It is likely that in the near future a larger group of court users who can only access the courts via public transport with a one hour or more journey time will be greater than stated in the analysis.” (Montgomeryshire Bench)

It is not for HM Courts & Tribunals Service to comment on the provision of public transport. That said, access to justice is not just about proximity to a court. The changes we are making to our service will mean fewer people needing to attend court. Using modern technology, as we do for many other services, will make access to justice easier.

“The Welsh Government is concerned that the travel time data and analysis provided by HMCTS in its consultation paper is insubstantial and unreliable due to gaps where there is a significant percentage of **no data** for journey times for people.” (Welsh Government)

In some cases there are a number of journeys that are missing travel time data from the journey planner tool, which varies between regions and jurisdiction. This is not a limitation of the data, but a function of the journeys that were extracted from the tool at the time of analysis. In most cases this is between 0% and 5% of all journeys modelled. We have estimated travel times for these journeys using the next nearest court building within the same local area. Where no alternative courts existed in the local area, we used average regional travel speeds by car and by public transport and distances to compute their travel times.

“Given the pace and significant scale of UK Government reforms to the justice system, the Welsh Government strongly recommends that the UK Government undertakes a full and proper review to evaluate the cumulative impacts of the reforms to understand how they are significantly reducing access to the justice system and whether the UK Government is complying with its obligations to uphold important principles including the right to a fair trial in the European Convention on Human Rights.” (Welsh Government)

We are seeking to offer more convenient ways for citizens to interact with the justice system which are proportionate to the seriousness of the matter being considered. We recognise that for some types of cases personal attendance at court is necessary.

“The provision of justice is inextricably linked to accessibility. Courts which are crucial to the strength of our communities and society, protecting those who otherwise cannot protect themselves and ensuring that justice can be expected for all, are facing closure. These closures combined with the further proposed increases in court fees, reductions in eligibility for legal aid, limit the accessibility of the justice system. Access to justice, and indeed equal access to justice is a hallmark of a civil society. It is at the heart of a democratic society. The continuous centralisation of court services away from communities undermines entirely the notion of local justice.” (Assembly Member)

It is likely that travel duration will increase in Wales. However, the transport links are considered sufficient and journey times are expected to remain acceptable.

Access to justice is not just about proximity to a court. We are committed to providing alternatives to travel.

“The consultation reflects that the closures relate to around one-fifth of all court buildings. The data for Wales reflects that one-third of Magistrates courts face closure (6 of 18) and half of all county courts (5 of 10). The proposed closures will therefore have an impact on a larger proportion of court users in Wales.” (Children’s Commissioner for Wales)

The number of courts quoted is incorrect. Seven magistrates’ courts are to close from a present total of 23 in Wales; with four civil and family courts to close from a present total of 19.

“I share the view of the Judges at Swansea Crown Court that it would not be appropriate to reduce the crown court capacity to four crown courts to serve West Glamorgan and Dyfed Powys... I do not consider that there are any significant practical obstacles to using the Crown Court at Haverfordwest on a regular basis.

Certainly, no practical obstacles were drawn to my attention when I visited the court.” (Presiding Judge for Wales)

We are not required to consult on the integration of services, but we have reviewed comments received. We will consider the need for additional capacity for the Crown Court in West Wales.

Value for money

“The Courts lined up for closure in Wales are virtually unused and a total waste of resources... the public sector wastes Millions of pounds every day and this will stop some of that waste.” (Member of the public)

As the respondent has observed, there are low utilisation rates at many of the courts proposed for closure. It is our aim to focus the delivery of justice on a core estate and to utilise that estate more efficiently, to the benefit of users and the taxpayer.

Operational efficiency

“Proper thought needs to be given to the impact on Benches if LJAs have to merge. This is an excellent opportunity for work to be done on the optimum size of Benches, in relation to local knowledge, distances to be travelled and pastoral issues. This work is more appropriately considered before closures, as is the potential impact on recruitment of magistrates with local knowledge. Once again, this is a missed opportunity to create the justice system anew.” (Wales Bench Chair Forum)

Bench mergers were not part of this consultation, although it is recognised that if certain courts close there will need to be a consideration of merging some Local Justice Areas (LJAs). For example, it would not make sense to operate two benches at one courthouse and some LJAs are likely to need realignment. We will want to work with Local Judicial Business Groups in Wales to take forward early local stakeholder engagement about the merger of benches.

“We would have preferred to see a complete overhaul of the entire system, to produce a sustainable, integrated justice system. In short, the document is too embedded in court closures, rather than taking the opportunity to develop the vision of a modern justice system which we wholeheartedly endorse.” (Wales Bench Chair Forum)

In conjunction with addressing the HM Courts & Tribunals Service estate, we are looking to modernise our practices and adopt more streamlined ways of working. We have already established alternative ways of working such as police using live links and digital screens plus digital case management systems. We will continue to develop the systems so fewer people will physically go to court, therefore, allowing us to reduce our estate, reinvesting savings into reforming our processes and increasing digital access.

“The likelihood that the proposed county court closures will result in an increase in home loss has wider implications for others. The local authority will have an obligation to work with those households to attempt to secure alternative accommodation. For some households, the local council may be required to provide temporary accommodation and then permanent accommodation themselves. The cost to the public purse of providing these services can be

extensive and, in terms of overall public expenditure, will offset part of the envisaged savings intended to be used for improvements. The additional costs are likely to be transferred from central government to the devolved government of Wales.” (Charity)

We are committed to creating a system that brings justice closer through modern, digital ways of working which mean fewer people need to attend court.

“I note that the proposals made in the consultation document are based on an assessment of current and historical figures, and a general assumption that crime will decrease over the coming years. However, I suggest that in respect of the proposed closures a comprehensive assessment of any future utilisation is carried out. For example, it is widely accepted that the development of the Wylfa Newydd Nuclear Power Station on Anglesey will dramatically change the economical landscape on Anglesey, and as a consequence the criminological profile will also change.” (Police and Crime Commissioner, North Wales)

We regularly review trends in workloads across all jurisdictions and the proposals included in the consultation were based on current and forecast workloads. Any exceptional changes to workload would be handled through flexible use of the court capacity at that time. Retaining underused estate on the speculation that criminal workload may rise cannot be justified. For Anglesey, we are exploring alternative provisions.

Alternative provision of services

“Consider putting a court into local prisons or when designing new prisons consider including a court area. A Magistrate or Judge could hear a number of cases from around each region in one secure area. This reduces travelling, cost and increases security” (G4S)

HM Courts & Tribunals Service will work with the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) to explore opportunities for alternative accommodation within prisons in Wales.

“Courthouses have been closed previously because of the lack of facilities and so it is difficult to provide a list of suitable venues; one would expect that a cost benefit analysis assessment to have been done and published as part of the consultation so that a considered response can be offered. Moreover, apart from further investment that might be needed to use alternative venues, there is a risk that those venues not in control of HMCTS would need to be returned to the landlord or their availability withdrawn for other reasons. The most likely venues would be local authority buildings and local authorities are under financial pressures and currently are known to be looking to reduce their estate costs.” (Powys and Herefordshire Branch Magistrates’ Association)

HM Courts & Tribunals Service has already established alternative ways users can interact with our services, such as the use of video link, and we are looking to expand these provisions to provide more choice than is currently available. This includes exploring whether we can appropriately make use of civic buildings for certain types of hearings. Full consideration of the suitability of such buildings to host court hearings will always be given before being used. Enabling works have been factored into our proposals.

Welsh language impact and Welsh affairs

“In more Anglicised areas of Wales, such a routine active offer of service was not usually made. Accordingly, the closure of Carmarthen Civil, Family Tribunal and Probate Hearing Centre, Carmarthen Law Courts, Neath Port Talbot Civil Court and Family Court and Dolgellau Crown and Magistrates Court is likely to affect the use of the Welsh language, simply because the material factors that influence language use will not be in place.” (Academic)

We are as committed to the provision of services in Welsh as in English. Our Welsh Language Impact Assessment was shared with ministers before any decisions on which courts to close were taken. We will be able to continue to deliver our services in Welsh and to respond to the needs of our users as we did before the consultation took place.

“Areas of Wales almost exclusively excluded from jury selection are areas where a significantly higher proportion on the electoral roll are Welsh speakers. The one and a half hour travelling distance time from Swansea, Caernarfon and Mold excludes large areas of mid and west Wales.” (Welsh Language Liaison Judges)

There is no statutory limit to the distance a juror can travel to undertake jury duty. The Jury Central Summoning Bureau is responsible for all jurors in England and Wales and will endeavour to provide jury service as close as possible to where jurors live. It should be noted, however, that the ability to use the Welsh language is not a juror selection criteria.

“HMCTS purports to be committed to promoting the Welsh language and as a government department is obliged to. The consultation documents appears to address the impact on every other form of potential inequality through, inter alia, gender, race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, age and gender reassignment, as well as environmental and greenhouse gas effects and the effects on small businesses, but the Welsh language is not a consideration addressed at all within any of the consultation documents.” (Association of Judges of Wales)

We did consider the impact upon the use of the Welsh language at the outset of the proposed changes to the provision of court and tribunal services in Wales. We are committed to delivering equally high quality services in Welsh and English and we try to ensure that policy decisions affecting justice services in Wales promote and facilitate the use of Welsh. A full Welsh Language Impact Assessment is published with the Government response to the consultation.

“...there is a need to consider the technical resources available within the estate to hold Welsh and bilingual hearings, both now and in the future.” (Welsh Language Commissioner)

Some of the proposed closures will move work to court centres that have better in-built translation facilities, for example the Crown Court at Swansea and Caernarfon Criminal Justice Centre.

“A detailed assessment is needed of the language skills capacity of the courts workforce in Wales and any changes needed should be planned on the basis that it must be ensured that Welsh language services can be provided in future in accordance with the statutory duties of HMCTS.” (Welsh Language Commissioner)

We keep the linguistic capability of our staff under constant review. We currently have 111 Welsh speakers and 22 members of staff at different stages of learning Welsh, which represents 18% of our staff. We are also currently working to prepare revised and updated details to recruiting officers on Welsh language post designations when advertising vacancies. Our Workforce Change Board regularly reviews our Welsh language capabilities and takes steps to manage and improve when necessary. Over the last few years, most of our staff have attended a level one, one day course on Welsh language awareness and pronunciation. During 2015-16 all staff in Wales will need to complete an online Welsh awareness course.

Responses to individual proposals

Brecon Law Courts

The Lord Chancellor has decided that Brecon Law Courts should be closed and its criminal hearings moved to Llandrindod Wells Law Courts, Merthyr Tydfil Combined Court and, for users living in the Ystradgynlais area, Swansea Magistrates' Court. Civil, family and tribunal hearings will be moved to Merthyr Tydfil Combined Court.

There were a total of 17 responses in relation to Brecon Law Courts. Of these:

- four were from magistrates
- three were from another public sector body
- three were from professional users
- two were from members of the public
- one was from a Member of Parliament or Assembly Member
- one was from a member of the judiciary
- one was from a criminal justice partner
- one was from a union or staff group
- one was from an other

Of these responses none were in support of the proposals, 16 were opposed and one was neutral.

Access to justice

Brecon is 29 miles from Llandrindod Wells, 19 miles away from Merthyr Tydfil and 25 miles from Ystradgynlais. Ystradgynlais is 15 miles from Swansea. There are no practical rail links between any of the courts referred to. The rail journey from Merthyr to Llandrindod is made via Cardiff and Shrewsbury and takes up to five hours one way.

On weekdays there is a regular bus service between Brecon, Merthyr Tydfil and Llandrindod Wells and also between Ystradgynlais and Swansea. Brecon Law Courts currently sits two to three days per week.

Some responses made references to access to justice issues regarding Brecon Law Courts.

“Infrequent bus services means that travel time become increasingly complex.”
(Academic)

We appreciate that Brecon suffers from poor public transport links with no train links. There is a regular bus service. In an increasingly digital age, users will not always need to attend hearings in person.

“The plans may also see the abolition of the Brecknock Local Justice Area and its merger with the Radnor Local Justice Area. This undermines the principle of local justice.” (Brecon Town Council)

The consultation did not include changes to Local Justice Areas. A realignment of LJA boundaries will be needed in respect of South Powys and we will engage with the Judicial Business Groups.

“As Vice Chairman of the Dyfed Powys Magistrates Advisory Committee, I am writing to say how deeply concerned I am at the proposed closure of Brecon Court. Yet again, local justice is being undermined and apart from the travelling distances, these proposals will dissuade local people to become magistrates, which is very disheartening for the communities from which they serve.” (Lord Lieutenant, Powys and Vice Chairman of the Dyfed Powys Magistrates’ Advisory Committee)

Magistrates will cover different areas than at present. We expect the process of local people being tried by local magistrates to continue. Magistrates are valued members of the judiciary and work well together for the benefit of the communities they serve, wherever they are delivering justice.

“... although the consultation paper refers to nearby courts, including Merthyr Tydfil, cases would in fact be transferred to Llandrindod Wells because it is in the same county as Brecon...” (The Law Society)

Llandrindod Wells will continue to be a satellite hearing venue with the administration being undertaken at Merthyr Tydfil. We will work with the Judicial Business Groups with a view to engaging on the realignment of LJAs, which could mean that courts other than Llandrindod Wells may be used for South Powys’ magistrates’ court work.

Value for money

The operating costs for Brecon Law Courts for 2014-15 were approximately £177,000. The building is generally of a good standard. However, essential maintenance works are required including improvement of the building ventilation system, the repair of electrical systems and the renewal of a flat roof.

“We think it therefore important that your appraisal of the current facilities is accurate as one interpretation might be to suggest that Brecon is a facility which is barely adequate and in need of a large sum of money spending on it.” (Mid Wales Law Society)

“Whilst in theory moving work to Llandrindod Wells may seem advantageous to us and clients, you seem to overlook how poor the court provision in Llandrindod Wells is. There is only one court, poorly designed, and 2 consultation rooms that are glass fronted and afford no privacy to anyone using them. The witness facility is between the main court and the two interview rooms. The toilets for staff, users and public, open directly from and into the public waiting area, consequently few ladies appear willing to use them particularly. The car park is small, and the court

itself is a very long walk from the train station and town centre, having been built in an out of town location. Brecon has three functioning court rooms, lots of consultation rooms, and is that rare thing, a well thought out building, that actually seems to work well for everyone. This includes that it is within 150 yards of the main police station and custody facility for South and Mid Powys.” (Anonymous)

“In respect of the Brecon courthouse it is suggested that further work could be done to see whether letting the open plan office space in the court has been explored?” (Powys and Herefordshire Branch, Magistrates’ Association)

Brecon is a large building that was only used to approximately 16% capacity in 2014-15. We believe that by reducing the number of such underused permanent buildings and investing in digital access we can improve access to justice. While a relatively new building at 21 years old it still needs investment to maintain the building. We do not believe that these costs when considered with the low utilisation, justify keeping the court open. We have to have due regard to ensure our estate is utilised to deliver justice efficiently and effectively while providing value for money to the public purse.

Operational efficiency

The current utilisation rate is very low at approximately 16% and does not justify keeping the court open. The receiving courts can absorb the workload from Brecon Law Courts without any enabling works. This will improve efficiency and enable savings to be made.

“There is no mention of the coroner's use of the building - will this continue to be held in Brecon or will the building be empty?” (Brecon Town Council)

We have reviewed our workload database which records courtroom utilisation data and can confirm that the Coroner’s Court usage is included in Brecon’s utilisation. Now that the decision to close Brecon has been made, a detailed implementation plan will be produced. We will continue to offer hearing facilities to HM Coroner where we are able to do so.

“The consultation does not take into account capacity in the workloads of neighbouring courts that the work would be transferred to. In the specific case of Brecon, do Llandrindod Wells, Merthyr Tydfil and Swansea have sufficient capacity to absorb the work? What happens if any further courts close in future?” (Brecon Town Council)

In making the proposal to close Brecon and allocating work to neighbouring courts, we evaluated the capacity available and are satisfied that receiving courts have current and future capacity to meet forecast workloads.

“Would the small number of children and young people living in the Ystradgynlais area and who commit or are charged with a criminal offence, continued to be overseen by the Powys Youth Offending Team?” (West Glamorgan Magistrates)

The Powys Youth Offending team would continue to deal with youths who appear in court in respect of offences relating to the Powys area.

Alternative provision of services

“Powys County Council believe that they could assist the Ministry of Justice by providing a suitable more cost efficient alternative to the Brecon Courts.” (Powys County Council).

We are in discussion with Powys County Council about their offer.

Decision

All the points raised by respondents to the consultation have been analysed and following careful consideration, the Lord Chancellor has decided to close Brecon Law Courts and move the workload to Llandrindod Wells Law Courts, Merthyr Tydfil Combined Court and, for users living in the Ystradgynlais area, Swansea Magistrates' Court. Realignment of LJAs will be taken forward with the Judicial Business Groups. We will also continue to explore alternative provision.

Implementation

There are a number of factors to consider before Brecon Law Courts can close. An indicative timetable of implementation is attached to this document. Please note this timetable is subject to change as the programme progresses.

Bridgend Law Courts

The Lord Chancellor has decided that Bridgend Law Courts should be closed and its civil, family and tribunals' work transferred to Port Talbot Justice Centre and the criminal work to Cardiff and the Vale Magistrates' Court.

In Wales, Bridgend Law Courts received the most interest. There were a total of 42 responses in relation to Bridgend Law Courts. Of these:

- nine were from Members of Parliament or Assembly Members
- eight were from magistrates
- seven were from another public sector body
- six were from members of the public
- five were from staff members
- two were from professional users
- two were from members of the judiciary
- one was from a union or staff group
- one was from an other
- one was from a criminal justice partner

Of these responses none were in support of the proposals, 41 were opposed and one was neutral.

Access to justice

Bridgend is 16 miles away from Port Talbot and 20 miles away from Cardiff. There is a regular and frequent train and bus service from Bridgend to both Port Talbot and Cardiff.

There are good public transport links between major population centres in the geographical region served by Bridgend Law Courts. Bridgend Law Courts currently sits five to six days a week.

Some responses made a reference to access to justice issues regarding Bridgend.

“...the EIA is wholly defective in respect of travel and transport. Whilst the EIA recognises that those in rural areas ‘may’ experience higher costs and travel times, it fails to recognise that many of the valleys in Ogmore have the same characteristics as those rural areas.” (Member of Parliament)

The geography of Wales means that even before these proposals some people would have to travel an hour to get to court. That can also be the case for the daily journey to school, college or work, or for hospital appointments. For the majority of citizens attendance at court will be a rare occurrence. That said, we do acknowledge that the

travel times only reflect the closing location and receiving location as opposed to including the whole area.

“Bridgend, as the Newcastle & Ogmore Bench, has been in existence since 1836, nearly 200 years, and during that period has played an important role in the affairs of the local Bridgend community, serving many diverse areas including industrial and rural economies, through good times and bad, helping to maintain a high standard of social cohesion in valleys and towns alike, administering justice fairly but firmly to defendants, and victims, being always conscious of their circumstances, needs and abilities.” (Magistrate)

Magistrates are appointed to represent the diversity of the population in the community, and to judge cases dispassionately, ensuring that they deliver justice fairly. Cases will continue to be heard by local magistrates who are valued members of the judiciary who work well together for the benefit of the communities they serve wherever they are delivering justice.

“As I previously stated, it seems clear that a civil servant has just looked at a map and gauged Bridgend to Cardiff as about 22 miles. Based on that false premise of the area of the County of Bridgend it has been assumed that this would incur very little inconvenience to travel to Cardiff Law Courts.” (Magistrate)

Travel times were calculated using data on journey times from the Department of Transport (DfT) Transport Direct Journey Planner tool. Someone travelling from the furthest part of the Llynfi Valley to Bridgend may do so by train. Trains currently run down the Llynfi Valley once every hour (at 15 minutes past). The journey takes 22 minutes, arriving at Bridgend at 37 minutes past the hour. This enables a connection with the 40 minutes past the hour train service from Bridgend to Cardiff, arriving in Cardiff at nine minutes past the hour. A total travel time (from Maesteg station to Cardiff station) would be 54 minutes.

“Not even our Bench Chairman was aware of the inclusion of Bridgend Law Courts on the list until the general public announcement was aired. This shows a total lack of transparency and even courtesy.” (Magistrate)

Until the Government announced the consultation it would not have been appropriate to speculate as to which courts and tribunals were included and which were not. As soon as the Written Ministerial Statement was laid, each Bench Chair was contacted personally to be advised of the announcement and senior managers attended every affected site in Wales.

“To my knowledge, no attempt has been made by the government to ascertain whether magistrates in Bridgend will continue to serve in their posts if the proposed closures go ahead.” (Member of Parliament)

Magistrates are dedicated volunteers and it is anticipated that they will want to continue to deliver a high standard of local justice. Where they undertake their duties is generally secondary to the valuable service they offer. The judiciary are not asked to declare their intentions before a public consultation is launched.

“The relocation of the court’s services and the subsequent breakdown in Bridgend’s legal infrastructure will destabilise the community and undermine local confidence in the justice system for a generation. The bonds of trust between

stakeholders that have developed over time and underpin the local justice system, should not be discarded in such a cavalier way.” (Member of Parliament)

The legal profession experience the inefficiency in the justice system every day and work with court staff and the judiciary to keep the system working, despite its flaws. We would not have justice without them and they feel the frustrations of the current system most keenly and understand the case for reform most powerfully. We will work with stakeholders to ensure that there is a smooth transition, and effective engagement will be undertaken to ensure that the high standard of local justice delivered is maintained.

Value for money

The operating costs for Bridgend Law Courts for 2014-15 was approximately £367,000. The accommodation is of a good standard. However, maintenance work will be required over the next five years if the court does not close, including a structural review of the premises.

Some responses raised concerns about value for money.

“Bridgend Law Courts have received significant capital investment to improve the facility over recent years and in particular all courtrooms are now accessible to people with a disability. The Court also provides separate rooms for victims, witnesses and defendants and last year opened a new Bridewell custody suite, one of only 4 used by South Wales Police. Bridgend Law Courts now meet the national requirements of a modern up to date courthouse. Future maintenance will therefore be low.” (Assembly Member)

Recent surveys have identified further maintenance necessary over the next five years. Essential maintenance work was undertaken at the 1970’s Bridgend Law Courts building during 2014 to keep it fit for public use. We cannot continue to invest in maintaining an ageing and deteriorating estate. HM Courts & Tribunals Service spends around £500 million a year on its buildings. We will provide far better access to justice if we reduce the cost of our estate and reinvest the savings in improving digital access, and improving the accessibility and facilities in what will become our core court and tribunal venues.

“West Glamorgan magistrates do not agree with the premise that “no enabling works would be required to accommodate this move”. Considerable work would need to be undertaken to prepare Port Talbot Justice Centre for the influx of additional work; and to offer the requisite secure facilities for those prisoners and detainees who currently appear in custody in Bridgend Law Courts in respect of civil, family and tribunals’ work. This latter point is of particular concern.” (West Glamorgan Magistrates)

We do not intend to create secure facilities at Port Talbot Justice Centre which will be used for civil, family and tribunal work only. Almost all of our civil, family and tribunal estate does not currently have accommodation in terms of custody and dock facilities. If someone needed to appear in court from custody, or presented a risk to the safety of court users, the case would be transferred to a court with the necessary custody facilities.

Operational efficiency

The current utilisation rate is approximately 50%, which does not justify keeping the court open. The receiving courts can absorb the workload from Bridgend Law Courts without

any enabling works. Combining the workload will provide efficiency and enable savings to be made.

“Bridgend Youth Offending Team recently merged with those of Neath/Port Talbot and Swansea to form the Western Bay Youth Justice and Early Intervention Service. That amalgamation – encouraged by the Welsh Government – would appear to be somewhat infelicitous in the event that the work of Bridgend Youth Court is transferred to Cardiff, whose Youth Offending Service was perceived to have been some way behind the standard of both Bridgend and the new alliance.” (Newcastle and Ogmore Bench)

It would not be appropriate for us to comment on the perceived standard of different Youth Offending Services. Criminal court workload will always be dealt with at a magistrates’ court serving a particular local justice area, which means that youths charged with alleged offences in the Newcastle and Ogmore Local Justice Area will now be heard at the current Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan Magistrates’ Court, once the transition plan has been developed and implemented.

“According to the information provided to our working group, the secure dock is frequently used for family court hearings because of the close proximity of Parc Prison; Caswell Clinic; and the newly opened secure unit Taith Newydd.” (West Glamorgan Magistrates)

While we have used this criminal facility for civil, family and tribunal work at Bridgend, in most of our other civil, family and tribunal estate we do not have those custody or secure facilities and arrangements for matters that would have been listed at Bridgend will now be made in accordance with our standard process for such cases.

“Bridgend has seen work moved out by the department already restricting access to justice and driving down utilisation. Search warrants for the whole of South Wales we are advised are heard at Bridgend. These are not included in utilisation figures, despite taking up a substantial amount of judicial and legal adviser time.” (PCS, Trade Union)

While applications for search warrants are generally heard during working hours, which means that applicants would need to attend at Cardiff, it is possible for applications to be heard other than in a courtroom, and even in a magistrate's home. The work to centralise bulk cases was undertaken as part of a national initiative and was not something we did in Wales to reduce utilisation in any particular court. The Single Justice Procedure will enable a single magistrate sitting other than in a courtroom to deal with the majority of the traffic cases, DVLA cases and television licensing cases in future. The courtroom capacity needed will therefore reduce.

“The Cell capacity at Cardiff cannot cope with the additional work from Caerphilly and Bridgend. Currently, on occasions prisoners have had to be transferred from Cardiff to Bridgend when their Cells are full.” (Assembly Member)

Cell capacity is based on the number of courtrooms at a location. The number of cells at the current Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan Magistrates’ Court is appropriate to the number of courtrooms.

“The Port Talbot Justice Centre is a very large building and most of it is given over to administrative staff. The court room facilities within this building are very much

ancillary to its main activity – administrative work. It is not an exaggeration to say that this building is essentially an office with some court facilities. If, as seems likely, the administrative work undertaken in the centre is removed vast areas of the building will be unoccupied.” (Presiding Judge for Wales)

“Approximately 80 compliance and enforcement staff, currently based in the Port Talbot Justice Centre, will be required to vacate the building when the Criminal Enforcement privatisation process concludes. However, the consultation document is silent in this respect.” (West Glamorgan Magistrates)

“We do not consider that the practical implications of transferring work to the Port Talbot Justice Centre have been adequately considered.” (Association of Judges of Wales)

Following the decision to retain the compliance and enforcement business as part of HM Courts & Tribunals Service, enforcement staff will remain at Port Talbot. We have assessed the capacity at Port Talbot Justice Centre and are satisfied that there is sufficient capacity.

Alternative provision of services

“If... there is capacity why don't you move the tribunal work from the 5 [Cardiff] city centre locations (which are in a bad state of repair) to the Bridgend court rooms, this would all these old premises to be sold and as they are city centre locations they will bring in much more money than the Bridgend courtroom land.” (Magistrate)

Bridgend Law Courts does not have the capacity to absorb the volume of tribunals business from Cardiff. We recognise that there is a need to find a longer term solution in Cardiff where there are five court and tribunal buildings in use. We continue to review our estate to assess how we can best meet the needs of the public in this area.

Decision

All points raised by respondents to the consultation have been analysed and following careful consideration, the Lord Chancellor has decided to close Bridgend Law Courts, moving the workload for civil, family and tribunals work to Port Talbot Justice Centre and the criminal work to Cardiff and the Vale Magistrates' Court. We will also continue to explore alternative provision.

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 Bridgend Law Courts can close. An indicative timetable of implementation is attached to this document. Please note this timetable is subject to change as the programme progresses.

Carmarthen Civil, Family, Tribunal and Probate Hearing Centre

The Lord Chancellor has decided that Carmarthen Civil, Family, Tribunal and Probate Hearing Centre should be retained.

There were a total of seven responses in relation to Carmarthen Civil, Family, Tribunal and Probate Hearing Centre. Of these:

- three were from professional users
- two were from Members of Parliament or Assembly Members
- one was from a magistrate
- one was from a union or staff group

Of these responses none were in support of the proposals, whilst seven were opposed.

Access to justice

Carmarthen is 17 miles away from Llanelli, 30 miles from Haverfordwest and 50 miles from Aberystwyth. There is a regular train and bus service from Carmarthen to Llanelli. There are regular timetabled yet infrequent train and bus services from Carmarthen to Haverfordwest. Bus services link Carmarthen to Aberystwyth.

Carmarthen Civil, Family, Tribunal and Probate Hearing Centre serves a geographical area that is largely rural in character.

“We strongly object to the proposed closure of courts in Carmarthen given the impact this will have on access to justice and the justice system in the Welsh language for court users and other service providers in the Welsh language.”
(Welsh Government)

Our proposal had meant that the majority of work from the Carmarthen courts would have relocated to Llanelli, which is in Carmarthenshire and where our staff reflect this Welsh speaking community.

Value for money

The operating costs for Carmarthen Civil, Family, Tribunal and Probate Hearing Centre for 2014-15 were approximately £18,000. The accommodation is in good condition.

“The proposals seem to justify closure of the Carmarthen courts on the basis that they are “poorly maintained”. Both courts in the last 3 to 4 years have been completely re-furnished to a very high standard, at great cost to the public purse.”
(Solicitor)

“In fact Carmarthen Civil hearing centre only opened a few years ago at its current location. This seems a complete waste of public money and makes no sense.”
(Solicitor)

“The Hearing Centre at Carmarthen at Hill House appears to provide good value for money when compared with the other figures given in respect of other Courts. The operating costs amount to £18,000 per annum with High Court usage when compared with other suggested Court closures.” (Solicitors)

“We are surprised that the Government are considering, on the Grounds of cost, closing the Court and tribunal center in Carmarthen, considering the amount of public money that was spent on it, so recently by the Government.” (Carmarthen Citizens’ Advice)

The Carmarthen Civil, Family, Tribunal and Probate Hearing Centre was refurbished as a hearing centre when it was newly leased in 2012. This expenditure was necessary for the court to relocate from the Picton Terrace site. The retention of Carmarthen Civil, Family, Tribunal and Probate Hearing Centre allows us the continued use of a relatively new building, with good facilities, under a flexible lease which is cost effective and offers value for money given its relatively low operating costs.

Operational efficiency

The current utilisation rate is approximately 51% capacity.

“The Carmarthen civil centre has the Cafcass offices located in the same building and makes sense because many family case hearings take place there.” (Solicitor)

The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) Cymru are located in the same building as the court. They are part of the Welsh Government, who HM Courts & Tribunals Service currently lease the court accommodation from.

Alternative provision of services

“Similarly, family court hearings could again be held in the Guildhall as this was the situation until quite recently. Consideration should be given to transferring work from the Hill House building to the Guildhall as this would ensure access to justice locally for all involved with such cases...” (Dyfed Magistrates’ Association)

“...instead of closing all courts in Carmarthen, consideration should be given to consolidating all hearings in Hill House/Picton Terrace. It is accepted that this venue is currently unsuitable for those cases where a defendant is likely to be immediately remanded in custody or receive an immediate custodial sentence, but it will be evident from particular case that this is likely and court staff can then list those matters in a court with appropriate facilities. This approach was taken for many years following the loss of custody facilities at Ammanford Magistrates Court prior to its closure and worked well.” (Carmarthenshire County Council)

The age, maintenance costs and the lack of suitable facilities associated with the use of the Guildhall, Carmarthen and restrictions on structural changes due to its Grade II listed status, make the co-location of civil, family, tribunal, probate and criminal work at that location operationally difficult.

As acknowledged, without investment Carmarthen Civil, Family, Tribunal and Probate Hearing Centre is not suitable for custodial work. It may be possible to use the existing video conference facility at Carmarthen, by prior arrangement, to provide access for those users unable to travel to Llanelli for criminal hearings.

Decision

All points mentioned by respondents to the consultation have been analysed and following careful consideration, the Lord Chancellor has decided to retain Carmarthen Civil, Family, Tribunal and Probate Hearing Centre.

Carmarthen Law Courts (The Guildhall)

The Lord Chancellor has decided that Carmarthen Law Courts should be closed and its Crown Court work moved to the Crown Court at Swansea with its magistrates' hearings to Llanelli Magistrates' Court.

A total of 18 responses were received in relation to Carmarthen Law Courts. Of these:

- four were from members of the judiciary
- three were from another public sector body
- three were from professional users
- three were from magistrates
- two were from Members of Parliament or Assembly Members
- one was from a staff member
- one was from a criminal justice partner
- one was from a union or staff group

Of these responses one was in support of the proposals, 16 were opposed and one was neutral.

Access to justice

Carmarthen is 27 miles from Swansea and 17 miles from Llanelli. The locations are connected by regular train and bus services.

Carmarthen Law Courts serves a geographical area that is largely rural in character. Public transport links are good and regular local bus services link Carmarthen to local population centres.

Some responses made references to access to justice issues.

“Carmarthen Law Courts (the Guildhall) has been a feature of Carmarthen Town for close to 250 years and is the only court in the region of Dyfed that undertakes Crown Court work.” (A Member of Parliament and an Assembly Member)

We appreciate that the justice system has long traditions, but the HM Courts & Tribunals Service reform agenda is a once in a generation opportunity to build on the strength and independence of our justice system to create a modern, efficient service to meet the needs of the 21st century, operating within available resources. We are exploring alternative venues to understand if a Crown Court facility could be provided on a need basis for particular local cases rather than retaining a permanent presence based on current usage.

“...Carmarthen is the main administrative base for public and third sector bodies serving West Wales along with being the principal town in West Wales. To ensure

access to justice, it is considered essential that the magistrate's court in Carmarthen is retained.” (Magistrates’ Association)

It is recognised that Carmarthen is seen as the ‘hub’ for Carmarthenshire. We need to move towards an estate with buildings which are larger and facilitate flexible use. Llanelli, in Carmarthenshire, is a multi-jurisdictional court, which has the capacity to accommodate Carmarthen’s criminal workload. The savings can be used to reinvest in developing our future core estate.

“..it would not be appropriate to reduce...Crown Court capacity to four Crown Courts to serve West Glamorgan and Dyfed Powys... I do not consider it appropriate that both Carmarthen Crown Court and Swansea Guildhall should be closed...I accept that there is no need for both. The choice between the two should be determined by (a) the economics of running each centre (b) considerations of access to justice and (c) Welsh language issues.” (Presiding Judge for Wales)

“[The proposal] sends a clear message to those communities that they have no meaningful involvement in the justice system [and can] no longer expect to have their case heard in Haverfordwest or even Carmarthen but now expect to travel to Swansea. They may have expected that their right to give evidence in front of jurors who come from a similar community with an understanding of their community and environment would be upheld [and to] give their evidence in Welsh in front of jurors who may also speak their language.” (Barristers’ Chambers)

We are committed to reducing the need for any unnecessary attendance at court and are implementing alternative digital ways of working to achieve this. We are exploring alternative provision for the Crown Court outside of Swansea on a need basis rather than a permanent presence.

Value for money

The operating costs for Carmarthen Law Courts were approximately £162,000 for the financial year 2014-15. The Guildhall was built in 1777. Generally the accommodation is of a good standard as the building underwent a refurbishment in 2010-11. While the building is in good structural condition, it is not compliant with the Equality Act 2010 and the arrangement of the accommodation does not meet the needs of a modern business. There is inadequate separation of victims, witnesses and defendants, inadequate judicial and juror segregation, with poor facilities for witnesses and victims. Due to the absence at the site of a modern vehicle dock, prisoners are delivered to the building via the public pavement outside of the premises.

Because the Guildhall is a Grade II listed building, listed buildings consent would be required before necessary structural work (required to modernise the building) could be undertaken.

“In 2010 Carmarthen Court House underwent major refurbishment. Construction costs were £948,300; fees were £90,710; totalling £1,039,010. Closing this court represents a considerable waste of public moneys.” (Magistrates’ Association).

The refurbishment of the Carmarthen Guildhall in 2010-11 included work necessary to prevent the deterioration of the structure and to allow the safe and efficient use of the building. The roof was repaired, stonework was renewed and other smaller works completed. Ongoing maintenance work is still required at the court as well as work to

ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010. Despite the level of investment it remains poorly utilised and, therefore, represents poor value for money to the taxpayer.

Operational efficiency

The current utilisation rate of approximately 11% is very low and does not justify keeping the court open. The receiving court can easily absorb the workload from Carmarthen Law Courts without any enabling work being required.

“Natalie Ceeney, Chief Executive of HM Courts and Tribunals Service, said on 23rd September 2015 “what worries me is the human cost. In our criminal courts, witness, victims and defendants can wait years for a case to come to trial, causing chaos to lives as people wait for a decision before they can work out how to move on.” West Glamorgan magistrates wholly agree with her and wonder how reducing Crown Court space in Swansea and Carmarthen will address her worries.” (West Glamorgan Magistrates)

Judicial listing decisions are made to ensure the most efficient delivery of justice, utilising the available estate within the local justice area. Listing decisions are not made with any consideration about the future of any court. We have assessed that there is sufficient capacity to receive the relocating workload. Listing arrangements will ensure that the current good low waiting times in the magistrates’ court is maintained, if not improved through some efficiencies. The Crown Court sat 18 days in 2014-15 and the closure should have no adverse impact on the waiting times for trials currently heard at Carmarthen.

“This proposal...will create a situation which will mean that we [Swansea Crown] will permanently work at full capacity and have no means of coping with any unforeseen exigencies.” (Association of Judges of Wales)

We are exploring whether existing facilities could be adapted at minimum cost to allow some local Crown Court cases to be heard in West Wales based on current usage.

Alternative provision of services

“The County Council acknowledges that the court service is under significant budgetary pressure and that an element of court rationalisation is necessary. It is suggested however that instead of closing all courts in Carmarthen, consideration should be given to consolidating all hearings in Hill House/Picton Terrace. It is accepted that this venue is currently unsuitable for those cases where a defendant is likely to be immediately remanded in custody or receive an immediate custodial sentence, but it will be evident from the facts of a particular case that this is likely and court staff can then list those matters in a court with appropriate facilities. This approach was taken for many years following the loss of custody facilities at Ammanford Magistrates Court prior to its closure and worked well.”
(Carmarthenshire County Council)

As acknowledged, without investment Carmarthen Civil, Family, Tribunal and Probate Hearing Centre is not suitable for custodial work. It may be possible to use the existing video conference facility at Carmarthen, by prior arrangement, to provide access for those users unable to travel to Llanelli for criminal hearings.

Decision

All points mentioned by respondents to the consultation have been analysed and following careful consideration, the Lord Chancellor has decided to close Carmarthen Law Courts, moving the crown court work to the Crown Court at Swansea and the magistrates' hearings to Llanelli Magistrates' Court.

Implementation

There are a number of factors to consider before Carmarthen Law Courts can close. An indicative timetable of implementation is attached to this document. Please note this timetable is subject to change as the programme progresses.

Dolgellau Crown and Magistrates' Court

The Lord Chancellor has decided that Dolgellau Crown and Magistrates' Court should be closed, once suitable local alternative provision is established, and its work moved to Caernarfon Criminal Justice Centre with future consideration being given to work originating from the south of Dolgellau catchment area moving to Aberystwyth Justice Centre.

There were a total of 21 responses in relation to Dolgellau Crown and Magistrates' Court. Of these:

- six were from another public sector body
- four were from criminal justice partners
- three were from professional users
- two were from Members of Parliament or Assembly Members
- two were from magistrates
- two were from members of the judiciary
- one was from a member of the public
- one was from a union or staff group

Of these responses none were in support of the proposals, 19 were opposed and two were neutral.

Access to justice

Dolgellau Crown and Magistrates' Court is 43 miles from Caernarfon. A regular bus service links Dolgellau to Caernarfon, but the service is infrequent. A bus travels the route at a frequency that varies from once every two hours to once every four hours and the journey takes approximately two hours. Dolgellau is 34 miles from Aberystwyth, the journey by car takes one hour. Regular bus services link Dolgellau to Aberystwyth and the journey takes one hour and 15 minutes.

Some responses mentioned access to justice as part of their response.

“The report acknowledges that services to Caernarfon are infrequent. Services connecting at Dolgellau are equally infrequent, and in the same way as currently occurs with hospital appointments at Ysbyty Gwynedd in Bangor, a straightforward procedure can mean a fully day of travelling.” (Academic)

We appreciate that Gwynedd suffers from poor public transport links. The bus service is regular though sometimes infrequent. In an increasingly digital age, users will not always need to attend hearings in person.

“The Council finds it totally unacceptable in this day and age to expect service users to face a minimum return travel time of 2 hrs 30 mins (from the Dolgellau area to Caernarfon and return) when having access to a motor vehicle. When not

having access to a motor vehicle and having to rely on public transport and service connections to be in good time for court hearing times, this travel time can easily be increased over and above this, by several hours.” (Dolgellau Town Council)

Access to justice is not just about proximity to a court. We are committed to providing alternatives to travel. There could be some difficult public transport journeys from Dolgellau, but this is not a reason on its own to justify the retention of the court. We are exploring if any alternative venue may be found that meets the low workload emanating from this area without the need for a permanent presence.

“...there may also be a powerful access to justice point to be made about the closure of Dolgellau Magistrates Court. If an alternative public building was available with a substantial saving in cost I would recommend preserving a hearing centre in Dolgellau without hesitation. HMCTS Wales should explore this possibility.” (Presiding Judge for Wales)

The Crown Court has not sat in Dolgellau since before 2007 without complaint and the Magistrates' Court sits only one day a week. Most members of the community do not need to use services provided by the court and, for those court users who experience problems in travelling to alternative court venues, the court will consider applications to conduct business by alternative means. In addition, the range of court business that can be conducted by phone and through the internet is increasing. Some types of non imprisonable cases, such as those dealt with under *“Make a Plea”* online, can now be completed without the need for parties to attend court. We are, however, exploring what alternative provision may be available in Dolgellau.

Value for money

Operating costs for Dolgellau Crown and Magistrates' Court in the financial year 2014-15 were approximately £57,000. Generally the accommodation is of an unsatisfactory standard for a modern business. There is inadequate separation of victims, witnesses and defendants and because of the absence at the site of a modern vehicle dock, prisoners are delivered to the building from the public pavement outside of the premises. Maintenance works will be required should the court not close which includes the replacement of toilets, provision of a new access control system, replacement of parts of the building fire alarm and panic alarm systems, upgrading of the court CCTV system and work to ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010.

It should be noted that, because the court building is a Grade II listed building, listed buildings consent would be required before necessary structural work (required to modernise the building) could be undertaken.

“The closure of Dolgellau as a money saving exercise alone would involve the closure of one of the few court houses in Wales where the Welsh language is the first language spoken in Court. This is a significant departure in our view from the obligation of Government to ensure that it preserves those institutions where the Welsh Culture is clearly alive and remains in use.” (Mid Wales Law Society)

Dolgellau's workload will transfer to Caernarfon Criminal Justice Centre where Welsh is also the predominant language spoken in court. Caernarfon, over Dolgellau, also has integrated translation systems to facilitate simultaneous interpretation of evidence and recording of the same. The Welsh Language Unit is based at Caernarfon, where our team

of in-house Welsh translators and interpreters are based. We do not, therefore, consider that we are departing from our commitments in our Welsh Language Scheme.

“Moving the justice hearings to Caernarfon or Aberystwyth would also create additional costs for others associated with the process, such as the police, solicitors, and the Council's own officers.” (Gwynedd County Council)

“It is felt that sustaining the Court service is the priority. However, closing or moving the court should not be considered without a detailed appraisal of the facilities and other buildings in Dolgellau town that could be used instead of the current Grade II listed building.” (Member of Parliament)

Court attendance can be 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. We have a duty to offer more convenient ways for citizens to interact with the justice system whilst maintaining the authority of the court for serious cases. While there may be some increase in travel time and/or cost, for some these will be less.

“The Impact Assessment is noted and it is accepted the use of the building as a Crown Court is no longer viable and there is no objection to this part of the proposal.” (Gwynedd Bench)

The court is no longer viable to hear Crown Court matters.

Operational efficiency

Dolgellau Crown and Magistrates' Court was utilised at approximately 14% capacity during 2014-15 which does not justify keeping it open. The receiving courts are able to absorb the workload without any enabling works and will provide an improved efficiency and enable HM Courts & Tribunals Service to make savings.

“I support the suggestion that Caernarfon Crown Court should become a multi-purpose court serving all jurisdictions in North West Wales. Self-evidently, the proposed closures in Holyhead, Llangefni, Caernarfon Civil and Family Justice Centre and Dolgellau should not take place until all the necessary work has been done to allow the work of those courts to be transferred.” (Presiding Judge for Wales)

“North Wales Police have undertaken a review of the additional costs that will have to be incurred by the force should the proposed closure of Dolgellau, Prestatyn and Holyhead Magistrates Courts go ahead. From a total of 356 attendances at the affected sites per annum, the force will face an increase of around 222 hours travelling time (8,700 miles). This will amount to an additional £6,700 in travel costs and resource time.” (Police and Crime Commissioner, North Wales)

Given the very low level of workload at Dolgellau at approximately 14%, (the court is usually open one day a week), the impact to North Wales Police should not be significant and the closure of all three courts will bring some efficiencies by negating the need for extensive travel between our venues, although we accept that the closures may impact some more than others. We will work with our partner agencies to understand and manage the impact closures may have and these will now form part of our implementation

plans. For example, increasing the use of live links to reduce or negate the need for police officers to attend to give their evidence.

Alternative provision of services

“..video link will eventually be by default but that such a progressive step change requires a senior and cross-CJS mandate, appropriate investment, a detailed business case and a cross-CJS programme of work to deliver its full potential...very much in its infancy [if the court closes] imminently police officers will have to attend court in person in the interim...the only public/civic buildings that could potentially be fitted with video link facilities in the Dolgellau area are the police station and the Penarlag council offices. Neither of which are ideal.” (Police and Crime Commissioner, North Wales)

Progress towards a modernised service is being made. Digital screens have been introduced into many court buildings and a digital case management system for the administration of criminal cases is well underway. “*Make a plea*’ online, which for summary, non imprisonable offences, for example speeding tickets, currently only available in Gwent, will mean the defendant doesn’t need to attend court. We are also discussing the expansion of live links for the police to use to provide evidence without attending court. The court will not close until suitable local alternative provision is established.

Decision

All points mentioned by respondents to the consultation have been analysed and following careful consideration, the Lord Chancellor has decided to close Dolgellau Crown and Magistrates’ Court once suitable local alternative provision is established, and move the work to Caernarfon Criminal Justice Centre with future consideration being given to work originating from the south of Dolgellau catchment area moving to Aberystwyth Justice Centre

Implementation

There are a number of factors to consider before Dolgellau Crown and 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.

Holyhead Magistrates' Court

The Lord Chancellor has decided that Holyhead Magistrates' Court should be closed and its work moved to Caernarfon Criminal Justice Centre, once suitable local alternative provision is established.

There were a total of 18 responses in relation to Holyhead Magistrates' Court. Of these:

- six were from another public sector body
- four were from criminal justice partners
- three were from Members of Parliament or Assembly Members
- two were from professional users
- one was from a member of the judiciary
- one was from a magistrate
- one was from a union or staff group

Of these responses none were in support of the proposals, 17 were opposed and one was neutral.

Access to justice

Holyhead Magistrates' Court is 29 miles away from Caernarfon with a regular bus service via Bangor. Alternatively there is a train from Holyhead to Bangor and then a bus from Bangor to Caernarfon. Anglesey is of largely rural character, although there is also an industrial aspect to the area. Holyhead is the largest population centre on Anglesey.

It should be noted that Holyhead Town Council regards the court building as an important building within the Holyhead Conservation Area. Therefore, planning permission would be required for any works that markedly altered the appearance or structure of the court building.

“The proposed closure of courts in Holyhead and Llangefni will deny easy access to justice to many Anglesey residents.” (Member of Parliament)

“I believe that Anglesey deserves and needs its own courts. We have already seen the downsizing of the court system via initiatives such as the Court Estate Reform Programme established by the Coalition Government in 2010. As a separate county it seems logical that the court system should be preserved rather than...residents having to travel outside of the Island to secure justice. (Isle of Anglesey County Council)

Access to justice is not just about proximity to a court. We are committed to providing alternatives to travel for those court users who would otherwise have to make excessively long or difficult journeys to attend court, although on Anglesey we will look to establish an alternative part-time venue, but this may be in Llangefni.

Value for money

The operating costs for Holyhead Magistrates' Court for 2014-15 were approximately £85,000. The accommodation at the building is generally poor. There is inadequate separation of victims, witnesses and defendants. Maintenance is required to repair a leak in a flat roof surface, re-plaster all internal walls, replace all floor coverings, replace heat emitters and redecorate the public areas of the court.

"I am concerned that there won't be a market in north Wales for the court buildings the MOJ intend to shut. In 2013 it was reported by the Independent newspaper that around 100 court buildings in England and Wales stood empty after the MOJ failed to sell them. It is worth pointing out that there will still be significant costs attached to these buildings if they're not sold, even if they sit empty. Dolgellau courthouse is a Grade 2 listed building and in Holyhead planning permission would be required for any works to alter the appearance or structure of the court building due to its position in a conservation area." (Police and Crime Commissioner, North Wales)

The HM Courts & Tribunals Service Estates team have responsibility for the speedy disposal of our buildings and to get a sale price that represents best value for the taxpayer. HM Courts & Tribunals Service needs to reduce the cost of its estate and reinvest the savings. The difficulties inherent in altering a building located in a conservation area prevent us from making more efficient use of the court at Holyhead. The receiving court is in excellent condition and is also currently under used.

Operational efficiency

The current utilisation rate is very low at approximately 20% and does not justify keeping the court open. The receiving court can absorb the workload from Holyhead Magistrates' Court without any enabling work.

"...the reduction in court numbers will be detrimental to the administration of justice as a whole. This will be particularly relevant as the local population increases and so with it the amount of work that the courts will process." (Member of Parliament)

"...we are concerned about the capacity of Caernarfon Justice Centre in the event that it receives court work transferred from Caernarfon Civil and Family Court, Holyhead Magistrates' Court, Llangefni Magistrates' Court and Dolgellau Crown and Magistrates' Court." (Welsh Government)

HM Courts & Tribunals Service are investigating the practicalities of using alternative means of taking part in court hearings, including the use of video link technology; telephone hearings; and allowing parties to make representations by means of written submission. Where attendance at a hearing is needed other civic or public buildings could be used for hearings where security requirements are low. We are actively exploring this option for Anglesey.

The under use of the receiving site at Caernarfon Criminal Justice Centre 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. An additional four courtrooms are planned for at Caernarfon

Criminal Justice Centre to accommodate the civil, family and tribunal work from Caernarfon and Llangefni.

Alternative provision of services

“To close Llangefni Civil and Family Court would save an estimate £329,000, which would go towards updating the Holyhead Magistrates Court building and thus saving on the cost of the provision of 4 additional courts at Caernarfon.”
(Ynys Mon/Isle of Anglesey Bench)

This proposal would not represent value for money for the taxpayer. There are restrictions on how the court at Holyhead can be modified, as a result of the building being within the Holyhead Conservation Area. The court at Llangefni is a difficult location to operate efficiently, even allowing for cost savings realised by the closure of Holyhead Magistrates’ Court. Both Holyhead and Llangefni require extensive backlog maintenance investment and neither are suitable to accommodate each other’s work. Closing these two deteriorating buildings will save operating and maintenance costs, which can be reinvested to make access to justice more equitable to all users and, in Caernarfon, to create a court that is able to deal efficiently with present and future courts and tribunals work in North West Wales.

“..further detailed consideration should be given on a local footprint to identify how improved use of public buildings and technology currently available within public services could be used to reduce cost and maintain local access to the justice system....it is believed that some of the buildings in the ownership and use of the Local Authority could usefully be accessed by the judiciary. Currently some of the Welfare Benefits Tribunals are heard within Council Offices in agreement with the judiciary.” (Isle of Anglesey County Council)

HM Courts & Tribunals Service do not currently use the council offices. We are considering the use of alternative venues. The court will not close until suitable local alternative provision is established.

Decision

All points mentioned by respondents to the consultation have been analysed and following careful consideration, the Lord Chancellor has decided to close Holyhead Magistrates’ Court and move the work to Caernarfon Criminal Justice Centre, once suitable local alternative provision is established on Anglesey/Ynys Mon, possibly at Llangefni.

Implementation

There are a number of factors to consider before Holyhead 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.

Llangefni Civil and Family Court

The Lord Chancellor has decided that Llangefni Civil and Family Court should be closed once suitable local alternative provision has been established, and its work moved to Caernarfon Criminal Justice Centre once the necessary enabling works have been completed.

There were a total of 14 responses in relation to Llangefni Civil and Family Court. Of these:

- four were from another public sector body
- two were from Members of Parliament or Assembly Members
- two were from members of the judiciary
- two were from staff members
- one was from a magistrate
- one was from a criminal justice partner
- one was from a professional user
- one was from a union or staff group

Of these responses one was in support of the proposals, 11 were opposed and two were neutral.

Access to justice

Llangefni is located in the central, eastern part of Anglesey. It is 16 miles away from Caernarfon and the journey by car takes approximately 20 minutes. There is a regular bus service from Llangefni to Caernarfon via Bangor. The journey from Llangefni to Caernarfon takes approximately one hour 15 minutes. The court continues to be under used and despite also housing tribunal hearings is not open every day.

“The transport analysis is noted and whilst a person from Amlwch can reach Caernarfon to attend court the question should be whether the travelling is reasonable and affords reasonable access to justice...Hearing cases in Caernarfon/Prestatyn is imposing an unreasonable travelling requirement on many litigants and will be a practical and effective bar to access to justice.” (District Judge Owen Williams and District Judge Jones-Evans)

“I can properly record factually that in the past there has been strong local feeling that Anglesey should have facilities for residents of Anglesey on the island.” (Designated Civil Judge for Wales)

We recognise that the public should not have to make excessively long or difficult journeys to attend hearings at courts and tribunals. We appreciate that Llangefni suffers from poor public transport links, but the changes we are making to our service will mean fewer people needing to go to a court in person. Using modern technology, as we do for many other services, will make access to justice easier. For those court users who

anticipate that they will experience problems in travelling to alternative court venues, the courts will consider applications to conduct business with the court by alternative means, where possible. We are actively exploring whether an alternative provision may be identified in Llangefni to serve Anglesey.

Value for money

The operating costs for Llangefni Civil and Family Court for 2014-15 were approximately £116,000. It is a Grade II listed building constructed in the 1860s. There is a ramp for disabled access at the front entrance, but in other respects the building is not compliant with the Equality Act 2010. Maintenance work is needed over the next five years if the court was not closed. Necessary work includes repair of the roof to replace lead flashing, renewal of parts of the flat roof, replacement of guttering and rainwater pipes, re-plastering of the internal walls, replacing floor coverings damaged as a result of water ingress, replacement of suspended ceilings in parts of the building, the replacement of toilets and of a kitchen and improvements to air conditioning systems.

“We agree with closing Llangefni County Court as the building at present is not fit for purpose. A lot of repairs and maintenance work is required to bring the building up to standard and the building would be too expensive to improve and upgrade.” (HMCTS Staff)

“We agree that maintaining the current court building in Llangefni is unsustainable in the long term.” (District Judges)

Operational efficiency

The current utilisation rate is low at approximately 31% and does not justify keeping the court open. The receiving court can absorb the workload from Llangefni Civil and Family Court with some enabling work.

“The county court at Llangefni was the subject of a consultation as to closure in 2010. The decision was that it should not be closed. HMCTS have proceeded nonetheless to move its staff to Caernarfon county court, leaving staff to attend only during counter hours and/or for sittings. There may be strong views whether this was within the spirit of the decision in 2010.” (Designated Civil Judge for Wales)

Decisions on the location of staff are made according to how best to dispose of the workload most efficiently and effectively.

“Currently there are seven court rooms marked for closure and to be replaced by four in Caernarfon.” (District Judges)

We plan to construct four new courtrooms at Caernarfon Criminal Justice Centre, to create an eight hearing room venue. The under use of the receiving site at Caernarfon Criminal Justice Centre suggests that only four new court rooms are required to absorb the work of the other courts, offering 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 when their case will be heard.

Alternative provision of services

“Before a definitive decision is taken in respect of the closures on Anglesey, I suggest that an assessment is made as to the feasibility of using the court at Llangefni as a magistrates court for crime as well as a civil/family court and/or exploring whether another public building is available in that town which could be used as a combined court centre.” (Presiding Judge for Wales)

“It would be more cost effective to lease the old magistrates court from the council than allocate the Llangefni Hearing Centre to Caernarfon CJC where substantial alterations would be required which would be much more costly.” (HMCTS Staff)

Llangefni Civil and Family Court could not be used for criminal business without significant investment, which would be cost prohibitive. We are exploring part time hearing facilities for Anglesey. The court will not close until suitable local alternative provision is established.

Decision

All points mentioned by respondents to the consultation have been analysed and following careful consideration, the Lord Chancellor has decided to close Llangefni Civil and Family Court and move the work to Caernarfon Criminal Justice Centre, once suitable local alternative provision is established on Anglesey/Ynys Mon.

Implementation

There are a number of factors to consider before Llangefni Civil and Family 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.

Neath and Port Talbot Civil and Family Court

The Lord Chancellor has decided that Neath and Port Talbot Civil and Family Court should be closed and its work moved to Port Talbot Justice Centre.

There were a total of nine responses in relation to Neath and Port Talbot Civil and Family Court. Of these:

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

Of these responses none were in support of the proposals and nine were opposed.

Access to Justice

Neath is nine miles away from Port Talbot Justice Centre and the journey by car takes approximately 15 minutes. There is a direct rail and bus service between Neath and Port Talbot which is regular and frequent.

“Although the towns of Neath and Port Talbot are geographically nine miles apart the consultation does not take into consideration the extra distances travelled by court users travelling between these towns. Nor does the consultation take account local topography.” (West Glamorgan Magistrates)

“Although public transport from Neath to Port Talbot may seem straight forward it does not take into account the need to reach Neath or Port Talbot from the valley communities which make up the bulk of the county borough. Neath Port Talbot transport infrastructure has serious shortcomings that means buses to and from the valleys are infrequent and journey times lengthy. Nor does it take in to account the distance from Port Talbot Railway and Bus Stations which will present issues of accessibility in general, but particularly for those people with disabilities.” (Charity)

Port Talbot train station will shortly be linked to the Justice Centre by a new public footpath. We appreciate that parts of the Neath and Port Talbot catchment areas do not have the same direct public transport service as they do between each other. In an increasingly digital age, users will not always need to attend hearings in person.

Value for money

The operating costs for Neath and Port Talbot Civil and Family Court for 2014-15 were approximately £278,000. The building is in an adequate condition, but will require essential maintenance work to maintain the good state over the next five years including

external cladding renewal of the site, a vehicle access barrier and overhaul of the guttering and down pipes.

Operational efficiency

The current utilisation rate is low at approximately 42%, which does not justify keeping the court open. The receiving court can absorb the workload from Neath and Port Talbot Civil and Family Court without any enabling works.

“This court has only recently been made the designated divorce court for Wales. All divorce petitions are now issued there. Why on earth close a court which is extremely busy and been set up for this purpose.” (Solicitor)

Centralised divorce work will transfer, without change, to Port Talbot.

“The proposals are all the more disappointing after credible proposals were previously put forward to increase usage by moving the Neath Port Talbot Civil and Family Court work to Port Talbot and the magistrates occupying the building in Neath, this was rejected by the Secretary of State.” (Member of Parliament)

Creating a custody complex at the court would have been cost prohibitive. We need to reduce the current and future cost of running our estate, ensuring that it is utilised effectively to provide value to the public purse. The sales proceeds of surplus buildings will be reinvested to make justice more accessible to all.

Alternative provision of services

“Alternatives may assist if these can be taken out into the valley communities but suitable facilities and resources to allow this to happen will be scarce. We understand that this was part of the plan relating to previous court closures but this is yet to happen.” (Charity)

We are looking to expand the range of alternative ways in which court users can access the justice system. We will make better use of technology, including video conferencing, and explore whether we can appropriately make use of civic buildings for certain types of hearing. The delay in establishing the video link at Neath is disappointing, but our willingness and desire to provide such an alternative is not in doubt.

“We do not consider that the practical implications of transferring work to the Port Talbot Justice Centre have been adequately considered.” (Association of Judges of Wales)

“It is important to note that without government funding, the justice centre does not appear to have the facilities to integrate the expected work which is currently undertaken at both Neath and Bridgend.” (Magistrates’ Association)

The Port Talbot Justice Centre is a substantial building and while there is a large area dedicated to HM Courts & Tribunals Service enforcement work, there are five hearing rooms which can accommodate both Bridgend and Neath’s civil, family and tribunals business.

Decision

All points mentioned by respondents to the consultation have been analysed and following careful consideration, the Lord Chancellor has decided to close Neath and Port Talbot Civil and Family Court and move the work to Port Talbot Justice Centre.

Implementation

There are a number of factors to consider before Neath and Port Talbot Civil and Family 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.

Pontypridd Magistrates' Court

The Lord Chancellor has decided that Pontypridd Magistrates' Court should be closed and its work moved to Merthyr Tydfil Combined Court.

There were a total of 14 responses in relation to Pontypridd Magistrates' Court. Of these:

- six were from Members of Parliament or Assembly Members
- three were from magistrates
- two were from individuals
- one was from a professional user
- one was from another public sector body
- one was from a union or staff group

Of these responses none were in support of the proposals, whilst 14 were opposed.

Access to justice

Pontypridd Magistrates' Court is located in the south eastern part of the county of Rhondda Cynon Taff. It is 12 miles from Merthyr Tydfil with a regular and frequent bus and rail service. The cost of work necessary to maintain the building and the low utilisation represents poor value for money for the taxpayer.

“In 2010 the Courts at Aberdare and Llwynypia were closed. The argument put forward then was that it was only a 20 minute journey to Pontypridd for those affected. This current consultation completely ignores the cumulative effects of closing Pontypridd Court on the ability of those people living in the Rhondda or the western side of the Pontypridd constituency to access services. For them it is an additional journey, which seems to have been overlooked and for which no transport figures are provided. This is surely a flaw in the assessment process.”
(Rhondda Cynon Taff Welsh Liberal Democrats)

Access to justice is not just about proximity to a court. The changes we are making to our service will mean fewer people needing to physically go to a court. Using modern technology, as we do for many other services, will make access to justice easier.

A model has been built to assess travel times from each Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) as it is not feasible to calculate travel times from each individual address in England and Wales. These are areas defined by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) that mostly contain 1,000-2,000 people. We therefore calculated travel times from the centre of each LSOA to each of their local courts/tribunals and weighted these according to 2011 census data. Some responses to the consultation commented that the travel time analysis only takes into account journeys from the centre of towns to courts. This is not the case - each town under the travel time analysis is in fact comprised of a number of LSOAs depending on the size of the town, and each of these LSOAs are considered within the analysis.

“We would request a proper, validated evaluation of times which we are confident will establish that many people and many parts of the community will not be able to access Merthyr suggested within the time frames given in the consultation paper.” (A Member of Parliament and an Assembly Member)

“It will deter reports relating to domestic violence or where reports are made leading to charges, it will result in more case collapses if witnesses or victims do not or cannot readily attend. The suggestion that Pontypridd is only 12 miles away is trite. Geographically for a significant part of RCT’s population the obstacles are significant and not as portrayed in the impact document.” (A Member of Parliament and an Assembly Member)

Pre-hearing support provided by criminal justice agencies to victims and witnesses should establish any particular needs and concerns that need to be addressed. Merthyr Tydfil Combined Court offers a full range of facilities to enable the segregation of victims from defendants. Presently, trials in domestic violence cases are listed to take place within about three weeks of first hearing.

“The communities of Rhondda, Taff Ely and Cynon Valley are unique areas historically and culturally. They need and deserve local courts, accessible locally and with local Magistrates who understand the area.” (A Member of Parliament and an Assembly Member)

“If the Minister for Public Services in Wales gets his way and a reorganization of Local Authorities takes place following his proposed outline then a new county could be formed consisting of Rhondda Cynon Taff, Merthyr and Bridgend. With a proposal to also close Bridgend then it would leave a large county with just a single Magistrates’ Court at its furthest reaches.” (Rhondda Cynon Taff Welsh Liberal Democrats)

We acknowledge that some people may 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. We are also exploring an alternative provision in Bridgend.

Value for money

The operating costs for Pontypridd Magistrates’ Court for 2014-15 were approximately £277,000. Although the building has recently been refurbished it still requires essential maintenance work over the next five years including cell area ventilation system, refurbishment of the lift and a replacement air conditioning system.

“The document notes the refurbishment that has been carried out at the Court recently. To proceed with its closure in the face of this represents a waste of the public money that will have been used to carry out the refurbishment. This also suggests a lack of strategic planning with regards to the delivery of local justice. There is no long- term vision – services are just pared back to save money in response to short- term pressures.” (Assembly Member)

Building-related work was necessary at Pontypridd to maintain a safe environment for all court users and to allow the continued practical use of the court. Even though we made

that investment, if the court was to remain open the operating costs and expense required to maintain the structure would not represent value for money for the taxpayer.

Operational efficiency

The current utilisation rate is low at approximately 43% and does not justify keeping the court open. The receiving court can absorb the workload from Pontypridd Magistrates' Court with minor enabling work required. Combining the workload at one location would improve efficiency and enable savings to be made.

“...Pontypridd is the only remaining Magistrates' Court in the county. It is unconscionable that it should be removed and that Rhondda Cynon Taff, the third largest Local Authority in Wales by population, should be left without such a facility.” (Rhondda Cynon Taff Welsh Liberal Democrats)

Rhondda Cynon Taff would not be the only county without a criminal court and there are a number of examples where this is already the case in England and Wales.

“Changes to sitting patterns and listing arrangements in Pontypridd have been put in place to drive down utilisation and prepare it for closure.” (PCS, Trade Union)

The work to centralise bulk cases was undertaken as part of a national initiative, and not something that was done within Wales to reduce utilisation in any particular court. The Single Justice Procedure will enable a single magistrate sitting somewhere other than in a courtroom to deal with the majority of traffic cases, DVLA cases and television licensing cases in future. The courtroom capacity needed will, therefore, reduce.

Alternative provision of services

“...don't assume that everyone has access to fast broadband and adequate computer power and knowledge. For persons without these facilities could you not arrange some kind of local link with staff on duty to assist so that people could give evidence etc without having to worry about tech failure.” (Anonymous)

The government has stated its commitment to improve internet access across England and Wales. Where alternative venues are used to provide access to justice we will provide assistance and advice regarding the use of relevant technology for users to interact directly with us.

Decision

All points mentioned by respondents to the consultation have been analysed and following careful consideration, the Lord Chancellor has decided to close Pontypridd Magistrates' Court and move the workload to Merthyr Tydfil Combined Court.

Implementation

There are a number of factors to consider before Pontypridd 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.

Prestatyn Magistrates' Court

The Lord Chancellor has decided that Prestatyn Magistrates' Court should be closed and its criminal work moved to Llandudno Magistrates' Court. The building will be retained and adapted for civil, family and tribunals work which will transfer from Rhyl Civil and Family Court. The closure of that court was approved under the 2010 Court Estate Reform Programme.

There were a total of 17 responses in relation to Prestatyn Magistrates' Court. Of these:

- four were from magistrates
- three were from another public sector body
- three were from Members of Parliament or Assembly Members
- two were from criminal justice partners
- one was from a member of the judiciary
- one was from a professional user
- one was from a staff member
- one was from a union or staff group
- one was from an other

Of these responses none were in support of the proposals, whilst 17 were opposed.

Access to justice

Prestatyn Magistrates' Court is located 24 miles away from Llandudno. There is a bus and rail service between Prestatyn and Llandudno. Prestatyn Magistrates' Court currently hears criminal cases three to four days a week.

“The Llandudno court is not on the proposal closure list at present however the closure of Prestatyn will mean more use of the resources and staff at the Llandudno location, and the possible need for Magistrates on the family bench to travel to Prestatyn. As we have seen in the recent past, both benches working in the same building proved to be workable, and no issue were identified. We are also very concerned about the ability of Welsh speakers from our area to have their cases heard through their chosen first language (Welsh) by Magistrates and Staff, when attending Court or other buildings that HMCTS may use.” (Conwy Bench)

“I consider the effects of the considerable worsening of access to justice by those in rural, mainly Welsh speaking, parts of Denbighshire, and by those many vulnerable court users with chaotic lifestyles from deprived areas and on benefits or low incomes, far outweigh any gain to be had by HMCTS in removing magistrates' work from Prestatyn Courthouse.” (Denbighshire Bench)

We will close Prestatyn Magistrates' Court, but will not dispose of the building instead changing its use to a civil, family and tribunal court. It is acknowledged that some

magistrates may need to travel to different courts due to these changes. When the benches were required to work together recently we appreciated their efforts to ensure there was no negative impact. A full Welsh language impact assessment, which deals with our ability to hear cases in Welsh, will be published with the response to the consultation.

To ensure that access to justice is maintained, even in more rural locations, we are committed to providing alternative ways for users to access our services. In Prestatyn, it may be possible to use the existing video link for those unable to attend at Llandudno.

“...The proposals are inconsistent in proposing to list family work into a criminal justice centre in Caernarfon but closing Prestatyn magistrates’ court to enable it to become a civil and family centre whereas it could also combine jurisdictions and give better access to justice... planning permission has already been granted for a combined court centre at Prestatyn with seven court rooms.” (PCS, Trade Union)

The proposals take various forms according to our estate and the venues we already have. The proposal to move magistrates’ courts work from Prestatyn to Llandudno, and to move civil, family, and tribunals work into Prestatyn from the closing Rhyl Civil and Family Court is one that enables us to maintain a network of courts in North Wales that is capable of providing present and future court users with more conventional access to justice.

Value for money

The operating costs for Prestatyn for 2014-15 were approximately £169,000 and this is likely to be similar when the building becomes a civil, family and tribunals centre.

“Nor is there any mention of the unoccupied rooms in that part of the former police station (which forms part of Prestatyn courthouse site) and how they might be used.” (Denbighshire Bench)

“With three courtrooms available, there is capacity for the Prestatyn Courthouse to deliver both civil and criminal hearings”. (Denbighshire County Council)

The former police station’s use will be considered in light of the consultation document and as part of our wider and ongoing review of our estate. We would need to create a cell complex at Prestatyn if we were to continue to use the court for criminal work which, at a cost of over £5 million, was not considered affordable or value for money when there is capacity at Llandudno for criminal work. Creating a civil, family and tribunals court at Prestatyn provides better value for money for the taxpayer and allows the closure of Rhyl Civil and Family Court.

Operational efficiency

The current utilisation rate is low at approximately 39% and the workload can be absorbed at Llandudno Magistrates’ Court without any enabling work being required. Combining the workload in one location would improve efficiency and enable savings to be made.

“..The figure outlining that the court utilised only 30% of its capacity during 2014-15 is questionable as I understand the court was closed for maintenance during this period. This figure is therefore not indicative and I would wish to see further information as to how this was quantified... Prestatyn has far more suitable courtrooms, more appropriate for criminal trials. Again, bearing this on mind there

is no cost analysis as to how much it would cost to enable Prestatyn to be DDA compliant.” (Councillors)

“The bench has been told that the figures given in the consultation have not taken into account the fact that Prestatyn Courthouse was closed for 3 months during the relevant period. This is a significant error... during the...closure, Llandudno courthouse could not take all of the magistrates’ work. There would be further detrimental effects on rural areas and Welsh speakers and an unbalanced magistracy where urban magistrates dominate composition of the bench.” (Magistrates’ Association)

It is correct that the utilisation data for the financial year 2014-15 includes a three month period when hearings could not be listed at Prestatyn. We apologise for not making this clear in the consultation document. Taking this data into account the utilisation for the period stated should have been approximately 39%.

“The County of Denbighshire should not be left without a criminal court.” (Denbighshire Bench)

Denbighshire would not be the only county without a criminal court and there are a number of examples where this is already the position.

“There is no justification to move all civil/family hearings from Llandudno.” (District Judges)

As part of the detailed implementation plan, we will now consider how best work can be distributed, consulting the judiciary regarding listing arrangements.

“I do not oppose Llandudno Magistrates Court taking the criminal work lost to Prestatyn Magistrates Court as a consequence of that court becoming a centre for family/civil.” (Presiding Judge for Wales)

“...I agree that it [the Civil and Family Court at Rhyl] is unfit for purpose. I strongly support a proposed move to new and better facilities at Prestatyn.” (Designated Civil Judge for Wales)

Alternative provision of services

It may be possible to use the existing video conference facility at Prestatyn, by prior arrangement, to provide access for those users unable to travel to Llandudno for criminal hearings.

Decision

All points mentioned by respondents to the consultation have been analysed and following careful consideration, the Lord Chancellor has decided to close Prestatyn Magistrates’ Court and move the criminal work to Llandudno Magistrates’ Court. The building will then be adapted for civil, family and tribunals work which will transfer from Rhyl Civil and Family Court.

Implementation

There are a number of factors to consider before Prestatyn 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.

Wrexham Tribunal and Hearing Centre (Rhyd Broughton)

The Lord Chancellor has decided that Wrexham Tribunal and Hearing Centre (Rhyd Broughton) should be closed and its work moved to Wrexham Law Courts and Mold Law Courts.

There were a total of three responses in relation to Wrexham Tribunal and Hearing Centre (Rhyd Broughton). Of these:

- two were from members of the judiciary
- one was from a union or staff group

Of these responses none were in support of the proposals, whilst three were opposed.

Access to justice

Wrexham Tribunal (Rhyd Broughton) is two miles from Wrexham Law Courts building at Bodhyfryd, Wrexham. The court at Bodhyfryd is more centrally located than the Rhyd Broughton site.

Wrexham Tribunal (Rhyd Broughton) is 11 miles from Mold Law Courts and a journey by car takes approximately 25 minutes.

There is no rail link between Wrexham and Mold but a regular bus link is available.

Value for money

The operating costs for Wrexham Tribunal (Rhyd Broughton) were approximately £197,000 for 2014-15. The building is owned by the Department of Work and Pensions and leased to HM Courts & Tribunals Service. The tribunal consists of three hearing rooms, one medical room and one judicial retiring room, the waiting areas for which are small.

Although the accommodation is compliant with the Equality Act 2010, the facilities available within the building are poor. There are no video link facilities for users. There is a need to improve security arrangements at the tribunal. Staff and judiciary cannot access the court other than from public areas and the entrances to some courtrooms cannot be seen by staff or security guards.

We need to reduce the cost of our estate and reinvest the savings. The previous refurbishment at this court was required following a health and safety report which highlighted some areas requiring work. The close proximity of the receiving courts, their size, good condition and under use justifies the closure of this centre.

Operational efficiency

During the 2014-15 financial year, Wrexham Tribunal (Rhyd Broughton) was utilised at approximately 12% capacity.

“The closure of the tribunal accommodation at Wrexham will mean the loss of three tribunal hearing rooms and a medical consulting room at Wrexham with no

new capacity being provided at Prestatyn (just the existing three court rooms). We are of the view that the shortage of hearing rooms will prove to be a real and increasing problem across North Wales unless additional hearing rooms are provided to make good the shortfall.”(Association of Judges of Wales)

“As above stated the Employment Tribunal uses the County Court and Magistrates’ Court building in Wrexham. It is a purpose built court building with rather basic facilities and generally barely adequate parking facilities for judiciary and members. However it does just about serve its purpose. It is possible for the tribunal to hold multi-day hearings at this venue which are helpfully clerked by the County Court staff already based at the building.” (Regional Tribunal Judge)

“Whilst there is no objection to the closure in principle, assurances are required that the move to Wrexham Law Courts will enable the resident District Judge to have a room at that court. An assurance will also be required that there will be sufficient rooms available for SSCS hearings particularly as the Employment Tribunal book Court 6 for the first 3 weeks of every month. The Wrexham Rhyd Broughton venue is currently the only hearing venue for Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit appeals in North Wales. It has a medical examination room and provision will be needed for this at the Law Courts. Facilities for child support hearings are also required, namely an additional separate waiting area. 691 sessions were held in 2014-15; 151 in 2014-2015. A presence at Wrexham is preferable to Mold because Wrexham serves many outlying areas whilst the distance between Mold and Prestatyn is relatively small.” (Regional Tribunal Judge)

We analysed both current and forecast workload and are satisfied that our remaining estate has the capacity to accommodate tribunal work.

Alternative provision of services

Given the proximity of both Wrexham and Mold Law Courts, we do not consider an alternative provision to be necessary.

Decision

All points mentioned by respondents to the consultation have been fully analysed and following careful consideration, the Lord Chancellor has decided to close Wrexham Tribunal (Rhyd Broughton) and move the work to Wrexham Law Courts and Mold Law Courts.

Implementation

There are a number of factors to consider before Wrexham Tribunal (Rhyd Broughton) can close. An indicative timetable of implementation is attached to this document. Please note this timetable is subject to change as the programme progresses.

Conwy and Colwyn Civil and Family Court

“We note that the consultation documents set out the intention to close the County Court jurisdiction of Conwy and Colwyn Civil and Family Court. This is described as ‘an administrative measure as the County Court does not sit here and has not done so for a number of years’. However, it is commonplace for the households that we help to be required to attend possession proceedings in the Llandudno court buildings. This closure therefore will impact on people and is not simply administrative. We note that this closure is not listed in the consultation summary list of court closures and, as such, has not received the specific impact assessment that the other listed courts have, in terms of travel times and costs. We would suggest that this be remedied.” (Shelter Cymru)

“The Welsh Government suggests that closure of Conwy and Colwn County Court jurisdiction has an impact on communities in the south of Conwy and would result in people who currently attend Conwy and Colwyn County Court and Family Court in Llandudno having an unreasonably long journey to make to attend court in Prestatyn.” (Welsh Government)

The name Conwy and Colwyn Civil and Family Court refers to the jurisdiction of the former court building at Colwyn Bay, which was previously closed. We do not intend to completely cease sitting civil and family matters at Llandudno. Prestatyn, while the civil, family and tribunal venue of central North Wales, will list hearings in accordance with judicial decisions that best meet users’ needs.

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 respondents

In addition to the 19 members of the public who responded to the consultation, the following named individuals and organisations provided a response:

Aberdyfi Community Council	Children's Commissioner for Wales
Albert Owen, Member of Parliament, Ynys Môn	Chris Davies, Member of Parliament, Brecon and Radnorshire
Angel Chambers, Swansea	Christine Chapman, Welsh Assembly Member, Cynon Valley
Ann Jones, Welsh Assembly Member, Vale of Clwyd	Citizens Advice Bureau
Barristers at Iscoed Chambers, Swansea	Coity Higher Community Council
Bethan Jenkins, Welsh Assembly Member, South Wales West	Committee for Administrative Justice & Tribunals, Welsh Government
Blackmill and Glynogwr Tenants and Residents Association	Constitutional Affairs and Inter-Governmental Relations, Welsh Government
Brecknock & Radnorshire Bench Chairman	County Councillor in Prestatyn North
Brecon Town Council	Darren Millar, Welsh Assembly Member, Clywd West
Bridgend County Borough Council	Denbighshire Bench Chair, Elect
Bridgend Town Council	Denbighshire County Council
Carmarthen Town Council	Denbighshire Magistrate Bench Chairman
Carwyn Jones, Welsh Assembly Member, Bridgend and First Minister of the Welsh Government	District Judge Godwin, on behalf of the Association of Judges of Wales
Cefn Cribwr Community Council	District Judge James and HH Judge Edwards, Welsh Language Liaison Judges
Centre for Welsh Legal Affairs, Prifysgol Aberystwyth/Aberystwyth University	District Judge Jones-Evans
Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire Magistrates Bench Chairman	District Judge Parsons
Chair of Dyfed Magistrates' Association	District Judge Williams
Chair of Wales Bench Chair Forum	

Dolgellau Town Council	Jonathan Edwards, Member of Parliament, Carmarthen East and Dinefwr
G4S	
Gamlins Solicitors LLP incorporating Hywel Davies & Co	Judge Harper, Acting Regional Employment Judge
GEOAmey Prisoner Escort Custody Service UK Ltd	Kirsty Williams, Welsh Assembly Member, Brecon and Radnorshire
Glamorgan Valleys Magistrates Bench Chairman	Leanne Wood, Welsh Assembly Member, South Wales Central and Leader of Plaid Cymru
Gwynedd Council	Legal Wales Foundation
Gwynedd Law Society	
Gwynedd Magistrates Bench Chairman	Leighton Andrews, Welsh Assembly Member, Rhondda and Welsh Government Minister for Public Services
HH Judge Seys-Llewellyn QC, Designated Civil Judge for Wales	Liz Saville-Roberts, Member of Parliament, Dwyfor Meirionnydd
HH Judge Thomas, Resident Judge on behalf of Swansea Crown Court Judiciary	Llanbedr Community Council
HH Judge Twomlow, Circuit Judge	Local Barristers
HMCTS Staff	Local Journalists
Huw Irranca Davies, Member of Parliament, Ogmore	Local Magistrates
Isle of Anglesey County Council	Local Solicitors
Isle of Anglesey Magistrates Bench Chairman	Madeleine Moon, Member of Parliament, Bridgend
James Davies, Member of Parliament, Vale of Clwyd	Maesteg Town Council
Jane Hutt, Welsh Assembly Member, Vale of Glamorgan and Welsh Government Minister for Finance and Government Business	Member of the Public Committee
Janice Gregory, Welsh Assembly Member, Ogmore and Chief Whip in the Welsh Government	Gwynedd Caernarfon WI
JCP Solicitors	Mick Antoniw, Welsh Assembly Member, Pontypridd
	Mid Wales Law Society
	Monmouthshire Incorporated Law Society
	Mrs Justice Nicola Davies, Presiding Judge of the Wales Circuit

Mr Justice Wyn Williams, Presiding
Judge of the Wales Circuit

Neath Port Talbot Council for Voluntary
Service

Newspaper reporter

North Wales Police

Owen Smith, Member of Parliament,
Pontypridd

Paul Lewis QC, Leader of the Wales and
Chester Circuit

Peter Black, Welsh Assembly Member,
South Wales West

Police and Crime Commissioner for
Dyfed Powys

Police and Crime Commissioner for
North Wales

Porthcawl Town Council

Powys County Council

Public and Commercial Services Union
(PCS)

Quality Solicitors Edward Hughes

Rhodri Glyn Thomas, Welsh Assembly
Member, Carmarthen East and Dinefwr

Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough
Council

Rhondda Cynon Taff Welsh Liberal
Democrats

Rhun Ap Iorwerth, Welsh Assembly
Member, Ynys Mon

Sedgwick Chudleigh McKenna Solicitors

Simon Thomas, Welsh Assembly
Member, Mid and West Wales

Stephen Crabb, Member of Parliament,
Preseli Pembrokeshire, and The
Secretary of State for Wales

Stephen Kinnock, Member of Parliament,
Aberavon

Suzi Davies, Assembly Member, South
Wales West

T. R. Evans, Hughes & Co

Trearddur Community Council

UK Association of Part Time Judges

Vale of Clwyd Trades Union Council

Welsh Language Commissioner



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