

Statement to Parliament: Her Majesty's Courts & Tribunals Service consultation

Together with the senior judiciary, the government is committed to modernising the justice system. HM Courts & Tribunals Service's long-term reform programme is already delivering benefits by making access to justice quicker and easier whilst ensuring fairness. HM Courts & Tribunals Service's £1 billion reform programme is ambitious, ensuring justice is accessible but proportionate and making use of the technology available in the modern world. It will provide modern IT and processes, and focused services to support those who require court services. It covers all jurisdictions and touches every aspect of the system, including making more effective use of its physical places, spaces and buildings.

Courts and tribunals estate

It is important that when the programme of reform is complete we have the right buildings in the right places that can take full advantage of the opportunities that modernisation brings. They should be flexible, efficient and offer the best possible environment for those who seek justice, and our approach should reflect the greater use of digital services.

I am, today, announcing the publication of six separate, but related, consultations about the HM Courts & Tribunals Service estate.

Consultation on future estates strategy

The first consultation, Fit for the future: Transforming the Courts and Tribunals Estate, provides an outline of reform activities which are either underway or planned. It outlines the three core principles behind our approach – ensuring access to justice, providing value for money for the taxpayer and ensuring efficiency in the long term – and a proposed approach to future consultations on changes to the estate as HMCTS reform initiatives deliver results.

Consultations on court closure proposals

While consideration of the demands on the courts and tribunals estate in the context of reform is important, we also need to assess the existing estate to make sure it is efficient and offers value for money to taxpayers now. To this end, a key consideration in management of the estate is that we only operate buildings that we need, eliminating duplication and overlapping service provision, with the savings recycled back into the reform programme.

I am therefore, today announcing five separate consultations on proposals to close eight courts. These proposals are being made under the existing courts and tribunals estates principles and current processes and workloads.

The courts are:

- Banbury Magistrates' and County Court and Maidenhead Magistrates' Court (in a single consultation for the court estate in the Thames Valley),
- Cambridge Magistrates' Court
- Chorley Magistrates' Court and Fleetwood Magistrates' Court (in a single consultation for the court estate in Lancashire),
- Northallerton Magistrates' Court
- Wandsworth County Court, and Blackfriars Crown Court (in a single consultation for the court estate in London).

All consultations will begin on 18 January 2018 and run for 10 weeks. A response to the consultations will be published following proper consideration of all views submitted.

A copy of the consultation documents will be placed in the Libraries of both houses.