

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.

Press release: FCO Minister for Asia and the Pacific Mark Field to attend UN Security Council meetings

The Foreign Office Minister for Asia and the Pacific Minister Mark Field will today (18 January) begin a two day visit to New York, where he will represent the UK at the UN Security Council. On Thursday he will deliver a statement on counter-proliferation and on Friday attend the council meeting on Afghanistan.

During his visit the Minister will also meet with the Afghanistan Deputy Foreign Minister Hekmat Khalil Karzai, host a meeting on climate change with Commonwealth countries and meet with representatives from the Wildlife Conservation Society.

Speaking ahead of his visit Minister Field said;

The UK remains committed to a world without nuclear weapons. We believe the best way to achieve this goal is through gradual multilateral disarmament, negotiated step-by-step, within existing frameworks.

With our international partners we must continue to prevent proliferation and must hold to account states that breach our rules.

On the Afghanistan meeting the Minister said;

Afghanistan is making real progress in overcoming many challenges. However, there is still work to be done to help Afghanistan's government and people achieve their goal of building a more stable and prosperous country.

The UK continues to play our part in supporting this goal. We have committed up to £750 million for the four years up to 2020 to support the Afghan Government's work to improve security, reduce poverty, and increase access to health and education.

This UN Security Council meeting will be a chance to, collectively and individually, express our full support for the efforts of the Afghan government to take forward a peace process, which will be vital for Afghanistan's long term stability.

Further information

[News story: National Infrastructure Commission welcomes Sir John Armitt as new Chair](#)

Sir John Armitt has today (18 January 2018) been appointed the permanent Chair of the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC), where he will provide strategic advice to ensure the UK has the long-term infrastructure it needs to thrive.

Having served as a Commissioner since the NIC was established in 2015 and last year being appointed Deputy Chair, Sir John Armitt is a familiar face to the Commission.

With a background in engineering, Sir John Armitt's expertise in infrastructure and major project delivery is extensive.

He has a proven track record of working at the forefront of UK infrastructure in positions that included the Chief Executive of Network Rail, President of the Institution of Civil Engineers and Chairman of the Olympic Delivery Authority, where he played a key role in coordinating the 2012 London Olympics.

He was awarded a CBE in 1996 for his contribution to the rail industry and a knighthood in 2012 for his work in engineering and construction.

Announcing the appointment, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond, said:

Boosting productivity is essential to sustaining real wage growth. And investing in infrastructure is one of the keys to raising our productivity performance.

The National Infrastructure Commission's expertise is vital for ensuring the UK's infrastructure is fit for the future. Sir John Armitt brings years of experience of UK infrastructure. With him at the helm, I am confident we will develop a strategic and ambitious infrastructure plan that supports economic growth for decades to come.

Chair of the National Infrastructure Commission Sir John Armitt said:

I'm delighted to have been appointed as the Chair of the National Infrastructure Commission as we prepare for the publication of our first National Infrastructure Assessment later this year.

Making the right choices about planning and investing in infrastructure is critical to the UK's prosperity and quality of life. I want the Commission to remain focused on tackling the long-term issues of congestion, capacity and carbon – and to continue to hold the government to account where decisive action is needed – so we can secure the improvements that companies, communities and families need.

I look forward to working with my fellow Commissioners and listening to our stakeholders as we set out the way forward for the UK's infrastructure.

Replacing Lord Adonis who resigned from the position at the end of last year, Sir John Armitt takes charge of the NIC's exciting programme of work, with the first ever National Infrastructure Assessment due out this summer. The assessment will take a long-term view of Britain's infrastructure needs and make recommendations to the government on how best to meet them.

Further information

First set up in 2015 and established permanently in January 2017, the [NIC](#) is an executive agency which helps plan, prioritise and ensure efficient investment in Britain's infrastructure. It provides government with strategic thinking to address the UK's long term infrastructure needs.

Speech: Lord Chancellor swearing-in speech: David Gauke

Mr Attorney, I'd like to thank the Lord Chief Justice for that warm welcome and I look forward to working with you and other members of the bench.

I'd also like to start by thanking my predecessor and Cabinet colleague, David Lidington, who I think quickly established himself as an effective Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State. I very much hope to emulate his speedy grasp of such an important constitutional role.

Being appointed as Lord Chancellor is a huge honour and deeply humbling. Dare I say, it is also a little daunting, especially when you look back at some of the previous custodians of this historic title over the centuries.

In light of such an illustrious rollcall of historical figures, I think it is only natural for a new incumbent to look for a familiar reference point.

As the Lord Chief Justice has reminded us, a former Lord Chancellor from my home town of Ipswich was none other than Cardinal Wolsey. An auspicious connection given he went on to serve as Lord Chancellor for 14 years!

My enthusiasm was however a little tempered when I recalled how Wolsey's time as Lord Chancellor was made fraught through dealing with Henry the Eighth and his powers: stripped of his title and his wealth, he faced charges of treason after an unsuccessful attempt to negotiate a settlement with a powerful European supra-national organisation.

Thankfully, not all the duties exercised by Cardinal Wolsey continue to fall on the shoulders of the Lord Chancellor!

So, let me turn to the specific responsibilities I have affirmed to uphold today.

The Rule of Law

Defending the independence of the judiciary and respecting the Rule of Law, that is the foundation of our democracy, our way of life, and the safeguard of fairness and freedom in our society.

The pomp and the pageantry may be centuries old, but what they represent, forged from 900 years of history, remain relevant and important today.

You, the judiciary, are at the heart of the Rule of Law. You uphold and exercise that every day in the judgements and decisions you make and in being called upon to make decisions on some of the most difficult moral and technical issues of our time.

It is a job that requires expertise and deep knowledge. But your task also requires independence from the other branches of the State. You must be free

to make decisions without fear or favour and without undue influence.

That's why I take seriously the solemn affirmation I have made today to defend that independence and to respect the Rule of Law.

Efficient and effective courts

This commitment also includes ensuring efficient and effective support for courts. I want people to have confidence in every part of their justice system.

That means crimes being properly investigated. It means effective prosecutions where there is sufficient evidence and it is in the public interest. It means courts handing down sentences that fit the crime.

It also means a justice system that supports victims and ensures a smooth and efficient process for litigants, for example, through new technology and greater innovation.

I look forward to working closely with the Lord Chief Justice and senior judiciary to build on the important work that is already underway to reform and modernise our courts and tribunals system and to make this a reality.

UK legal services and English Law

Whether in criminal or civil law, the UK's legal system is respected around the world, something that I have seen for myself having worked in corporate law.

As a trainee solicitor over 20 years ago, I was struck working on a shipping litigation case, it was an English Tribunal applying English law that was determining a dispute involving cargo being shipped across the Pacific on a Greek-owned ship with, if I recall correctly, an Indonesian crew.

The only apparent connection to the UK was that the contracts were under English Law and determined by English tribunals.

That was the case then, it's the case now, and it will continue to be the case after we leave the EU. Because, the UK leads the way in global legal services. English Law and UK courts provide the certainty, clarity and flexibility that clients from around the world want.

I know just how important this sector is, not just for London, but for cities and regions across the UK. That's why I want an outcome from our negotiations with the EU that is good for our legal system and good for our position as a provider of legal services around the world, one that protects and promotes a strong and successful legal services sector.

That means ensuring close and comprehensive arrangements for civil judicial co-operation with the EU after Brexit. It means a legal services sector that benefits from and serves as a catalyst for future trade.

I want to see London continue to be an international hub for finance and

legal services, but also see legal services continue to grow and thrive in regional centres serving as specialist hubs.

I look forward to working with the legal services sector and the judiciary to build on our 'Legal Services are GREAT' campaign launched last year to promote the UK's legal services on the world stage.

A final word on the judiciary

The reputation of our legal services is underpinned by our world-leading judiciary, respected for its expertise and its independence.

As Lord Chancellor, I look forward to working with you, Lord Chief Justice, and other senior members of the judiciary, to ensure we continue to attract exceptional and talented people in order for it to remain strong, free from improper influence and truly independent – indeed, to remain the envy of the world.

Conclusion

I mentioned that Cardinal Wolsey managed 14 years as Lord Chancellor. With seven years at the Treasury, seven months at DWP and having just completed my first seven days at the Ministry of Justice, that may be an ambitious record to match.

Although, I have read on Twitter and elsewhere that I may have set a record of my own by being the first solicitor to be appointed Lord Chancellor. I'm pleased that, so far at least, this record remains intact even after such careful and scrupulous deliberation from you, Lord Chief Justice! They do say that the law is an iterative process, so, I await to be revised.

But what I can commit to today is that during my time as Lord Chancellor I will be ambitious for our country's legal services. I will be steadfast in my commitment to defend the independence of the judiciary and respect the Rule of Law, and I will be determined in our work to create a justice system that is open to all, a justice system that everyone in the country can have confidence in, and one that lives up to the deep-rooted sense of justice and fairness the United Kingdom is known for around the world.

Thank you.

[News story: Top college principals to drive improvements in further](#)

education

Some of the country's top college principals have been appointed to a new group which will work with underperforming colleges to help drive up standards and improve quality of teaching.

The seven National Leaders of Further Education (NLFE) will provide support to the further education sector, to help improve provision so that more people have access to high quality education and training.

All the NLFES, [confirmed today](#) by Apprenticeships and Skills Minister Anne Milton, are college leaders from good or outstanding colleges who have a strong track record of delivering improvement – both in their own colleges and in working with others.

Apprenticeships and Skills Minister Anne Milton said:

We have a number of fantastic leaders across the FE sector, who have already achieved great results. Now we want them to use their expertise and experience to help other colleges to improve.

This is an exciting new programme that will provide colleges with practical advice and support from experts within the sector, who have a proven track record of delivering results, giving learners a greater chance of gaining the skills and knowledge they need in later life.

It has also been [announced](#) that seven new members have been appointed to the Principals' Reference Group, made up of experienced principals from good or outstanding colleges, who will advise and challenge the FE Commissioner and help inform policy development affecting colleges.

Additionally, more Deputy FE Commissioners and Advisers have been selected to support the FE Commissioner in leading interventions to help struggling FE and sixth form colleges.

These high quality appointments were made following a rigorous and open recruitment process.