



**PRESS RELEASE**

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*The burden of seeking justice must not fall unfairly on the poorest in society*

The Magistrates' Association reads with interest the Secretary of State for Justice's statements in relation to consultation on the closure of 24 underused and inadequate courts in several regions of England.

It is appreciated that these courts are not currently operating for court hearings. Many of them have not been used for some considerable time. The Association also notes that there will be full consultation on the final closure of these courthouses.

The Magistrates' Association believes that justice must be 'taken to' and 'delivered in' the communities where crime is committed. Such a process allows the community to see justice being delivered, thus enhancing confidence in the system.

The Association supports the principle that all who attend court should have access to appropriate facilities to ease stress. However it also strongly believes that access to justice does not just begin in the courthouse and that quality justice is compromised if travelling is not easy and speedy.

The Association will engage fully in the consultation process and would encourage the Ministry to consider alternative arrangements where appropriate to ensure local justice, but accepts it is the government's final decision.

Ministry of Justice statement below:

Ministry of Justice Statement  
Changes to court services in England  
**13 October 2009**

**Consultations are being held on the closure of 21 underused and inadequate courts in several regions of England.**

Services will continue to be provided by alternative magistrates' courts in each area.

PATRON: Her Majesty the Queen  
PRESIDENT: The Lord Chief Justice

CHAIRMAN OF COUNCIL: John Thornhill JP  
DEPUTY CHAIRMEN: John Fassenfelt JP, John Howson JP  
HONORARY TREASURER: Mike Dodden JP  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE & ASSOCIATION SECRETARY: Sally Dickinson  
Registered Charity Number 216066

Justice Secretary Jack Straw said the changes would help to deliver a more modern justice service that puts the needs of victims and witnesses first while providing best value for taxpayers.

Justice Secretary Jack Straw said:

'Going to court should not place undue stress on victims and witnesses of crime. We have made significant improvements to the facilities for these court users.

'However, many of the courts that we are consulting on closing do not have suitable facilities for victims and witnesses; in addition a number of the buildings do not allow adequate access for disabled court users. I do not believe it would provide good value for money to bring these buildings up to the required standard at the taxpayers' expense.

'I am keen to hear the views of court users and other interested parties; the consultation exercises will allow them to express their views on the proposals.

'I will make a decision on how to proceed after consideration of those representations.

'Together these proposals set out a positive step forward to ensuring that Her Majesty's Courts Service provides sufficient accessibility whilst directing and prioritising its resources to where they most matter for the communities it serves.'

Her Majesty's Courts Service is also seeking the views of court users on future provision of magistrates' courts in London. A [discussion document](#), taking into account the possibilities presented by virtual courts, is published today.

Following an earlier consultation the decision has also been taken to close Nelson County Court in Lancashire.

### **Proposed court closures in the Midlands**

- [Proposed closure of Bourne, Gainsborough, Louth, Sleaford and Stamford magistrates' courts](#)

### **Proposed court closure in the North East**

- [Proposed closure of Whitby Magistrates' Court](#)

### **Proposed court closures in the North West**

- [Proposed closure of Leigh County Court](#)
- [Proposed closure of Widnes Magistrates' Court](#)

**Proposed court closures in the South East**

- Proposed closure of Cheshunt Magistrates' Court
- Proposed closure of Dorking Magistrates' Court
- Proposed closure of Mildenhall Magistrates' Court
- Proposed closure of Wantage Magistrates' Court

**Proposed court closures in the South West**

- Proposed closure of Bridport and Sherborne magistrates' courts
- Proposed closure of Cullompton Magistrates' Court
- Proposed closure of Eastleigh Magistrates' Court
- Proposed closure of Havant Magistrates' Court
- Proposed closure of Launceston Magistrates' Court
- Proposed closure of Minehead Magistrates' Court
- Proposed closure of Wareham Magistrates' Court
- Proposed closure of Wells Magistrates' Court

**London discussion paper**

- Planning for the future of the magistrates' courts service in London