



PRESS RELEASE

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Magistrates consider legal action against the Ministry of Justice

The Magistrates' Association has taken advice from Russell-Cooke Senior Partner, John Gould, on its position regarding judicial review of the Lord Chancellor's proposals for court closures. The controversial proposals, announced in December, included the closure of 93 magistrates' courts in England and Wales. Although precluded by its Royal Charter from taking action itself, the MA is coordinating possible legal action in relation to more than a dozen courts so far.

The MOJ presented the proposals as a rationalisation of the court estate to eliminate courts which lack facilities or are under-used. But concerns have grown amongst local magistrates as it has emerged that a number of the courts included for closure are among those with the best facilities and the highest levels of use. It has also been suggested that the MOJ has ignored or misunderstood the evidence submitted by interested parties during the consultation process.

John Thornhill, Chairman of the Magistrates' Association commented:

"There is a growing concern among some of the Association's members that the process has not been handled effectively. A number of the decisions do not appear to take account of either the stated objectives or the evidence presented. The Association has always accepted that a number of courthouses are no longer sustainable on financial or other grounds. However it believes the decisions are driven purely by financial constraints, without consideration of other important factors such as community needs and crime mapping as suggested by the Association."

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