



DATE **MARCH 2026**

BRIEFING ON **THE LOCAL JUSTICE AREA CONSULTATION
RESPONSE**

CONTACT **POLICY@MAGISTRATES-ASSOCIATION.ORG.UK**

ABOUT THE MAGISTRATES' ASSOCIATION

The Magistrates' Association (MA) is an independent charity and the membership body for the magistracy.

We work to promote the sound administration of the law, including by providing guidance, training and support for our members, informing the public about the courts and the role of magistrates, producing and publishing research on key topics relevant to the magistracy, and contributing to the development and delivery of reforms to the courts and the broader justice system.

With over 11,500 members across England and Wales, we are a unique source of information and insight and the only independent voice of the magistracy.

A joint consultation by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and Judicial Office (JO) on the reform of Local Justice Areas (LJAs) was opened in early 2025. The reforms proposed to make fundamental changes to LJAs to deliver greater efficiency and better outcomes for all who rely on the justice system. With support from Bench Chairs, our branches and members, we submitted a [26-page response](#) to this consultation grounded in our members' views and the principle that a post-LJA magistracy must be local and rooted in place, shaped with magistrates – based on consent and goodwill – and built for the future.

The consultation received more than 1,400 responses, demonstrating the importance of this issue to magistrates. There was extensive use of free-text options by respondents, meaning feedback was nuanced and detailed.

We drew on the expertise of our five policy committees, as well as convening a special meeting of our National Council, bringing together representatives from all 53 local MA branches. We also held three workshops attended by over 30 Bench Chairs whose support was significant, hosted a roundtable with Family Panel Chairs and ran two national member webinars, with many more members submitting their views in writing. Our thanks go to everyone who participated.

In March 2026, the government issued its response to this consultation [on the Government website](#) and [as a PDF](#). We are delighted that the magistracy's collective voice was heard loud and clear, with all concerns listened to and almost all accepted.

While we are very pleased with the overall outcome of the consultation, there are some points where we feel further work and discussions are needed, for example, on the formation of some benches. See 'On the regional structure of the courts' and 'On magistrate deployment' below. We will continue to monitor and lobby to ensure implementation is smooth, partially in terms of flexibility of home courts. We will also continue to monitor large benches and rural areas.

This briefing summarises the consultation response, proposal by proposal, alongside our recommendations and final decisions.

ON THE REGIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE COURTS

Initial proposal	The MoJ and JO proposed abolishing the current model of 75 LJAs and replacing this with 58 benches. Most would share boundaries with criminal justice areas (CJAs) which match police force areas and, in most cases, counties. Where boundaries did not match with CJAs, the proposal was to merge current LJA court groups to form larger benches.
Our response	We did not agree with the 58 proposed benches, noting that the proposed size of benches appeared inconsistent. We expressed particular concern about the creation of "super-benches" of over 400 magistrates, which would weaken bench cohesion, increase travel and dilute pastoral support.
Consultation decision	The current 75 LJAs will be retained and used as the new administrative benches, preserving the current structure and rejecting proposals to reduce the number of benches to just 58. However, in some areas the

current bench structure doesn't work as well as it should, and the response leaves the door open to reviewing bench boundaries in the future, "provided that any consideration of change is undertaken collaboratively and with clear local support". This is something we had also called for in our response to the original consultation.

ON MAGISTRATE DEPLOYMENT

Initial proposal The MoJ and JO proposed that all magistrates be assigned to a bench and, within this, to a 'home court'. Further, magistrates would be allocated for 60-80% of their cases to their home court, with an expectation that the rest of the time magistrates would sit at other courts in their bench area that are within a reasonable journey time from their address. A 'reasonable journey time' was defined as no more than 90 minutes by car or public transport.

Our response We supported assigning magistrates to a designated home court or cluster of courts but firmly advocated for flexibility at the heart of deployment, rejecting the proposed figures for time away as too rigid and strongly opposing making sitting outside home courts mandatory.

We fundamentally disagreed that 90 minutes each way constituted a reasonable travel time, stating that this was excessive particularly for volunteers holding a judicial office.

Consultation decision Home court assignment will proceed, but with greater flexibility and clearer emphasis on reasonableness. Magistrates will not be expected to spend 20-40% of their sittings away from their home court, and any sittings outside the home court would be agreed with the individual magistrate.

The expectation that a 'reasonable' journey time for a magistrate would be up to '90 minutes each way, by car or public transport', has been rejected.

ON HOME COURT ALLOCATION

Initial proposal The MoJ and JO proposed that existing criminal, youth and family magistrates be assigned to the court in which they sat most frequently over the past 12 months as their home court.

Our response We did not agree with using the last 12 months of sitting patterns as the basis for assigning home courts, which risked misrepresenting actual preferences and future capacity.

We emphasised that specialist panels such as youth and family should not be treated in the same way as adult courts, particularly in relation to the home court model. We raised that youth and family magistrates often sit

irregularly across multiple locations and that work is not spread evenly across a bench, meaning that operational sitting patterns do not equate to preference or suitability.

Consultation decision

While sitting patterns over 12 months was retained as a good barometer for assigning a home court, the importance of discretion of home court allocation in individual circumstances is acknowledged, particularly where there may be reasons why a magistrate has sat most frequently in a court that would not be considered a 'permanent' home court.

ON ELECTION VS SELECTION OF MAGISTRATES' LEADERSHIP

Initial proposal

The MoJ and JO proposed managing the workload of the Bench Chair by splitting the role into two: one would have responsibility for the management of court business, and another would have responsibility for welfare and pastoral matters.

The consultation also asked whether Chairs and Deputies should no longer be elected – instead they could be selected, where eligible magistrates submit an expression of interest and are selected by an evaluation body.

Our response

We strongly opposed any move to appoint rather than elect magistrate Bench chairs, arguing that the legitimacy and accountability of these roles is dependent on peer election.

We also argued against the Bench Chair role being divided in two, saying that the Bench Chair role is inherently holistic and splitting the role would create unhelpful boundaries that wouldn't reflect how benches operate in practice.

Consultation decision

Election to these roles has been retained, so leadership will not be selected. If necessary, due to no candidates standing for election, a Deputy Bench Chair may be appointed via an expression of interest. This would be done in full consultation with the local bench and on the initiative of the Bench Chair.

The Bench Chair role will not be split into two but kept as a single role, with use of Deputies encouraged to manage workloads.

ON TAAAC CONSOLIDATION

Initial proposal

The MoJ and JO proposed that the 45 TAAACs (Training, authorisations, approvals and appraisal committees) is too many, and to reduce the number to 14 in total to enable more effective operation. They suggested that the Judicial College introduce the role of learning partners to ensure that core national training provision is delivered in each circuit.

Further proposals included consideration as to whether TAAAC members should be elected or selected, as well as a proposal to combine FTAAACs (Family training, authorisations, approvals and appraisal committees) and JTAAACs (Justices' training, authorisations, approvals and appraisal committees) to share opportunities and remove duplication.

Our response

We did not support the proposal to reduce TAAACs to 14. Regionalising the structure would significantly weaken their effectiveness, diminish local insight and reduce their capacity to provide meaningful support. We called for a comprehensive review of the TAAAC model, rather than consolidation. We agreed that a Judicial College regional learning partner should be a statutory member of each TAAAC.

We argued for TAAAC members to be elected by their peers. We were strongly opposed to the combination of FTAAACs and JTAAACs.

Consultation decision

There will be no reduction of TAAACs to 14 and any future changes to administrative groupings would only happen with local consultation. A wholesale review of the operation of TAAACs was not accepted. Judicial College Learning Partners will become statutory members to strengthen training links.

The consultation response did not agree that TAAAC members should have a mandate, rather opting for a simplified TAAAC appointment process designed with TAAACs. The proposal to combine FTAAACs and JTAAACs was not taken forward, but this may be revisited in future.