

Appendix 1 - Relevant Extracts from the Consultation Paper

To ensure we deliver business effectively and meet our future strategic requirements, HM Courts & Tribunals Service has applied a set of principles against which the proposals in this consultation were developed. The principles are:

Ensuring Access to Justice

- To ensure continued access to justice when assessing the impact of possible closures on both professional and lay court and tribunal users, taking into account journey times for users, the challenges of rural access and any mitigating action, including having facilities at local civic centres and other buildings to ensure local access, modern ICT and more flexible listing, when journeys will be significantly increased.
- To take into account the needs of users and in particular, victims, witnesses and those who are vulnerable.
- To support the requirements of other agencies such as the Crown Prosecution Service, Social Services, Police Forces and the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS).

Delivering Value for Money

- To reduce the current and future cost of running the estate.
- To maximise the capital receipts from surplus estate for reinvestment in HM Courts & Tribunals Service.

Enabling Efficiency in the longer term

- To reduce the reliance on buildings with poor facilities and to remove from the estate buildings that are difficult and expensive either to improve or to upgrade.
- To move towards an estate with buildings which are larger and facilitate the more efficient and flexible listing of court and tribunal business whilst also giving users more certainty when their cases will be heard.
- To increase the ability to use the estate flexibly across the criminal jurisdiction and separately across the Civil, Family and Tribunal (CFT) jurisdictions.
- To move towards an estate that provides dedicated hearing centres, seeking opportunities to concentrate back office function where they can be carried out most efficiently.
- To improve the efficient use of the estate by seeking to improve whole system efficiency, taking advantage of modernised communication methods (wi-fi and video links) and adopting business processes to increase efficiency and effectiveness.
- To increase the efficient use of the estate wherever possible irrespective of current administrative boundaries.

Kettering County Court – Proposal

Kettering County Court is one of two county courts in Northamptonshire, the other being Northampton Combined Court.

It is proposed that Kettering County Court is closed and its workload transferred to Northampton Crown Court, County Court and Family Court hearing centre. Enabling works would be required to facilitate the workload from Kettering.

The current Kettering County Court building is not fit for purpose and would require major investment for the delivery of modern justice.

Should Kettering County Court close it would enable work to be moved to a larger, modern, purpose built court centre which offers good quality facilities for HM Courts & Tribunals Service users. This will also enable the court to be responsive and flexible with the throughput and listing of cases meeting user and workflow demands more effectively.

Kettering County Court was built in 1930, and has two courtrooms. The court is split over two floors and does not provide lift access between floors. The ground floor is not on one level and has a number of small steps which creates difficulties for anyone with mobility issues. Currently, where persons attending are unable to use the stairs, the hearing has to take place in a small ground floor interview room. There are two rooms for district judges but only one room is able to be used for hearings due to restricted access. There is no separate public toilet; staff and public share the same facilities.

The court utilisation is low with only one hearing room being available for use this provides limited listing as only one judge can sit on any given day.

Northampton Crown Court, County Court and Family Court hearing centre is centrally located. The centre offers improved accommodation and facilities; these include a total of six courtrooms and four district judge chambers with ample consultation rooms. There is a lift which enables access to the upper floor for those with mobility issues. Enabling works would be required; these would include creating a multi-jurisdictional open plan office, an additional courtroom and a centralised storage facility.

The court building is open and staffed two days per week; normally Wednesday and Thursday for district judge hearings, the majority of which are rent and mortgage possessions. On those days the public counter is open on an appointment only basis. Utilisation levels at this court are low; during the 2014/15 financial year, it was used for 20% of its capacity. All other civil hearings are heard at Northampton Crown Court, County Court, and Family Court hearing centre.

Kettering County Court is situated in Kettering town centre. There is no public car park at the court. There is a municipal pay and display car park within a 10 minute walk at a cost of £3.00 for up to three hours or £6.00 for a full day. Travel from Kettering to Northampton takes approximately 30 minutes by car, one hour by bus and two hours by train. Parking at Northampton is charged at £2.40 for up to three hours and £7.00 all day. A Day Return by bus costs £8.40 and a Day Return by train £22.80.

There are no HM Courts & Tribunal Service staff or other agencies based at Kettering.

Kettering County Court is a freehold property. The 2014/15 operating costs for Kettering County Court were approximately £104,000.

Kettering Magistrates' Court - Proposal

Kettering Magistrates' Court is one of four magistrates' courts in Northamptonshire; the others are located in Corby, Northampton and Wellingborough. The court deals with adult and youth criminal court business and Tribunal matters.

It is proposed that Kettering Magistrates' Court closes and the workload be transferred to Wellingborough Magistrates' Court, where some enabling works would be required to move furniture and for redecoration. Should Kettering Magistrates' Court close the consolidation of workload and resources into one court will enable the court to be more responsive and flexible to workflow demands. The throughput and listing of cases will improve which in turn will deliver enhanced customer service and improved courtroom utilisation.

As part of the wider consultation for HM Courts & Tribunals Service reforms there is also a proposal to close Corby Magistrates' Court and transfer the work to Wellingborough Magistrates' Court, creating a central point of access to justice for the area. Details of this proposal can be found at page 15 of this document. Wellingborough Magistrates' Court offers good quality facilities for HM Courts & Tribunals users. Wellingborough Magistrates' Court has three courtrooms and nine cells, two of which have a direct link to the courtroom. Workload from Kettering Magistrates' Court would easily be accommodated at this site. Should this proposal go ahead the Judicial Business Group (JBG) would undertake local stakeholder engagement to consider the need for the merger of Local Justice Areas.

Kettering Magistrates' Court was built in 1967. The building has two courtrooms; both have a secure dock and access to five cells which are owned by the police authority. The building has two dedicated witness waiting rooms, however, this facility is not suitable for vulnerable victims and witnesses. There is no separate access to the court building for victims and witnesses and no secure van dock for defendants in custody.

Wellingborough Magistrates' Court offers good quality facilities for HM Courts & Tribunals users. It has three courtrooms and nine cells, two of which have a direct link to the courtroom. There is a secure van dock for defendants in custody.

Kettering Magistrates' Court has two courtrooms and sits on four days per week. During 2014/15 it had an approximate utilisation level of 64%.

Wellingborough Magistrates' Court is situated eight miles away from Kettering Magistrates' Court. The journey time by a car is approximately 20 minutes. The travel time by train from Kettering to Wellingborough takes approximately 10 minutes, and costs £3.30 each way.

There are no HM Courts & Tribunals Service staffs or other agencies based at Kettering Magistrates' Court.

Kettering Magistrates' Court is a freehold building. The 2014/15 operating costs for Kettering Magistrates' Court were approximately £82,000.

The closure of Kettering Magistrates' Court formed part of the Courts Estates Rationalisation Programme in 2010. It was proposed that Kettering Magistrates' Court be closed, and that the workload be transferred to Corby and Wellingborough Magistrates' Courts. The decision was made to retain Kettering Magistrates' Court due to concerns that Corby and Wellingborough Magistrates' Court; whose utilisation at that time was 70.5% and 85.9% respectively, did not have the capacity to absorb the workload. Daventry and Towcester Magistrates' Courts were closed and Kettering Magistrates' Court was retained. Since then workload has continued to reduce. Wellingborough Magistrates' Court now has the capacity to absorb the workload from Kettering.