

# **UPDATE FOLLOWING THE CONSULTATION ON THE CENTRALISATION OF YOUTH COURTS IN MERSEYSIDE**

## **Introduction & Background**

This paper invites views and opinions on a proposal to change the way youth cases are listed in Merseyside. In 2015, the Judicial Business group and the Youth panel Chairmen consulted on two proposals in respect of youth business in Merseyside; the formation of a single Youth Panel for Merseyside and the centralisation of youth court business in one location within the County.

Following the consultation, the overwhelming majority of responses were in favour of the formation of a single youth panel however, there were a number of logistical objections from stakeholders in respect of the proposal to move to one location. Following the consultation, in August 2015 the Justices Clerk wrote to all stakeholders informing them that the Youth panel Chairmen would proceed with the merger of the youth panels but that youth work would not be centralised at one location at that time.

A number of concerns had been raised by stakeholders about centralisation. Specifically the additional travel time of parties, the risk of delays in delivering youths in custody to a single site and additional travel costs. Since 2015, the geographical landscape of the magistrates` courts in Merseyside has changed. As part of the Ministry of Justice Reform programme St Helens Magistrates Court has relocated to the Queen Elizabeth II Law Courts in Liverpool. The Judicial Business Group has also successfully centralised first listings for certain types of court business at different locations within Merseyside. For example all Domestic Violence cases are heard at Liverpool, all occasional courts are listed in Sefton and all traffic cases being listed at Wirral Magistrates Court.

Taking into account the underpinning principles of HMCTS Reform, that the system should be just, proportionate and accessible HMCTS it is now time to reconsider the proposal to move to one location for all youth hearings.

The rationale being that as the youth business continues to reduce across the area (see annex 1); in line with business needs the youth court sessions have also reduced. As a consequence, there is one allocated youth court in Sefton every fortnight and one allocated youth court in Wirral each week. Liverpool offers youth court hearings three days a week. By moving to a single hearing centre there will be the capacity to list youths before a properly constituted youth court on a more regular basis. Any youths remanded to youth detention accommodation will be for the shortest possible period as there will be a more regular listing pattern than is currently available at the separate locations and

centralisation will deliver a better, more consistent service to all Youth Court Users.

The preferred hearing centre would be the Single Crime Centre in the Queen Elizabeth II Law Courts Liverpool. The reason for identifying Liverpool as the preferred option is on the basis that the Youth Court within the QEII is a separate building with its own facilities, entrance and waiting area. As a result it has a substantial advantage over other courthouses in that there is limited opportunity for cross-contamination of young people with adult defendants. Liverpool Youth Court also deals with the majority of the Youth court business in the County dealing with Liverpool, Knowsley and St Helens young people following the closure of both Knowsley and St Helens Magistrates Courts.

As part of the earlier consultation process consideration was given to whether the impact of changes to listing practice was in anyway contrary to the statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010. There was no evidence to suggest that there would be any adverse impact in respect of age, race, religion or gender. If the proposal were to go ahead HMCTS will continue to put in place reasonable adjustments to accommodate court users with disability issues appearing from custody on a case by case basis.

## **Proposal**

The Youth Panel Chairmen, the Judicial Business Group and HMCTS would like to provide stakeholders and partners an opportunity to provide their views on the centralisation of youth business in one location before a final decision is made. In particular HMCTS would appreciate feedback on the following questions:

- 1. Do you agree with the centralisation of hearings for youth cases?**
- 2. If the response to question 1 is no, why not?**
- 3. Do you agree the venue should be Liverpool? If not, please identify your preferred location providing reasons for your choice.**

## **How to respond**

Although HMCTS have expressed a clear provisional view in this paper, we want to make a fully informed decision. We consider the input of stakeholders and partner organisations to be crucial in enabling us to do so. We will be inviting views from the stakeholders identified below:

Agencies to be contacted regarding the matter will include:-

- The Merseyside Bench Chairman and members of the Judicial Business Group and Bench Committees
- Members of the Merseyside Youth Panel
- The Chairman of the Merseyside Branch of the Magistrates' Association
- District Judges (Magistrates' Courts) based in Merseyside
- HMCTS North West Region Delivery Director and Head of Crime
- HMCTS Cheshire Merseyside Senior Management Team
- The Lord Lieutenant of Merseyside
- HHJ Goldstone QC, Honorary Recorder of Liverpool
- Mr William Davis, Senior Presiding Judge on the Northern Circuit
- The Chief Constable of Merseyside Police Force
- The Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside
- Chief Crown Prosecutor for Merseyside
- Merseyside Youth Offending Service representatives
- Assistant Director of the National Probation Service, Merseyside
- PECS Contract Manager (NOMS)
- GeoAmey
- Legal Aid Agency
- PCS Trade Union
- Local Law Society
- Local Authorities in Merseyside
- Victim Support

*The above list is not exhaustive, should any stakeholders wish to circulate this document to other related parties that would be welcome.*

Please respond by no later than **Monday 15 May** individual and collective responses are welcome to:-

Stephen Pickstock  
Sefton Magistrates Court  
Merton Road  
Bootle  
Liverpool  
L20 3XX

Email: [stephen.pickstock@hmcts.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:stephen.pickstock@hmcts.gsi.gov.uk)

## Annex A

### Youth Workload Volume 2015 –Merseyside

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Rolling 12mths	Previous 12mths	%
189	168	189	153	107	62	144	105	142	141	139	94	1633	2130	-23

### Youth Workload Volume 2016 –Merseyside

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Rolling 12mths	Previous 12mths	%
123	131	115	117	98	122	105	136	132	97	134	128	1438	1633	-12

## About you

<b>Full name</b>	
<b>Job title</b> or capacity in which you are responding to this consultation exercise (e.g. member of the public etc.)	
<b>Date</b>	
<b>Company name/organisation</b> (if applicable):	
<b>Email address</b>	
<b>Telephone</b>	
If you would like us to acknowledge receipt of your response, please tick this box	<input type="checkbox"/> (please tick box)

**If you are a representative of a group**, please tell us the name of the group and give a summary of the people or organisations that you represent.

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We would welcome responses to the following questions set out in this paper.

**Do you agree with the centralisation of hearings for youth cases?**

**If the response to question 1 is no, why not?**

**Do you agree the venue should be Liverpool? If not please identify your preferred location providing reasons for your choice?**