



Legal Aid  
Agency

Cambridge Office  
The Magistrates' Court  
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**TO: All members of the Colchester & Clacton and Chelmsford & Harlow police station Duty Schemes**

**Additional: All members of Grays/Basildon and Southend Police Station Scheme**

**Consultation on the merger of the Colchester & Clacton and Chelmsford & Harlow Police Station Schemes.**

**This Consultation**

This consultation paper comprises two sections:

Section 1 outlines the Police Station Custody Unit closure, and the Duty Scheme affected.

Section 2 outlines the options identified to change the Duty Schemes affected within your local region.

We are consulting on these proposals for 3 weeks, from 19<sup>th</sup> February 2025.

The timetable for this consultation exercise is as follows:

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Date</b>
Consultation period	19/02/2025 - 12/03/2025
Consideration of responses	By 21/03/2025
Publication of consultation response	By 04/04/2025
Commencement of new rota	21/04/2025

Responses should be sent by email to: [diane.hayward@justice.gov.uk](mailto:diane.hayward@justice.gov.uk)

## Introduction and Background

This consultation is in response to the decision by Essex Constabulary to close Clacton Police Station Custody Unit, which is currently served by the Colchester & Clacton Duty Scheme.

### Section 1 – Clacton Custody Unit closure

There are currently two Duty Schemes in North Essex:

- Colchester/Clacton – There are two Police Station custody suite locations - Colchester and Clacton.
- Chelmsford/Harlow – There are two Police Station custody suite locations - Chelmsford and Harlow.

Data for 2024 from the DSCC showing all calls (duty and own) by police station:

Scheme	Month												Total
	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	
COLCHESTER	246	258	231	270	266	261	271	244	213	225	208	170	2863
CLACTON & HARWICH	90	98	139	105	118	129	124	124	128	115	124	93	1387
CHELMSFORD	279	263	303	293	358	342	349	310	285	339	331	321	3773
HARLOW & LOUGHTON	239	165	232	212	155	116	110	228	206	235	191	231	2320

Cases from the above police stations are usually listed in the Magistrates Courts located in North Essex, which are in Colchester and Chelmsford. The Court Schemes for Colchester/Clacton and Chelmsford/Harlow were merged in 2021, following consultation with scheme members, to give a combined Court Scheme for North Essex. This was to reflect HMCTS listing practices and to give a fair allocation of work to all providers located in North Essex.

Clacton Police Station Custody Unit will close on 21/04/25. Essex Police have stated that 80% of the Clacton cases are expected to be dealt with in Colchester. The remaining 20% of Clacton cases may be taken to any of the other 4 available custody suites in Essex – these are in Chelmsford, Harlow, Grays (temporarily closed from 20<sup>th</sup> January 2025 for up to 4 months) and Southend.

As a result of this closure, we need to review the Colchester/Clacton police station scheme.

**All postcode sectors are mapped onto at least one Duty Scheme. The changes proposed here will not affect this.**

The Postcode Tool, which can be found here: [Duty solicitors: rotas, information and guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#), sets out current Duty Scheme eligibility. The Postcode Tool will be updated post consultation for any changes to Duty Scheme eligibility, where appropriate.

## Section 2 – Proposed revisions to schemes in the Eastern Region

### Proposed Options

Please find below the options for the North Essex schemes from 21/04/25:

#### **Option A**

No change to existing arrangements. Duty scheme eligibility remains as currently set with separate schemes for Chelmsford/Harlow and Colchester.

The North Essex schemes would remain separate, and duty cases would continue to be allocated to the members of each separate scheme.

#### **Option B**

Combine the Colchester/Clacton Police Station Scheme with the Chelmsford/Harlow Police Station Scheme.

This proposal would combine both police station schemes and would result in a single combined Duty Rota covering the CJS areas of Colchester/Clacton and Chelmsford/Harlow.

Scheme Members would have access to North Essex Police Station work and would be required to service all the police stations in the combined CJS area.

The office postcode tool would be amended to combine the office postcodes that provide eligibility for the Colchester/Clacton and Chelmsford/Harlow schemes into a single scheme called the Colchester and Chelmsford scheme.

We would like to make it clear that the process for the allocation of duty work for both options will be according to the police station that the detainee is taken to, irrespective of where the arrest occurred. The fee payable will be determined by the police station that is attended.

#### **Legal Aid Agency preferred Option:**

Our preferred option is Option B.

Moving to a single North Essex Duty Solicitor rota is consistent with the intention of the police that 80% of Clacton cases will be taken to Colchester police station, whilst allowing a broader allocation of work to providers across North Essex. It would also bring the schemes into line with the North Essex combined court scheme.

Currently, all but one provider already has access to both North Essex schemes, through having an office located in a 'shared boundary' area. We have received anecdotal information that it is becoming difficult for providers to find suitable office space within this 'shared boundary' area and this option would remove that restriction and allow an office to be located anywhere within the wider, North Essex scheme boundary area.

Whilst Option A would also ensure that existing Colchester/Clacton members continue to be eligible to receive the duty cases going to Colchester police station, the 80% prediction may mean a loss of access of up to 20% of the Clacton cases to members of that scheme only. Also, it would not resolve the difficulties finding suitable office premises that is currently being experienced within the 'shared boundary' area.

As part of this consultation exercise, we also considered an option to merge the North Essex police station schemes of Colchester/Clacton and Chelmsford/Harlow with the South Essex combined police station scheme, Grays/Southend, to give one combined police station scheme across the whole of Essex ('whole Essex' police station scheme).

Such a wider merger would lead to an increase of travel time and costs for some providers, particularly those with a single office located in either North or South Essex. To balance that, we considered the possibility of allowing providers within a 'whole Essex' scheme to opt-out of a particular rota or rotas - for instance, if a provider decided that the police station was too far for it to be viable for them to travel to. However, that brings a risk that a rota may become vulnerable if too many providers decided to 'opt-out'. These 'opted-out of' rotas would also require more time and resources from our Rota Team to produce. Our conclusion at this time is that as this consultation is focussed on the closure of Clacton custody and changes within North Essex, it would not be appropriate to proceed with that option within this consultation. However, we have not ruled it out as a longer-term option, and we would welcome your comments on the key factors that you would like to see included in any future consideration of a 'whole Essex' police station scheme merger.

Respondents are invited to comment on Options A and B and on a possible future 'whole Essex' police station scheme merger. It may be the case that you would like to suggest an alternative approach. Please make it clear in your response which Option(s) and scheme(s) you are referring to and indicate your reasons for preferring these alternatives.

## **Legal Aid Agency**