



HM Courts &  
Tribunals Service

# Response to the consultation on the future of Lancaster Crown Court







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# Introduction and contact details

This document is the post-consultation report for the consultation paper, Proposal on the future of Lancaster Crown Court.

It will cover:

- the background to the report
- a summary of the responses to the report
- a detailed response to the specific questions raised in the report
- the next steps following this consultation.

Further copies of this report and the consultation paper can be obtained by contacting the Estates Consultation team at the address below:

**HMCTS Estates Consultation**

**HM Courts & Tribunals Service**

**102 Petty France**

**London SW1H 9AJ**

**Email:** [estatesconsultation@justice.gov.uk](mailto:estatesconsultation@justice.gov.uk)

This report is also available on the Ministry of Justice's website: [www.justice.gov.uk/about/hmcts/index.htm](http://www.justice.gov.uk/about/hmcts/index.htm).

Alternative format versions of this publication can be requested from HMCTS Estates Consultation.

## **Complaints or comments**

If you have any complaints or comments about the consultation process you should contact HM Courts and Tribunals Service using the contact details above.

# Foreword

**On 21 May 2025, HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) published a six week consultation, proposing the permanent closure of Lancaster Crown Court.**

The court is located in Lancaster Castle, a 12th Century, Grade I listed building that does not offer modern and flexible accommodation and has significant issues with security and accessibility. These issues cannot be resolved due to the listed status of the building and because the Castle complex operates as a tourist attraction. As a result, Lancaster Crown Court is currently closed and has not been utilised for either crime or civil hearings since 2019.

Since 2019, the work of Lancaster Crown Court has been reassigned to Preston Crown Court, where there is sufficient capacity. A local civil court continues to be provided at the nearby Lancaster Courthouse.

The consultation closed on 2 July 2025. A total of 27 responses were received, with each one carefully considered. As the Delivery Director responsible for managing the operations of HM Courts & Tribunals Service in the North West region, I am very grateful to everyone for taking the time to provide their views. It is clear from the responses received that our courts are valued by society.

Following careful consideration and analysis of each of the responses received, the Lord Chancellor has decided to permanently close Lancaster Crown Court.

As the court is not currently operational, the permanent closure is now in effect. HMCTS will work to formally exit the lease with the local authority. Preston Crown Court will continue to hear the Crown Court cases that would have previously been assigned to Lancaster Crown Court.

**Jane Wignall**

Delivery Director, HM Courts & Tribunals Service North West

# Background

**The consultation paper 'Proposal on the future of Lancaster Crown Court' was published on 21 May 2025. It invited comments on a HMCTS proposal to permanently close Lancaster Crown Court, a venue that has not held sittings since 2019.**

Responses were invited from anyone with an interest or view on the proposal outlined. The proposal was for the permanent closure of Lancaster Crown Court, with workloads to continue to be heard at Preston Crown Court.

In line with our estates principles to ensure access to justice, deliver value for money and maintain operational efficiency, our assessment was that the proposal made in the consultation would allow us to continue to deliver an effective service for users.

The consultation on the future of Lancaster Crown Court closed on 2 July 2025. This document summarises the responses received, providing HM Courts and Tribunals Service's reaction to the key themes, issues of concern and suggestions which were raised, and setting out the decisions that have been reached on the proposal.

In our consultation document, we set out that a separate Impact Assessment had not been provided, as there were no alternative options to explore. We noted that we would consider the need for a separate Impact Assessment as part of our response. Having considered all of the responses to this consultation, we have concluded that a separate Impact Assessment document is not required.

The final Equality Impact Assessment is at page 10.

A list of respondents is at Annex A.



# Summary of responses

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## Overview of responses received.

A total of 27 individual responses to the consultation paper were received. Of these:

- 12 were from professional users
- 3 were from staff
- 3 were from representatives of other public bodies
- 2 were from the judiciary
- 4 were from individuals, and
- 3 were from “other” or did not declare.

Responses were categorised under the themes of access to justice, operational efficiency, value for money, and other factors, and whether the respondent was broadly in favour of, or against the proposal. The responses were analysed for any evidence of impact of the proposals, and levels of support among particular groups.

Seven responses were in favour of the proposal, 19 responses were against, and one response was neutral.

Comments of those supportive of the proposal noted that the current arrangements with the work being heard at Preston Crown Court are working well, and that Lancaster Crown Court did not provide a sufficiently accessible environment for court users with mobility issues.

A summary of the responses against the proposal included comments that closing Lancaster would increase travel time and costs. Preston was also thought to be working at capacity, and that with the national court backlog issue closing a Crown Court was not sensible. Responses added that it did not seem the right time to close an important local asset like Lancaster. Many of the responses noted the historic and heritage aspect of the court.

# Responses to the proposal

## Decision on Lancaster Crown Court

Following analysis of the points raised in our consultation document and the responses to the public consultation, the Lord Chancellor has decided to permanently close Lancaster Crown Court.

The current listing arrangements will continue, with Preston Crown Court hearing criminal cases, and Lancaster Courthouse being available as necessary for civil work.

The following section of this document summarises responses in relation to Lancaster Crown Court and HM Courts & Tribunals Service's reactions to each emerging theme or area of concern raised.

## Access to justice

18 responses gave some insight into matters relating to access to justice. These were commonly references to journey times that would increase as a result of court users having longer journeys to Preston than to Lancaster. Accessibility was also a factor that was raised, adding that Lancaster is not a suitable venue for those with mobility issues and vulnerable court users, and that whilst Preston does offer better accessibility, more can be done to improve the facilities there.

Below is a representative selection of the comments submitted in relation to access to justice.

*"Lancaster Crown Court provides an invaluable community service in mid-Lancashire and is a high profile venue representing the continuity of British justice over many centuries. The proposed closure of Lancaster Crown Court would increase travel requirements."* **(Professional court user)**

*"At present defendants and witnesses, whom are often of a lower socio-economic background have to travel hours one way just to attend court, at Preston. This is unacceptable and contrary to the principles of justice."* **(Professional court user)**

*"Preston is a long way from Lancaster public transport is infrequent. There ought to be a local court for Lancashire people."* **(Member of the public)**

*"It weaves into vulnerable users, those in south Cumbria, have had Barrow and Lancaster taken from them, they must travel to Carlisle (2hours) or Preston (1.5hrs) and the jurors in their areas now to not hear cases."* **(Professional court user)**

*"My professional experience has been that travelling to court is a difficult and stressful experience for vulnerable court users. I anticipate that there will be a significant % who just don't turn up if they are required to travel to Preston."* **(Professional court user)**

*"Lancaster to Preston is not an insignificant journey. Those previously accessing Lancaster may travel from more remote parts of Lancashire where travel routes are less reliable."* **(Professional court user)**

*"Disabled witnesses could not access Lancaster Crown Court due to the steps and there was no provision for disabled toilets."* **(Lancashire Constabulary)**

## Response

HM Courts & Tribunals Service considers that while there may be increased journey times and costs for some users, the journeys required to reach Preston are reasonable for the vast majority of users.

The travel times set out in the consultation document were calculated using public transport journeys entered into Google Maps. Some responses to the consultations have claimed that the travel times provided are unrealistic and suggested that using travel

times from an online source is not reflective of reality. It is not possible to model every potential court user journey from every town and village, so we have used a representative range of locations to underpin the analysis, based on a spread of key towns and villages in the catchment area of Lancaster Crown Court. All times shown are from the town or area to the door of the court in order that they are a more accurate representation of a genuine journey for a public user, as opposed to a journey from one court location to another. The timings were also based on journeys that enabled the user to arrive in court on time.

Our view is that the data used is informed by thousands of real users and represents a reasonable and proportionate estimate of journey times. We worked with local colleagues to agree the list and sense check these example journey times.

HM Courts & Tribunals Service recognises that some users who live in more remote locations or have difficulty travelling may, in exceptional circumstances, not be able to attend court in time for a case listed at 10am. As is the case now, the courts are able to consider representations made by individual court users for reasonable adjustments and special measures on a case by case basis, for example providing a later hearing start time. There has not been any increase in complaints made about the need to travel to Preston.

Lastly, Lancaster Crown Court has not been operational since 2019, with the work already transferred to Preston. There is no clear evidence that this has impacted Access to Justice so far as a consequence of the court not being operational.

## Value for money

No responses provided commentary on value for money.

### Response

Although we received no specific comments on the matter of value for money, as a government agency, we have a responsibility for ensuring that public funds are spent wisely. Lancaster Crown Court is a leasehold property, and we have been incurring costs such as rent, rates, utilities, security, and service charges since the court ceased conducting hearings in 2019. It is not appropriate to continue incurring costs on a site that does not provide operational value. While there will be some costs associated with exiting our lease, such as dilapidations, the saving in operating costs will offset this in the longer-term. The court cannot deliver value for money when it is unable to sit.

## Operational efficiency

There were 18 responses that highlighted matters of operational efficiency. Responses that were supportive of the proposal explained that the current ways of working from Preston were sufficient, those against the proposals believed Preston did not offer enough capacity to accommodate the work of Lancaster.

A representative selection of responses is shared below.

*"There is a chronic lack of courtrooms across the country, particularly Lancashire, defendants wait years for trials and sentences. The court could be utilised for bail trials, or case management hearings in bail cases to reduce the backlog."* **(Professional court user)**

*"It is feasible to make good use of this building for appropriate Crown court work despite limitations. Many non-custody trials could readily be accommodated here when there is pressure on the Court estate to find capacity. During lockdown all manner of buildings (including football clubs and theatres) were found to be perfectly serviceable."* **(Professional court user)**

*"It would be a great shame to close such an historic Court centre amidst a backlog of cases before the Crown Court."* **(Professional court user)**

*"Even in its hey day it was difficult to list cases at Lancaster. It was not unusual for the court to sit less than a full day because of the inability to take additional work due to the geographical distance from the main court at Preston."* **(HMCTS Staff)**

*"There is absolutely no reason to send Lancaster bail hearings and remote hearings to Preston. There are a plethora of new Recorders who can be deployed. There ought to be no additional travel requirement."* **(Professional court user)**

*"Sort Preston out then it will work."* **(Member of public)**

### Response

Preston Crown Court has accommodated the workload of Lancaster Crown Court since 2019. Lancaster hosted a single Crown Court hearing room, and the security limitations of the building meant that only non-custodial cases could be heard, as the cells were deemed unsuitable in 2015. The layout presents challenges with no secure routes possible for judges, and the building is open to the general public. The listed nature of the building makes upgrading IT difficult and complex, for example the thickness of the walls and heritage fixings precluding drilling or affixing components.

Data shows that there is sufficient capacity at Preston to continue to deal with the one courtroom of work from Lancaster, even with the pressures on the system as a whole due to the nationwide Crown Court backlogs.

One response referenced the Independent Review of Criminal Courts, conducted by Sir Brian Leveson, and made the case to retain Lancaster Crown Court to provide the required Crown Court capacity. It is our assessment that the limitations of the building as outlined in the paragraph above including significant issues with security, accessibility, as well as not having adequate custodial facilities, are all factors that mean this building is not suitable for accommodating Crown Court cases.

Several responses also highlighted the prospective utilisation of Barrow-in-Furness Crown Court. When the Crown Court last sat in Barrow-in-Furness the sitting pattern was two weeks in every eight. Sitting the Crown Court at Barrow displaced other jurisdictions - magistrates' and county from courtrooms they would otherwise use. While decisions regarding where Crown Court hearings should take place are judicial, we continue to keep under review how we can maximise operational efficiency and utilisation of this site while balancing user requirements across all jurisdictions.

HMCTS recognises that Lancaster Crown Court is a historic building and an important public asset. However, it is not possible to modernise the custodial facilities (including a secure van dock) and IT provision. Security considerations relating to public access and the limited secure routes for court users generate unacceptable levels of risk and operations from a single courtroom building are inherently inefficient. The building is protected by Grade I listed status, and it would be for the local authority to consider next steps once the building is fully returned to them.

## Other considerations

There were 12 responses which gave views that could not be categorised into these three main themes. Most of these highlighted the historic nature of the building, and the associated grandeur of the court. One response noted a view that the security concerns, for both the judiciary and other court users were "overblown".

*"The court is not safe to operate, meaning there is an unacceptable security risk to court users, the judiciary and HMCTS staff - which extends to our staff and volunteers. The court is also a tourist attraction, victims and witnesses are often having to deal with tourists taking photos of the castle whilst they prepare to give evidence which has always felt inappropriate and intimidating for some victims and witnesses."* **(Representative of another public body)**

*"Lancaster is a spectacular building and everyone who attended the court either as advocates or staff enjoyed the experience. The building as it stands has inadequate cell facilities, conference rooms. Also, modern applications that are available to court users such as hearings attended via CVP and the opportunity for vulnerable witnesses and young witnesses to give their evidence pre-recorded sparing the witness to attend court on the day of trial."* **(Staff)**

*"Why can't any old buildings be retained for the use of the justice system save for prisons?!"* **(Member of the public)**

*"It would be an enormous shame to discontinue such a beautiful historic and working building. The country could be filled with modern accessible court buildings, but that is not what is always all about. Lancaster Crown court has a fabulous history, rooms and former jury rooms (with a magnificent historical 'drop') and when in the court that history and grandeur leads not only the barristers, judges and staff but jurors to truly appreciate the importance and significance of the role of natural justice and being fairly tried by twelve of your peers in modern day Britain."* **(Professional court user)**

## Response

The fact that the Castle complex is a live tourist attraction that welcomes visitors is a key reason why the building is not suitable for a court building in the 21st century.

Ensuring the safety and security of all those who use our courts and tribunals, is something we take very seriously. Most modern criminal court rooms will have a secure dock which is not possible at Lancaster. The building is a museum, with displays on the walls of antique weaponry, a fact that would not be tolerated for security purposes in any other building.

In addition to ensuring the safety and security of court users, we must also provide facilities to protect witnesses and vulnerable court users, and having to bypass a tour group does not seem the best way to provide that support. This building does not allow us to create separate entrances, for staff, judiciary, jurors, or witnesses or vulnerable court users.

# Conclusion and next steps

Following the Lord Chancellor's decision to close Lancaster Crown Court, we will work to exit the lease and fully decommission the building.

As there are no staff based at the building, there does not need to be any detailed engagement with the Departmental or Regional Trade Unions.

## The consultation criteria

The principles that Government departments and other public bodies should adopt for engaging stakeholders when developing policy and legislation are set out in the consultation principles.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance>

# Annex A – List of respondents

**In addition to the members of the public who responded to the consultation, the following organisations or groups provided a response:**

- 7 Harrington Street Barristers' Chambers
- Barristers
- Citizen's Advice Witness Service
- Dean's Court Chambers
- HMCTS Staff
- HMPPS Staff
- Judiciary
- Lancashire Constabulary
- Lincoln House Chambers
- St. John's Buildings Barrister's Chambers

# Annex B – Equalities Statement

## 1. Equality impacts

1.1 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ("the EA") requires Ministers and the Department, when exercising their functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct prohibited by the EA.
- Advance equality of opportunity between different groups (those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not).
- Foster good relations between different groups (those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not).

1.2 Paying due regard needs to be considered against the nine protected characteristics under the EA – namely race, sex, disability, sexual orientation, religion and belief, age, marriage and civil partnership, gender reassignment, pregnancy, and maternity.

1.3 The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and its ministers have a legal duty to consider how proposed policies are likely to impact on the protected characteristics and take proportionate steps to mitigate or justify the adverse impacts and to advance the beneficial ones.

### Direct discrimination

1.4 Our assessment is that the policy is not directly discriminatory within the meaning of the EA, as it applies equally to all persons affected by this proposal: we do not consider that the policy proposal would result in people being treated less favourably because of any protected characteristic.

### Indirect discrimination

1.5 Amongst court users, some groups of people with protected characteristics, as explained below, are over-represented when compared to the local general population. However, even if it were established that in some cases (for example, the length of journey time to court) these effects constituted a particular disadvantage, we believe that implementation of the proposals represents a proportionate means of achieving the legitimate aims of court efficiency.

1.6 Our approach has been to identify groups of people with protected characteristics living within defined areas of where the court is situated and compare them to the population of Lancashire and the national population (the 'court user data' section below details our approach). This allows us to identify whether any particular groups of people are likely to be disadvantaged by the proposals. Due to limitations in

the available data on local HMCTS users, we have had to make the assumption that they are representative of court users.

### Protected characteristics impacts

1.7 We have assessed the available data on the characteristics of age, disability, sex, race, and religion. Our current assessment is that whilst in Lancaster itself there is under-representation of older people (those aged 65+) and those with a disability, this is not the case for those areas for which Lancaster Crown Court is their nearest crown court venue. There is a slight over-representation of those aged 65+ in these catchment areas when compared with the Lancashire and national populations. The population living with a disability is very slightly higher in these areas also. A fuller analysis of this data is provided below in the 'court user data' section.

1.8 The evidence we hold is set out in tables 1 and 2. Together these show the nearest proxy data sets we currently have on the protected characteristics of users at the two courts being considered. We do not consider that the proposals would result in any particular disadvantage for people with the protected characteristics of sex, race or religion. Furthermore, we do not consider that the closure will have a greater impact on these groups when compared to the region's population as a whole. Nonetheless we will continue to assess the impacts of these proposals on affected groups who share protected characteristics, paying regard to any equality impacts identified in the responses to the consultation.

1.9 Although we do not currently have data on the protected characteristic of gender reassignment, and only limited data on sexual orientation and marriage and civil partnership, we do not consider that the proposal is likely to result in any particular disadvantage for people with these protected characteristics when compared to the general population.

1.10 To supplement our evidence, in Table 3 we have provided published data from the Crime Survey for England & Wales (2024/25) which details the protected characteristics of those who were victims of personal crime. We acknowledge that this data does not necessarily correlate to all court users, however, it provides a helpful indication of a cross-section of the population likely to access criminal courts.

**1.11** Our initial assessment noted the limitations in the available data to assess the extent of impacts on the remaining protected characteristics of sexual orientation, marriage, and civil partnership. The information provided in Table 3 allows us to identify the characteristics of those who were victims of crime in 2024/25, which includes sexual orientation and marriage and civil partnership. We are able to identify that those who are separated and divorced are over-represented amongst victims of crime when compared with other characteristics. We have been unable to identify data to allow an assessment of the impact on those with the protected characteristic of gender reassignment. Having considered the impact of the proposal on the groups for which limited data is available, we have not identified any indirect discrimination arising from the proposed closure.

**1.12** We recognise that the need to travel further (either by car or by public transport) is likely to have greater impacts on older people and people with disabilities and pregnant women. Available data suggests that there is a slight over-representation of people with disabilities in the areas local to the court being considered for closure (a 1% difference which we do not consider constitutes a disproportionate amount). There is no available data to suggest that there are more pregnant women in the areas local to this court compared to the Lancashire population as a whole.

**1.13** Whilst increased travel may have greater impacts for those groups, those impacts can be alleviated, to some degree, by some of the mitigating measures identified below. For example, the greater availability of online information and virtual court facilities may reduce the need to travel to courts.

**1.14** Overall, we believe that the potential impact is proportionate having regard to the aim of the policy. The closure of the proposed court will impact a small number of users and the savings and efficiency achieved as a result of the closure will contribute to a better service overall for users. It remains important to make reasonable adjustments for people of disability to ensure appropriate support is given. These are explained in more detail below in the mitigations section.

## Harassment and victimisation

**1.15** We do not consider there to be a risk of harassment or victimisation as a result of the proposal.

## Advancing equality of opportunity

**1.16** Consideration has been given to how this proposal impacts on the duty to advance equality of opportunity by meeting the needs of court users who share a particular characteristic, where those needs are different from the need of those who do not share that characteristic. Reducing the reliance on buildings with poor facilities to take advantage of a more modernised estate with better communication methods will help to generate a positive impact on all users, especially people with disabilities.

## Fostering good relations

**1.17** Consideration has been given to this objective that indicates it is unlikely to be of relevance to the proposal.

## Court user data

**1.18** HMCTS collects certain information on users of individual courts, but this is not readily available for analysis, and not comprehensive for protected characteristics. We have instead assumed that court users are likely to be drawn from, and roughly representative of, the general population living a) in the vicinity of the court buildings, and b) resident in local areas where the courts are the closest venue of that jurisdiction.

**1.19** This analysis has considered protected characteristics of populations at middle super output area (MSOA<sup>1</sup>) level as recorded in the 2021 Census, and age and sex as in mid-2022 population estimates (more recent data for religion, ethnicity and disability at this level is not available). The areas for which these courts are the closest venue has been calculated based on Transport API, (a managed services provider for transport time data) from the centroid of the MSOA to the coordinates of the court postcode, where this is the shortest journey by public transport.

**1.20** The proposals involve the closure of Lancaster Crown Court and the relocation of work to Preston Crown Court. Two MSOAs have therefore been identified for an analysis of the populations living in the vicinity of the court buildings effected by the proposals. The demographic data we have obtained is provided over the page, in Table 1.

**1.21** Residents of the two local areas in which these two city centre courts are located share similar demographics with each other. Potential court users living within the court areas are overwhelmingly young, working-age adults, with lower proportions of children and older adults (both aged 40-64 and 65+) than nationally or in the Lancashire area. Just 7% of the population living within the vicinity of Lancaster Crown Court are aged 65+ which suggests a limited impact on those who are older or less able to travel.

<sup>1</sup> Middle Layer Super Output Areas are a geographic hierarchy designed to improve the reporting of small area statistics in England and Wales. Middle Layer Super Output Areas are built from groups of contiguous Lower Layer Super Output Areas. The minimum population is 5000 and the mean is 8300.

Table 1: The protected characteristics of those impacted by the proposals (residents in areas of court locations)

		Population resident in MSOA of court location		Lancashire Population	England & Wales population
		Lancaster Crown Court the Castle			
EPIMS		102469	102476		
MSOA		E02005234	E02005269		
Site closures		1	0		
Gender	Male	53%	53%	49%	49%
	Female	47%	47%	51%	51%
Age	0-15	9%	14%	18%	18%
	16-24	45%	23%	11%	11%
	25-39	21%	29%	18%	20%
	40-64	18%	26%	32%	32%
	65+	7%	8%	21%	19%
Disability	Disability	25%	26%	26%	24%
	No disability	75%	74%	74%	76%
Race	White British	69%	50%	86%	76%
	White other	9%	10%	3%	6%
	Mixed	4%	4%	1%	3%
	Asian	12%	27%	8%	9%
	Black	4%	5%	1%	4%
	Other	2%	4%	1%	2%
Religion	Christian	34%	33%	52%	46%
	Buddhist	1%	1%	0%	0%
	Hindu	1%	6%	0%	2%
	Jewish	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Muslim	5%	21%	2%	7%
	Sikh	0%	0%	0%	1%
	Other religion	1%	1%	1%	1%
	No religion	48%	31%	38%	37%
	Not stated	10%	7%	7%	6%

Note: Data is based on the population resident in the middle super output area (MSOA) in which the court is located. Disability, ethnicity, and religion as recorded in the 2021 Census. Age and gender as estimated in mid-2022 by ONS.

1.22 Likely related to both the age profile and the city centre location, other demographics differ from the wider area. Rates of living with a disability are similar to the national rates. In the case of Preston, a much larger proportion of the population comes from an ethnic minority background, with a particularly high proportion of those coming from an Asian background (27% compared with 8-9% both nationally and in Lancashire). The city therefore has a smaller White British population (50%) than the national population (76%) and a marked difference from the rest of Lancashire (88%). Lancaster has a small proportion identifying as from a non-White background (12% from an Asian background) whilst the White British cohort (69%) is also smaller than the general and county-wide population.

1.23 Lancaster has a higher proportion of people stating they have no religion (48%) whereas Preston has a lower proportion (31%) when compared to the general and county-wide population. Both cities have a markedly smaller proportion of those identifying as Christian, with Preston having high proportions of members of the Hindu and Islamic faiths.

1.24 In light of the findings above, we do not consider that those with the protected characteristics of age, race, gender or religion, or disability living in these MSOAs will be impacted by these proposals.

1.25 A broader view of the populations likely to be impacted by the closure considers those in areas where the court is currently the closest of that jurisdiction. Though it should be noted that the comparison here is limited given that Lancaster Crown Court, when this court was operational, it was only able to hear a limited range of criminal hearings. Table 2 below provides a summary of the data obtained having reviewed the closest MSOAs, in line with the methodology outlined above.

**Table 2: The protected characteristics of those impacted by the proposals (residents in local areas where the site is closest court venue of that jurisdiction by public transport)**

		Population resident in MSOAs where nearest court of jurisdiction by public transport		Lancashire Population	England & Wales population
		Lancaster Crown Court the Castle			
EPIMS		102469	102476		
No. MSOAs incl.		24	101		
<b>Gender</b>	Male	51%	51%	49%	49%
	Female	49%	49%	51%	51%
<b>Age</b>	0-15	16%	18%	18%	18%
	16-24	14%	9%	11%	11%
	25-39	17%	18%	18%	20%
	40-64	31%	33%	32%	32%
	65+	22%	22%	21%	19%
<b>Disability</b>	Disability	20%	21%	26%	24%
	No disability	80%	79%	74%	76%
<b>Race</b>	White British	89%	85%	86%	76%
	White other	5%	4%	3%	6%
	Mixed	1%	2%	1%	3%
	Asian	3%	7%	8%	9%
	Black	1%	1%	1%	4%
	Other	1%	1%	1%	2%
<b>Religion</b>	Christian	53%	55%	52%	46%
	Buddhist	1%	1%	0%	0%
	Hindu	1%	2%	0%	2%
	Jewish	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Muslim	1%	6%	2%	7%
	Sikh	0%	0%	0%	1%
	Other religion	1%	0%	0%	1%
	No religion	37%	31%	38%	37%
	Not stated	6%	5%	7%	6%

Note: Data is based on the population resident in the middle super output areas (MSOAs) for which the court is the nearest court by public transport journey time as estimated using analysis of travel times to courts. Disability, ethnicity, and religion as recorded in the 2021 Census. Age and gender as estimated in mid-2022 by ONS.

1.26 There is a difference in the age profile of the population living in areas closest to Lancaster Crown Court (as a jurisdiction). The proportion of those aged 65+ for the 24 MSOAs included shows that 22% of the population fall within this age bracket, compared to the Lancashire population of 21% and the national population of 19%. There is a slightly lower proportion of those with a disability (20% for the Lancaster MSOAs compared with 26% across the region and 24% nationally). We recognise that the higher age profile may mean some users who face difficulties travelling might have to take longer journeys should criminal cases relocate from Lancaster to Preston. However, we have set out a range of mitigations below which we feel will ensure access to justice is maintained.

1.27 Overall, the demographics of these areas seem broadly in line with little variance that might present disproportionate impact on any particular group. We do not feel therefore that the proposals are discriminatory, and any potential impact can be mitigated by measures such as later hearing start times and listing hearings at an alternative venue where appropriate.

## Other data sources

**1.28** To enhance our understanding of the potential impact on protected characteristics we have explored alternative sources of data that might help us understand the demographic makeup of potential court users and those that might interact with the justice system. Our data sources are limited, and we have been unable to identify a data source that would provide a comprehensive assessment. However, we have found data that provides an overview of protected characteristics.

**1.29** The information provided below (Table 3) has been provided as an indication of potential users of criminal courts and is therefore applicable for our consideration of the proposals outlined in the consultation document. We provide an overview of our assessment of this data in paragraph 1.11.

**1.30** Previously in Table 3, results were expressed as percentages of the total population. Due to the most up to date data now being provided as proportions we have updated from using percentages of the overall population to using proportions of each individual subgroup.

*Table 3: The protected characteristics of victims of personal crime (2024/25)<sup>2</sup>*

		Proportion of Characteristics of adults who were victims of CSEW personal crime, 2024/25 CSEW	
		England and Wales	Adults aged 18 and over
			Victims of Personal Crime (%)
<b>Age</b>	18-24	11.9	19.2
	25-34	11.6	19.7
	35-44	11.2	18.4
	45-54	11.8	18.5
	55-64	11.3	17.3
	65-74	9.6	14.1
	75+	7.2	10.1
<b>Disability/ Illness status</b>	No disability/illness	10.2	16.5
	Disability/illness	13.6	19.7
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married/civil partnered	10.4	16.3
	Cohabiting	11.9	19.4
	Single	11.1	18.5
	Separated	13.7	20.3
	Divorced/Legally dissolved partnership	13.4	18.8
	Widowed	6.9	9.9
<b>Ethnicity</b>	White	10.9	16.9
	Mixed	15.3	24.2
	Asian or Asian	8.8	16.5
	Black or Black British	12.1	19.0
	Chinese or Other	9.1	15.3
<b>Religion</b>	No Religion	11.4	17.8
	Christian	10.5	16.2
	Muslim	9.5	18.5
	Hindu	7.0	12.9
	Other	22.0	28.4
<b>Sex</b>	Male	10.5	16.5
	Female	11.1	17.7
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	Heterosexual or straight	10.8	17.0
	Gay or lesbian	16.1	23.3
	Bisexual	16.7	25.3
	Other	11.3	19.0

<sup>2</sup> Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics.

## Defendants, victims, and witnesses

1.31 The Ministry of Justice publications *Ethnicity and the Criminal Justice System 2022*<sup>3</sup> and *Women and the Criminal Justice System 2021*<sup>4</sup> show the race and gender profile of defendants and those in the Criminal Justice system at a national level. They show that men and those from a Black ethnic group are over-represented amongst defendants in the criminal courts when compared to the general population from which they are drawn. Data for those sentenced in both the Crown and magistrates' courts in 2021 to 2022 confirm that:

- a) Males were more likely to be sentenced to immediate custody and to receive custodial sentences of six months or longer than females with a similar criminal history.
- b) Relative to the population, rates of sentencing for Black offenders over two times higher, and a third higher for mixed race offenders, relative to offenders from the White ethnic group; a trend mirrored in prosecutions.

1.32 There is no comprehensive source of data on the protected characteristics of victims and witnesses who may appear in the criminal courts. However, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (2021/22)<sup>5</sup> shows that the following groups of people are over-represented as victims of personal crime when compared to the general population:

- a) Single people (37% of all victims, compared to 23% of the general population).
- b) Those from ethnic minorities (excluding white minorities) backgrounds (17.2% of all victims, compared to 12.3% of the general population).
- c) Those with disability (25.9% of all victims, compared to 19.9% of the general population).

1.33 While groups of people sharing particular protected characteristics may be over-represented amongst victims, we are unable to quantify whether such over-representation equates to victims and witnesses who use the criminal courts. The data in Table 2 has been provided as a means of an assessment of impacts, while remaining live to the limitations of this as a proxy.

## Other Impacted Groups

1.34 Other groups potentially impacted by the proposed closure include the judiciary and legal professionals. Statistics from the Judicial Office show that males, those of White ethnicity and those aged 50 years and older are over-represented within the judiciary compared to the general population. The practising bar and practising solicitors are more diverse, though men remain over-represented in both professions.

1.35 With regards to other HM Courts & Tribunals Service staff, equality assessments will be carried out by HR at the Business Unit level and the impact on protected characteristics will be fully assessed once the impact on individuals has been understood. We will engage with staff at the implementation stage to carefully assess any equalities issues and work through possible mitigations. As no staff or judges are permanently based at Lancaster Crown Court, we do not consider that there will be impacts arising from these proposals.

## Mitigations

1.36 We recognise that as courts close, we need to continue to modernise and improve the way we deliver front line services and to make the most of technological advancements and efficiencies. We also need to continue to provide reasonable adjustments for court users to ensure access to justice is maintained. There are a number of mitigations that we are either considering (or are already in place) that will help to minimise the impact of court closures on court users. The list below provides examples that although may not be of direct relevance to criminal hearings such as those heard at Lancaster Crown Court, they are of wider benefit to HMCTS and in so doing improve access to justice as a whole. These mitigations include the following:

- a) All guidance material, together with information about processes, are made available online through GOV.UK and the Justice website. This would include: the location, directions to and available facilities of the relevant court or tribunal, guidance on mediation, how to make a claim, how to appeal, and how to make a complaint. In addition, these websites provide useful links and signposts users to related websites such as: Resolution, National Family Mediation, Community Legal Advice, Citizens Advice, Consumer Direct, Ofcom and Ofgem amongst others. Public information is reviewed regularly.
- b) Provision of business and contact centres for some services (e.g. County Court Money Claims Centre) mean that services can be accessed by post and phone until the hearing (if a hearing is required).
- c) Online services, such as Money Claims Online and Possession Claims Online allow online access to services up to the hearing stage (if required).
- d) Alternative Dispute Resolution is promoted where appropriate, which reduces reliance on court hearings.

3 [Ethnicity and the Criminal Justice System 2022 - GOV.UK](#)

4 [Women and the Criminal Justice System 2021 - GOV.UK](#)

5 [Crime in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

- e) Reasonable disability adjustments are undertaken in courts in accordance with the existing reasonable disability adjustments policy. Guidance is available to all staff, along with a central advice point, and has recently been updated with training due to be rolled out to staff during this year. Examples of adjustments relevant to this decision included:
  - identification of blue badge parking near the receiving court for those with mobility difficulties.
  - use of the staff car park where necessary for disabled users; and consideration of an alternative venue where access is problematic.
- f) Video links for criminal courts are used as follows:
  - prison to court video links allow defendants to appear from custody in magistrates' courts.
  - additional video links are within the court to allow vulnerable witnesses to give evidence without facing the defendant; and
  - the court will always decide whether it is appropriate to conduct a hearing in a certain way, and the parties will also be able to make representations. In making its decision the court should consider whether any parties or witnesses have a disability (e.g. visually or hearing impaired) or are vulnerable and would benefit from face-to-face contact to be able to effectively participate in the case.
- g) Assisted Digital provision will support the digital access needs of individuals who are currently not able to easily engage with online services to ensure reasonable adjustments are made.
- h) Facilities and provisions at the remaining sites can include disabled access, hearing enhancement facilities, baby changing facilities and video conferencing and prison link facilities. The exact facilities available at a court site can be found on our website: <https://courttribunalfinder.service.gov.uk/search/>. If appropriate facilities are not available arrangements can be made by contacting the court to determine reasonable adjustments that might be made, including, where necessary, use of an alternative venue.

## Conclusions

- 1.37 We acknowledge that the closure of Lancaster Crown Court would mean longer journey times for some users, had the court been operational. These journey times will be reasonable based on our stated measure of what constitutes a reasonable journey. It is important to also note that attending a criminal court is typically a rare event for most people and the volume of cases involved in these proposals is very small. However, we acknowledge that there will be some users who will find longer journey times problematic. As we do currently, specific access issues will be taken into account at the point of listing a hearing – for example providing a later start time or finish time if required.
- 1.38 Although increased journeys have the potential to impact some people with protected characteristics, the impact is expected to be limited and justified in the context of the aim of the policy. The mitigations set out above will continue to ensure access to justice is maintained. Many of the services traditionally accessed by face-to-face visits to court are being offered online. Some court hearings can also be conducted via telephone or video link and court users are being offered local alternatives to court hearings (mediation). All of these measures are reducing the need to travel to court buildings to access court services.
- 1.39 For those people who still need to attend court, reasonable disability adjustments are offered and other measures such as later court hearing start times will help to minimise impacts for those with transport difficulties.
- 1.40 In the long-term, the savings generating from the closure will contribute towards funding and improving court and tribunal services. Overall, we consider that the decision to close Lancaster Crown Court and the likely resulting impacts considered above represent a proportionate means of achieving the legitimate aim of a modernised, efficient court and tribunal service.
- 1.41 This Equalities Statement has been updated from the version used in the consultation document









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