



HM Courts &
Tribunals Service

Response to the consultation on the future of **Stirling** **SSCS Tribunal Hearing Centre**





HM Courts &
Tribunals Service

Response to the consultation on the future of **Stirling** **SSCS Tribunal Hearing Centre**

A consultation produced by HM Courts & Tribunals Service,
part of the Ministry of Justice. It is also available at <https://consult.justice.gov.uk/>

Contents

Introduction and contact details.....	1
Foreword.....	2
Background	3
Summary of responses.....	4
Responses to the proposal.....	5
Conclusion and next steps.....	8
The consultation criteria.....	8
Annex A – List of respondents.....	9
Annex B – Equalities Statement	10

Introduction and contact details

This document is the post-consultation report for the consultation paper, Proposal on the future of Stirling SCS Tribunal Hearing Centre.

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

This report is also available on the Ministry of Justice's website: 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 6 August 2025, HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) published a four-week consultation, proposing the permanent closure of Stirling SSCS Tribunal Hearing Centre.

Stirling Tribunal Hearing Centre hears cases in the Social Security and Child Support (SSCS) chamber of the First-tier Tribunal. This is a reserved tribunal which determines cases in regard to benefits and similar payments administered by the UK Government. Over time, some parts of the reserved tribunals have transferred to the Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service (SCTS). The Scottish Government now administers its own benefit schemes within the Scottish Social Security Agency, and therefore some of the associated SSCS tribunals are now administered by SCTS.

As a consequence of these changes, the number of cases being listed into Stirling Tribunal Hearing Centre has reduced significantly, and the majority of these cases are now being heard remotely, rather than in person. The hearing capacity provided by Stirling Tribunal Hearing Centre is no longer required, and retention of the site no longer represents value for money. The small number of cases where a face-to-face hearing is requested or required, can instead be heard at Glasgow Tribunal Hearing Centre where there is sufficient physical capacity.

The consultation closed on 3 September 2025. A total of six responses were received, and each response has been carefully considered. As the Delivery Director responsible for managing the operations of HM Courts & Tribunals Service tribunals in Scotland, I am very grateful to everyone for taking the time to provide their views.

Following careful consideration and analysis of each of the responses received, the Lord Chancellor has decided to permanently close Stirling SSCS Tribunal Hearing Centre.

HMCTS will work to formally decommission and exit the property which we expect to complete by March 2026. We will use existing Tribunals User Groups to ensure stakeholders are kept updated on progress of the decommissioning, alongside other formal communications channels.

Louise Hird

Delivery Director, HM Courts & Tribunals Service, Scotland Tribunals

Background

The consultation paper 'Proposal on the future of Stirling SSCS Tribunal Hearing Centre' was published on 6 August 2025. It invited comments on a HMCTS proposal to permanently close Stirling SSCS Tribunal Hearing Centre.

Responses were invited from anyone with an interest or view on the proposal outlined. The proposal was for the permanent closure of Stirling SSCS Tribunal Hearing Centre, with face-to-face hearings being relocated to Glasgow Tribunal Hearing Centre.

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 period closed on 3 September 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

Overview of responses received.

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

- three were from representatives of voluntary sector organisations
- one was from a representative of another public body
- one was from a member of the judiciary, and
- one was from a MP

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.

One response was in favour of the proposal, four responses were against, and one response was neutral.

Comments of those supportive of the proposal noted that the building is underutilised and hearings are frequently cancelled.

A summary of the responses against the proposal included comments that the removal of face to face hearings might reduce participation and increase travel time and costs to tribunal users and to the organisations that support users.

Responses to the proposal

Decision on Stirling SSCS Tribunal Hearing Centre

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 Stirling SSCS Tribunal Hearing Centre.

Work will commence to exit the lease and decommission the site before a full return to the landlord. There are no staffing implications as staff and judiciary are based in Glasgow and assigned to Stirling as required. When the decommissioning plans are confirmed, we will write to stakeholders to inform them of when Stirling SSCS will cease hearings.

The following section of this document summarises responses in relation to Stirling SSCS Tribunal Hearing Centre and HM Courts & Tribunals Service's reaction to each emerging theme or area of concern.

Access to justice

Six responses raised points relating to access to justice. These were commonly about the additional time and cost involved in travelling to Glasgow for any future face to face hearings. The nature of SSCS work also means that most appellants have either some mobility or mental health issues which could make attendance more difficult or overwhelm a tribunal user not used to the area. Service providers also thought that their clients may struggle with using technology for remote hearings, and that face to face hearings can be better, as the judiciary are able to see any challenges faced by tribunal users directly.

Below is a representative selection of comments submitted in relation to this theme.

"Many of our client's would also be unable to travel to Glasgow due to the time taken on a bus/train/car, the fact they cannot plan a journey and it would be an unfamiliar area for many of them." **(Representative of a voluntary sector organisation)**

"My only concern would be that some appellants who do prefer a face to face hearing, would be put off requesting this, if a distance has to be travelled." **(Member of the Judiciary)**

"Closing would have a detrimental impact on our clients. We encourage clients to attend Tribunals face-to-face, as we feel this gives the Tribunal a better insight and understanding into a client's health conditions and how this impacts them." **(Representative of another public body)**

"If Stirling closes, the person in Stirling will be placed at a disadvantage; they'll face higher travel costs and spend more time getting to their hearing." **(Member of Parliament)**

Response

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

The travel times set out in the consultation document were calculated using public transport journey times entered into Google Maps. Some responses highlighted that the Glasgow Tribunal Hearing Centre is a 15 minute walk from the train station at Glasgow Queen Street, but our analysis shows that public transport is readily available for this journey, and if an appellant had severe mobility issues, we can be requested to organise a taxi for that journey.

We accept that by its very nature, the work of the SSCS chamber deals with appeals to DWP benefits and payments related to disability or mobility issues. The majority of cases in Stirling currently are dealt with either on paper, or by remote hearing.

As set out in our consultation, there are mitigations in place to support face to face hearings where requested and required, including in some cases the tribunal paying reasonable taxi costs to enable an appellant to attend their hearing. Tribunal hearing start times can also be amended, subject to judicial agreement, to allow for extra time to travel. The advice given by HMCTS to all tribunal users is to contact the tribunal at the earliest opportunity to discuss any requirements or reasonable adjustments that may be required.

Operational efficiency

There was one response that highlighted operational efficiency. This noted that the venue is currently underutilised, and hearings are frequently cancelled.

Response

Due to devolution, with the Scotland Social Security Agency assuming responsibility for many benefits that had previously been issued and managed by the Department of Work and Pensions, the amount of work that is being handled by the HMCTS SSCS Chamber is decreasing significantly in Scotland. The number of appeals heard by the SSCS in Stirling has reduced significantly year on year. The majority of cases are dealt with on paper or via remote hearings. There are no staff or judiciary based in Stirling and they are assigned from Glasgow Tribunal Hearing Centre to operate Stirling when required.

One response mentioned that Stirling SSCS also hears cases from Scotland's Social Security Agency as well. SCTS on occasion hires a hearing room at Stirling for hearing SCTS cases. They pay a hire fee to do so. In the past year, they have hired a hearing room on 11 separate occasions, and on nine of those days we opened the building specifically to do so.

From 1 April to 31 August 2025, there have been a total of 15 face to face cases heard at Stirling SSCS from its catchment area. There were three hearing days per month in April, May and June 2025, but in June and July 2025 this dropped to just two hearing days per month, and this trend is forecast to continue. Also in this time, there have only been six receipts of cases pertaining to Personal Independence Payment, Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance, which are amongst the most significant benefits managed by DWP.

Given the utilisation data above, closing Stirling SSCS would impact a very small number of tribunal users, with the required level of hearings forecasts to continue to decrease, the site would not be operationally viable in the long term.

Value for money

No responses provided commentary on value for money. There was one response which suggested that we only open the tribunal hearing centre on set days of the week, and not have it staffed full time to reduce costs.

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 appropriately. Stirling SSCS is a leasehold property. We have to pay for building costs such as rent, rates, utilities and security. The building was used on average once a week in 2024/25, which does not represent value for money. While there may be some costs associated with exiting our lease, such as dilapidations, the saving in operating costs will offset this.

As regards the suggestion, the building is in effect only used on this basis currently. While there is permanent security presence on site at all times, there are no HMCTS staff or judiciary based at this location.

Other considerations

There were five responses which gave views that could not be categorised into the three main themes. Most of these highlighted that extra travel would cost time and money to the services which can support tribunal users, reducing their ability to help other clients. One comment asked if we had considered closing the Glasgow venue instead and retaining the venue in Stirling. There were also suggestions to initiate some form of local hub or sharing premises with other public services to provide a face to face contingency. Another suggestion was for paying tribunal users in advance of travelling to Glasgow to claim any travel costs, as they may not have the capacity to pay. Also, to consider paying travel costs for advice service representatives to accompany clients, given limitations on their own funding.

"It is also much more straightforward for advisers who may be attending as representatives. Journey time would be greatly increased, and this would mean we could not offer representation to as many clients. If we did represent these clients, we would then have reduced availability to assist others." **(Representative of a voluntary sector organisation)**

"It would take us much longer to get to and from Glasgow so less clients would be able to be advised and assisted by us as a result bureau resources may also prevent us from being able to represent client's if Centre is in Glasgow." **(Representative of a voluntary sector organisation)**

"If the current premises were to close then I would respectfully suggest that consideration be given to local hubs being used for appeals. This could be in shared premises such as Courts, or Local Authority Buildings, in the respective areas where appeals are to be heard. The advantage of this is that it would provide a cost effective locally based service which would be more client need focused." **(Representative of a voluntary sector organisation)**

"I'm concerned that whenever services are reduced, we tend to fall back on Glasgow or Edinburgh. Has any thought been given to closing the Glasgow centre and keeping provision in Stirling instead? If so, what were the reasons for the decision, and if not, why wasn't that option considered?" **(Member of Parliament)**

"If the Tribunal Hearing Centre in Stirling is to close, consideration should be given to paying travel expenses upfront for clients to ensure that they have the means to get to Glasgow if having to travel for an in-person tribunal. Consideration to paying for representatives travel expenses - organisations representing clients will also have strict budgets and may not be able to afford to reimburse their team members." **(Representative of another public body)**

Response

HMCTS recognises the support given to tribunal users by other advice organisations. Our utilisation data, shows these changes would impact a small number of tribunal users and only a small number will end up being heard face to face in Glasgow. This may lead to only limited impacts on the organisations that support tribunal users.

This proposal has been to consider the closure of Stirling SSCS, with face to face hearings transferred to Glasgow Tribunal Hearing Centre. Glasgow is a large administrative centre where work on cases across all tribunals in Scotland is conducted, as well as offering up to 20 hearing rooms. Stirling is strictly a hearing venue and has neither the hearing capacity, nor the capacity to accommodate the administrative infrastructure currently provided by the tribunal venue in Glasgow.

The number of cases heard by SSCS in Stirling has reduced significantly, and it is expected to continue to decrease or remain at extremely low levels. Given the high proportion of those cases that are dealt with on paper or remotely, and the support offered to assist users with travel difficulties where a face to face hearing is requested, we do not consider the establishment of a local hub in Stirling to be proportionate. We would encourage any tribunal user who may have difficulties in attending their hearing, to contact us at the earliest opportunity. There are a range of measures that can be considered to assist.

Conclusion and next steps

Following the Lord Chancellor's decision to close Stirling SSCS Tribunal Hearing Centre, we will work to exit the lease and fully decommission the building.

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:

- Falkirk Citizens Advice Bureau
- Clackmannanshire Citizens Advice Bureau
- A member of the Judiciary
- Chris Kane MP
- Stirling Council

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:
 - a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the EA;
 - b) Advance equality of opportunity between different groups (those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not);
 - c) 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 reform and 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 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. We have looked at data drawn from the Office for National Statistics as well as survey data undertaken by HMCTS.

Protected characteristics impacts

- 1.7 We have assessed the available data on the characteristics of age, disability, sex, race, marital status, and religion. Our current assessment is that the catchment area for Stirling is representative of the national population and only have slight differences in certain demographics. The population living with a disability is very slightly lower 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 disadvantage for people with the protected characteristics of sex, race, age or religion. Furthermore, we do not consider that the closure will have a greater impact on these particular groups when compared to the nation’s population as a whole. Nonetheless we will consider these alongside any equality impacts identified in the responses to the consultation.
- 1.9 A significant portion of the workload at Stirling would be in relation to Personal Independence Payment (PIP) appeals, and by its nature we would expect the demographics of those making an appeal of this kind to have a disability or long-term health condition. However, receipts of these kinds are decreasing to single digits per month as workloads migrate to the Scottish Tribunal system. We have considered these users in Table 1 and Table 2 which includes the proportion of those living with a disability for those living near the court as well as those who rely on Stirling hearing centre as their closest court by public transport. We do not consider the closure to have a greater impact on those with a disability when compared to the national population.

- 1.10 Although we do not currently have data on the protected characteristic of gender reassignment, and only limited data on sexual orientation, we do not consider that the proposal is likely to result in any disadvantage for people with these protected characteristics when compared to the general population.
- 1.11 To supplement our evidence, in Table 3 we have provided data from the HMCTS protected characteristics questionnaire 2023 which details the protected characteristics of those who use our courts. We have taken the data relating to SSCS responses and are split by digital and paper responses. We acknowledge that this data does not necessarily correlate to all court users and are provided voluntarily, however, it provides a helpful indication of a cross-section of the population likely to use tribunals.
- 1.12 Our initial assessment noted the limitations in the available data to assess the extent of impacts on the remaining protected characteristics of sexual orientation. The information provided in Table 3 allows us to identify the characteristics of those who were users of tribunals, which includes sexual orientation and characteristics of gender reassignment however, we are unable to obtain similar data from the areas close to and reliant on Stirling as their closest court for these protected characteristics.
- 1.13 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 2% 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 Scotland population as a whole.
- 1.14 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.
- 1.15 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

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

Advancing equality of opportunity

- 1.17 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 particular 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

- 1.18 Consideration has been given to this objective that indicates it is unlikely to be of particular relevance to the proposal.

Court user data

- 1.19 HMCTS collects certain information on users of individual courts and tribunals, we have shown some of this data in table 3 however this may not be comprehensive for protected characteristics and is provided on a voluntary basis. We have mainly assumed that court and tribunal users are likely to be drawn from, and roughly representative of, the general population living a) in the vicinity of the court and tribunal buildings, and b) resident in local areas where the courts and tribunals are the closest venue of that jurisdiction.
- 1.20 This analysis has considered protected characteristics of populations at intermediate zones (IZs¹) level as recorded in the 2022 Scottish Census. The areas for which these courts and tribunals are the closest venue have been calculated based on our travel times provider from the population centroid of the IZs to the coordinates of the court postcode, where this is the shortest journey by public transport.
- 1.21 The proposals involve the closure of Stirling Tribunal Hearing Centre, and the relocation of work to Glasgow Tribunals Centre. Due to the Falkirk council area falling within the Stirling Tribunal Hearing Centre catchment area and being a similar size population, we have also included the protected characteristics of that area. These three Council areas have therefore

¹ Intermediate zones are a geographic hierarchy designed to improve the reporting of small area statistics in Scotland. The population for these zones are between 5,000 – 15,000 people or 2,000 – 6,000 households.

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 below, in Table 1.

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

		Population resident in Council Area 2019			Scotland
		Stirling Tribunal Hearing Centre		Glasgow Tribunals Centre	
EPIMS		198561		366559	
Council Area 2019		<i>Stirling</i>	<i>Falkirk</i>	<i>Glasgow City</i>	
Site closures		1		0	
Gender	Male	48%	49%	49%	49%
	Female	52%	51%	51%	51%
Age	0-15	16%	17%	15%	16%
	16-24	14%	9%	15%	11%
	25-39	16%	18%	26%	19%
	40-64	34%	36%	30%	34%
	65+	20%	20%	14%	20%
Disability	Disability	22%	25%	26%	24%
	No disability	77%	75%	74%	76%
Race	White British	95%	97%	81%	93%
	White other	3%	2%	11%	4%
	Mixed	1%	1%	2%	1%
	Asian	<1%	<1%	4%	1%
	Black	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
	Other	1%	<1%	3%	1%
Religion	Christian	16%	15%	26%	18%
	Church of Scotland	22%	23%	13%	20%
	Buddhist	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
	Hindu	<1%	<1%	1%	1%
	Pagan	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
	Jewish	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
	Muslim	1%	1%	8%	2%
	Sikh	<1%	<1%	1%	<1%
	Other religion	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
	No religion	53%	55%	43%	51%
Not stated	6%	5%	7%	6%	
Marital status	Married	40%	41%	29%	39%
	Not Married	60%	59%	71%	61%

Note: Data is based on the population resident in Council area in which the court is located, this also includes the council area of Falkirk as it falls within the catchment area for Stirling tribunal and is a similar size to the area of Stirling. The data is from Scotland's census 2022.

- 1.22 Stirling and Falkirk share similar demographics to each other, there are slight differences such as a larger proportion of 16-24 year olds in Stirling compared to Falkirk. There is also a higher proportion of people with a disability in Falkirk which is similar to the national proportion.
- 1.23 Residents of Stirling share similar demographics with the national demographics. Potential court and tribunal users living within these areas are mid age working-age adults, with higher proportions of those aged 16-24 in Stirling. Over half of those living in Stirling are over 40 which seems to indicate an older population which may impact those who are less able to travel however, this is the same proportion to the national figures. There seems to be a higher proportion of 25-29 year-olds in Glasgow when compared to Stirling and National figures.

- 1.24 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 like the national rates. In the case of Glasgow, 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 11% compared with 2-4% both nationally and in Stirling/Falkirk. The city therefore has a smaller White British population (81%) than the national population (93%).
- 1.25 Stirling and Falkirk has a higher proportion of people stating they have no religion (53% and 55%) whereas Glasgow has a slightly lower proportion (43%) when compared to the general and county-wide population. There seems to be a slightly higher proportion of those with the Church of Scotland faith in Stirling and Falkirk when compared to the national proportions. There is a higher proportion identifying as Christian and Muslim in Glasgow City
- 1.26 There is a lower proportion of those living in Glasgow who are married (29%) when compared to 39% in the national figures. In Stirling there is similar proportions to the national proportions. We do not consider that those with the protected characteristics of age, race, gender, religion, or disability living in these council areas will be impacted by these proposals.

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 2022 Intermediate Zones where nearest court of jurisdiction by public transport		
		Stirling Tribunal Hearing Centre	Glasgow Tribunals Centre	Scotland
EPIMS		S02003780	S02003233	
Council Area 2019		Stirling	Glasgow City	
No. Intermediate Zones incl.²		93	380	
Gender	Male	49%	49%	49%
	Female	51%	51%	51%
Age	0-15	16%	16%	16%
	16-24	10%	11%	11%
	25-39	18%	21%	19%
	40-64	35%	33%	34%
	65+	21%	19%	20%
Disability	Disability	24%	25%	24%
	No disability	76%	75%	76%
Race	White British	96%	90%	93%
	White other	2%	6%	4%
	Mixed	1%	1%	1%
	Asian	<1%	2%	1%
	Black	<1%	<1%	<1%
	Other	<1%	1%	1%
Religion	Christian	16%	25%	18%
	Church of Scotland	22%	19%	20%
	Buddhist	<1%	<1%	<1%
	Hindu	<1%	1%	1%
	Pagan	<1%	<1%	<1%
	Jewish	<1%	<1%	<1%
	Muslim	1%	4%	2%
	Sikh	<1%	<1%	<1%
	Other religion	<1%	<1%	<1%
	No religion	54%	44%	51%
	Not stated	6%	7%	6%
Marital status	Married	41%	36%	39%
	Not Married	59%	64%	61%

Note: Data is based on the population resident in the Intermediate Zones for which the court is the nearest court by public transport journey time as estimated using analysis of travel times to courts. Data is obtained by Scotland's Census 2022.

² Intermediate zones are a geographic hierarchy designed to improve the reporting of small area statistics in Scotland. The population for these zones are between 5,000 – 15,000 people or 2,000 – 6,000 households

- 1.27 Similar to the council areas around Stirling the 93 intermediate zones that rely on Stirling as their closest tribunal share similar demographics to the national proportions. There is a slightly lower proportion of those with a disability (22% for the Stirling IZs compared with 26% in Glasgow and 24% nationally).
- 1.28 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

- 1.29 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 tribunals. 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.
- 1.30 The information provided below (Table 3) has been provided as an indication of potential users of tribunals 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 1.15.

Table 3: HMCTS protected characteristics questionnaire 2023³

Characteristics	England and Wales	Adults aged 18 and over
Gender		
Male	38.9%	44.3%
Female	61.1%	55.7%
Race		
White	84.9%	81.3%
Asian	6.1%	8.8%
Black	4.3%	5.5%
Mixed	2.7%	1.8%
Other	1.9%	2.6%
Religion		
Christian	36.4%	46.2%
Muslim	8%	12.7%
Hindu	0.5%	0.9%
Sikh	0.5%	1%
Jewish	0.2%	0.2%
Buddhist	0.4%	0.5%
Any other religion	2.1%	1%
No Religion	51.9%	37.5%
Marital Status		
Married	31.3%	32.7%

Characteristics	England and Wales	Adults aged 18 and over
Not Married	68.7%	67.3%
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual	92.7%	96%
Gay or Lesbian	3.4%	2%
Bisexual	3%	1.6%
Other	0.9%	0.4%
Pregnant now or in last year		
No	95.8%	98.3%
Yes	4.2%	1.7%
Same Gender as birth		
Yes	99.2%	99.5%
No	0.8%	0.5%

³ Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hmcts-protected-characteristics-questionnaire-2023/hmcts-protected-characteristics-questionnaire-data-on-users-of-reformed-services>

1.31 There is no comprehensive source of data on the protected characteristics of court and tribunal users who may use the tribunal hearing centres. However, HMCTS protected characteristics questionnaire shows that the following groups of people are over-represented as users of our courts and tribunal when compared to the Scottish population in the census:

- a) There was a higher proportion of females who returned the characteristics questionnaire than the national proportions shown in the census. 55.7%/61.1% as opposed to the 51% of females in the census.
- b) The global majority have a higher proportion in the questionnaire as compared to census figures.
- c) There is slightly lower proportion of those that are married when compared to the national census figures.

1.32 While groups of people sharing particular protected characteristics may be over-represented amongst court and tribunal users, we are unable to quantify whether such over-representation equates to court users who use the tribunal 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

1.33 Other groups potentially impacted by the proposed closure include the judiciary and legal professionals. Judicial diversity statistics from 2024 show that the distribution of female tribunal judges across roles is similar to that for their male counterparts. For non-legal tribunal members compared with judges, a higher proportion of non-legal members are female, or from an ethnic minority background.

1.34 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.

Mitigations

1.35 We recognise that as courts and tribunals 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 and tribunal 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 closures on users. The list below provides examples that although may not be of direct relevance to tribunal hearings such as those heard at Stirling tribunal hearing centre, they are of wider benefit to HMCTS and in doing improve access to justice as a whole. These mitigations include the following:

- a) SSCS appellants may claim for the hire of a taxi or private hire car if they are unfit to travel by public transport, are severely disabled that they cannot reasonably be expected to travel by public transport, are in the late stages of pregnancy or if suitable public transport is not available or is not available at appropriate times.
- b) All guidance material, together with information about particular 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.
- c) 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).
- d) Online services, such as Money Claims Online and Possession Claims Online allow online access to services up to the hearing stage (if required).
- e) Alternative Dispute Resolution is promoted where appropriate, which reduces reliance on court hearings.
- f) 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.

- g) 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.
- h) 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.
- i) 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://courtribunalfinder.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

- 1.36** We acknowledge that the closure of Stirling Tribunal Hearing Centre 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. 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.
- 1.37** 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 hearings can also be conducted via telephone or video link and court users are being offered local alternatives to hearings (mediation). All of these measures are reducing the need to travel to buildings to access court services.
- 1.38** For those people who still need to attend court, reasonable disability adjustments are offered and other measures such as later hearing start times will help to minimise impacts for those with transport difficulties.
- 1.39** In the long-term, the savings generating from the closure will contribute towards funding the reform of court and tribunal services including improvements at tribunals receiving the work of a closing building. Overall, therefore, we consider that the decision to close Stirling SSCS and the likely resulting impacts considered above represent a proportionate means of achieving the legitimate aim of a modernised, efficient court and tribunal service.



© Crown copyright 2025

Produced by the HM Courts and Tribunals Service

You may re-use this information (excluding logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/> or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

Where we have identified any third party copyright material you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

Alternative format versions of this report are available on request from HMCTS Estates Consultation at estatesconsultation@justice.gov.uk