



Ministry
of Justice



Judicial
Office

Reform of Local Justice Areas

Consultation response on the future administrative structures of the magistracy

Revised Welsh Language Impact Assessment

Executive Summary

1. This Welsh Language Impact Assessment (WLIA) sets out the joint assessment of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), HM Courts & Tribunals Service (HMCTS), and the Judicial Office (JO) – on behalf of the Senior Judiciary – of the Welsh language impacts arising from the final proposals following the consultation on the reform of Local Justice Areas (LJAs).
2. It examines the effects of the final proposals to reform LJAs in Wales on the Welsh language, including opportunities to use Welsh and the principle of treating Welsh no less favourably than English.
3. The statutory right to use Welsh in legal proceedings in Wales remains unchanged, and HMCTS will continue to plan and deliver services to uphold that right.

4. We acknowledge stakeholder feedback that a WLIA was not in place at the exact point of consultation launch. An assessment was published during the consultation (16 April 2025), with MoJ publicly committing to publishing a further WLIA alongside final proposals, and can be found here:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reform-of-local-justice-areas>
5. Reflecting the consultation response, we will retain all 75 existing LJA boundaries as administrative “Benches”, including those in Wales (consultation response para 22).
6. Reflecting consultation responses, we do not intend to merge a number of LJAs in North Wales, addressing concerns about diluting access to Welsh-speaking magistrates and staff.
7. We do not anticipate adverse impacts on Welsh language provision as a result of the revised approach described in the consultation response, though we will continue to monitor capacities for provision.

Background and Scope

8. MoJ and the Judiciary consulted on options to reform the number and configuration of LJAs in Wales, ranging from status quo to more consolidated structures, to support efficient deployment of justices, legal advisers and case listings.
9. As the final model no longer alters Welsh boundaries, the WLIA now focuses on deployment, continued access to Welsh-speaking proceedings, and ensuring any future changes remain compliant with language duties.

Legal and Policy Context

10. The Welsh Language Act 1993 (s.22(1)) provides for the use of Welsh in legal proceedings in Wales. HMCTS’s Welsh Language Scheme and practice protocols govern bilingual service delivery in courts. The MoJ Welsh Language Scheme and monitoring arrangements ensure consultations and services are accessible in Welsh, and that Welsh language capability is tracked across MoJ and its agencies.
11. The Reform of LJAs consultation response expressly reaffirms that deployment must not undermine Welsh language rights, and any future boundary or deployment changes must demonstrate they do not impede access to Welsh in the courts (para 246 and Equality section).

Assessment of Impacts on the Welsh Language

12. With reference to the previous Welsh Language Impact Assessment, we have undertaken this assessment by drawing only on existing documented sources.

This assessment does not require or involve any new access to live systems or operational data.

13. We anticipate a neutral impact on the use of Welsh in proceedings. The right to use Welsh in proceedings remains; listing strategies must continue to match Welsh language capacity (judiciary, legal advisers and interpreters) to cases. The consultation initially proposed the merging of LJAs in the Caernarfon (North Wales) and Carmarthenshire areas. The primary concern of mergers in the North Wales area was the dilution of Welsh-speaking magistrates, limiting the ability to support Welsh-speaking court users. By not merging a number of LJAs in North Wales, the revised model helps preserve concentrations of Welsh-speaking judicial and staff capacity, reducing potential dilution risks raised by respondents through the increased boundary size resulting in a potential increase of travel.
14. For accessing Welsh Language Services, HMCTS will continue to provide bilingual channels and ensure public information, consultations, and notices are available in Welsh. Welsh-speaking magistrates will continue to be deployed to courts where Welsh is used and will retain the right to sit in Welsh-speaking courts where preferred (para 246). All materials relating to this consultation response will also be available in Welsh.
15. Efficient deployment across LJAs must retain the ability to assign Welsh-speaking magistrates and legal advisers where needed. Avoiding a North Wales merger reduces travel and coverage issues for Welsh-speaking bench members and staff, supporting timely Welsh language and speaking provision at hearings. Magistrates will not normally be expected to travel more than 60 minutes from their home court which will support Welsh-speaking magistrates sitting the majority of their time in Welsh-speaking areas, ensuring Welsh language service continuity (paras 76, 195, 201, 224, 230).

Mitigations and Enhancements

16. Listing and Scheduling Controls continue to tag cases requiring Welsh and schedule in venues/sittings with appropriate Welsh-speaking judiciary and staff, ensuring interpreter coverage as needed. Deployment safeguards will largely prevent Welsh magistrates being routinely placed outside Welsh-speaking courts (paras 76, 195, 201, 224, 230).
17. Staff and magistrate capability tracking will continue to be recorded based on existing data collection processes.
18. The consultation responses and public-facing materials will be published in Welsh and English and enquiry routes in Welsh will remain available to support bilingual communications.

19. Existing guidance on the use of Welsh in court – such as practice directions and protocols – will continue to be highlighted to operational teams. Any capacity issues that arise will continue to be managed through existing listing processes.
20. The retention of all Welsh LJA boundaries reduces the risk that larger merged areas would dilute Welsh-language capability (para 22).

Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

21. Monitoring will continue to draw on existing data sources already used by HMCTS for Welsh language assessments, including internal records of Welsh-speaking staff and magistrates, staff learning Welsh, and statistics on the use of Welsh in court hearings.
22. Monitoring will also include awareness of operational enablers such as available translation equipment and relevant contracted services.
23. Feedback provided through consultations or standard HMCTS complaints routes relating to Welsh language access will continue to inform ongoing assessment of service effectiveness.

Communications and Engagement

24. All public-facing communications (including the consultation response) will be bilingual and clearly signpost Welsh language contact routes.
25. The consultation response will clearly state the intention to retain Welsh boundaries and safeguard Welsh language access.

Conclusion

26. Retaining all Welsh LJA boundaries, limiting travel expectations to 60 minutes, and explicitly guaranteeing Welsh language deployment rights together mean the updated model is not expected to create adverse impacts on the Welsh Language provision. With the existing statutory framework and HMCTS delivery practices in place the proposals should maintain or improve access to justice in Welsh. These proposals uphold the principle of treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English, in line with the Welsh Language Act 1993.
27. Any future reforms will include a full WLIA.