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By e mail

Anthony Douglas
Chief Executive
Children and Family Court Advisory
and Support Service

11 February 2016

Dear Anthony,

As an important partner in our courts and tribunals service, we wanted to make you aware that a written ministerial statement (WMS) was issued a short time ago relating to the recent national HMCTS estates consultation.

The WMS sets out that:

The government is committed to modernising the way in which justice is accessed and delivered. We are investing over £700m over the next 4 years to update the courts estate, installing modern IT systems and making the justice system more efficient and effective for modern users.

As part of this modernisation, the courts estate has to be updated. Many of the current 460 court buildings are underused: nearly half of all court rooms were used less than half the ordinary sitting time last year. They are expensive to maintain yet unsuitable for modern technology. The investment we are making to update the justice system requires us to review and modernise the physical estate as well. Ultimately we will have a more user-focused and efficient Courts & Tribunals service as a result.

On 16 July 2015 a consultation on proposals to close 91 courts and tribunals in England and Wales was announced. Over 2,100 separate responses were received, along with 13 petitions containing over 10,000 signatures.

For each location, it was considered whether the closure would still allow for effective access to justice, whether it offers a significant saving, and whether it would allow HM Courts & Tribunals Service to maintain high quality service provision. Where these conditions were met, we have made the decision to close the court or tribunal.

It is on this basis that the decision has been taken to close 86 court and tribunal buildings and retain five. 64 sites will close as proposed in the consultation, with a further 22 closures taking place but with changes to the original proposals. These changes, many suggested by respondents, include the establishment of suitable alternative venues, such as the use of local civic buildings; or different venues in the HMCTS estate to those originally proposed.

The response document available at <https://consult.justice.gov.uk/> provides a list of all courts and tribunals consulted on and the decision in each case, together with an indicative timetable for closure. Full explanations for the decision to close or retain a court are included in the regional consultation response documents being published alongside.

If you would like to discuss this further, please contact myself or the Estates Consultation Team (estatesconsultation@hmcts.gsi.gov.uk).

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Sadler', is positioned below the 'Yours Sincerely' text.

Kevin Sadler
Courts and Tribunals Development Director