



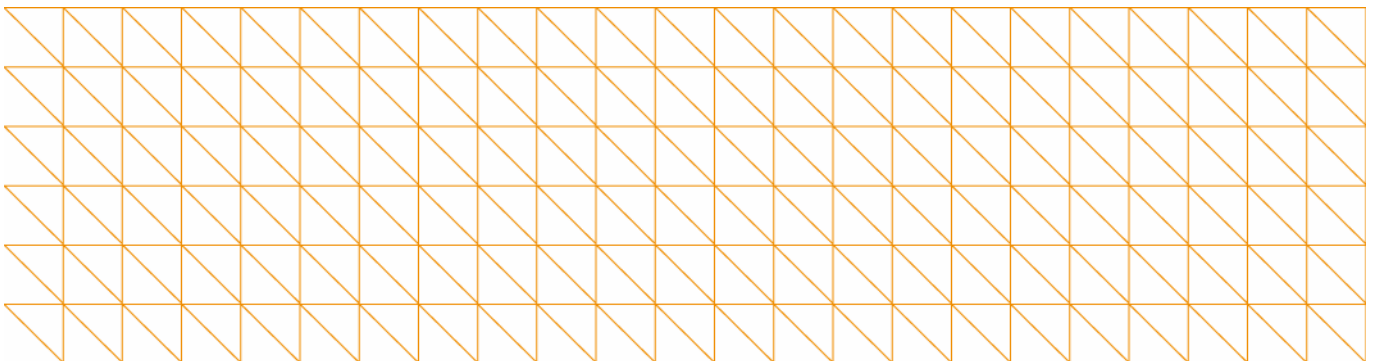
Ministry of
JUSTICE

Proposed Closure of Telford Hearing Centre

Response to Consultation

CP(R) 25/08

[11 May 2009]



Tribunals Service



Ministry of
JUSTICE

Proposed Closure of Telford Hearing Centre

Response to consultation carried out by Tribunals Service, part of the Ministry of Justice. This information is also available on the Ministry of Justice website at www.justice.gov.uk

Tribunals Service

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Introduction and contact details

This document is the post-consultation report for the consultation paper on the proposed closure of Telford 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 **Samantha Fagan** at the address below:

**Tribunals Service
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134-136 Wellington Street
GLASGOW
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Email: Sam.Fagan@tribunals.gsi.gov.uk**

This report is also available on the Ministry's website: www.justice.gov.uk.

Alternative format versions of this publication can be requested from the above e-mail address.

Background

The consultation paper 'Proposed Closure of Telford Hearing Centre' was published on 10 November 2008. It invited comments on the proposal to close Telford hearing centre and to transfer the hearings of SCS appeals to Shrewsbury.

The consultation period closed on 8 February 2009 and this report summarises the responses, including how the consultation process influenced the final shape/further development of the policy/proposal consulted upon.

A list of respondents is at Annex A.

Summary of responses

1. Of a total of 250 consultation papers issued, 10 responses to the consultation paper were received. Of these, 2 responses were from representative groups, 3 from members of the judiciary, 1 from a local authority, 1 from a Member of Parliament, 2 from members of the public and 1 from the Trade Union representing Tribunals Service staff.
2. Responses were analysed for evidence of impact of the proposals, levels of support or concern among particular groups as well as for possible alternative approaches to the subject of the proposals.
3. The most consistent point raised by respondents related to the superior accessibility of the Telford venue due to its ground-floor location. Other significant points related to perceived poorer parking facilities at the Shrewsbury venue, the superior quality of accommodation in Telford as well as the larger population of Telford compared to Shrewsbury and the likely impact of the move on those people.

Responses to specific questions

1. What comments would you like to make on the proposal to close Telford hearing centre?

In descending order of frequency the following points were made:

- That Telford venue is more accessible to people with disabilities or mobility problems due to its ground-floor location (5 responses).
- That the accommodation at Telford venue is of a superior quality to that at Shrewsbury (4 responses).
- That the parking facilities available at Shrewsbury are much poorer and located further from the venue (3 responses).
- That other tribunal cases currently heard at Shrewsbury should be transferred to Telford to increase its use (2 responses).
- That Telford has better transport links (1 response).
- That more people live in Telford and would therefore be inconvenienced (1 response).
- That signage should be improved to facilitate access to Telford (2 responses).
- That both venues are poorly served by public transport and are not centrally located (1 response).
- That alternative premises should be sought in Telford (2 responses).

2. Please describe any particular impacts that should be taken into account and why.

In descending order of frequency the following points were made:

- That access at the Telford venue is superior since the venue is ground-floor, contained on one level and has parking alongside (4 responses).
- That more people live in Telford and would therefore be inconvenienced (3 responses).

- That other Tribunals Service venues in the Midlands are closely located such as Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton (1 response).
- That parking facilities at Shrewsbury are poorer (1 response).
- That Shrewsbury venue has no direct bus link (1 response).
- That the railway station is much closer at Telford than at Shrewsbury (1 response).
- That disabled parking has to be booked in advance at Shrewsbury (1 response).
- That signage and directions at Telford should be improved (1 response).
- That the consultation has focused heavily on rail travel rather than on bus travel and not enough work has been done to determine how appellants get to the tribunal hearing centre (1 response).
- That there must be enough capacity at Shrewsbury to take on the additional hearings displaced from Telford (1 response).
- That the tribunal layout at Shrewsbury is overly formal and inhibits effective communication between the panel and attendees (1 response)

3. Will the closure of Telford hearing centre and transfer of hearings to Shrewsbury have a direct impact on you, or those you may represent? If yes, please explain how.

In descending order of frequency the following points were made:

- That there would be a positive impact since the location was closer (1 response).
- That there would be a negative impact since the location was further away (1 response).
- That there were potential health and safety issues for presenting officers due to the lack of suitable parking facilities (1 response).
- That facilities at the Shrewsbury venue were poorer (1 response).
- That the first floor location of Shrewsbury would lead to hearing cancellations if the lifts were out of order (1 response).

- That the evacuation of Shrewsbury in an emergency would present problems for wheelchair users and others with limited mobility (1 response).
- That parking at Shrewsbury is some distance away, with an uphill approach making access to the venue problematic for appellants (1 response).

Response by the Tribunals Service

The following responses are given to the points raised by the consultees. These have been grouped into overall headings which cover the points identified.

The Telford venue is more accessible

This covers issues such as its ground-floor situation, parking facilities and transport links.

- Although the Shrewsbury venue is not located on the ground floor, it is fully accessible by lift. The premises are fully compliant with the obligations laid down by the Disability Discrimination Act.
- The Shrewsbury venue has a disabled parking space directly adjacent to the entrance for use by disabled visitors. In addition, steps will be taken to make more car parking spaces available at the Shrewsbury venue for use by tribunal attendees who are Blue Badge holders.
- The railway station is closer to the venue at Telford than the equivalent at Shrewsbury, however, the overall transport links within the catchment area are significantly poorer. Access at Telford via the local bus station is also more difficult.

The Telford venue is superior in terms of décor and layout

- Steps have already been taken to improve the layout of the Shrewsbury venue to meet the needs of SSCS hearings. Specifically, this involved the removal of the dais from the hearing room in order to strike the right balance of informality in proceedings and to facilitate communication between attendees and the tribunal.

Telford is a more suitable location than Shrewsbury

- Analysis carried out in 2008 which looked at the locations of appellants attending Telford venue from all parts of its catchment area determined that, over a 12 month period, a total of 467 appellants attended hearings at the Telford venue. Of these, 236 (50.53%) had home addresses which were closer to the Telford venue than to Shrewsbury. The proximity of homes in the catchment area appears to be almost equally split and therefore the proposal does not cause any distinct negative impact on any one centre of population.

- Telford venue is currently under-used and there is sufficient capacity at Shrewsbury for all hearings to be held there.

Miscellaneous

Signage at Telford should be improved

- This does not fit with the Tribunals Service's overall strategic plans for Telford.

The analysis has focused on rail travel and not other forms of transport.

- We do not maintain data on methods of transport used by appellants attending tribunals. However, **both** rail and bus facilities in Shrewsbury cover a larger part of the overall tribunal catchment area.

It would be difficult to safely evacuate wheelchair users from the Shrewsbury venue due to its first-floor location.

- The venue is fully compliant with the obligations laid down by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Strategies are in place (*Evac-chairs*) for evacuating wheelchair users in the event of an emergency and nominated staff are trained in their use and deployment.

Conclusion

1. As outlined in the original public consultation paper, the creation of the Tribunals Service in 2006 unified a number of previously separate tribunal organisations under a single organisational structure. As a result, the Tribunals Service has inherited a hearing centre network which now overlaps, leading to duplication of tribunal hearing provision in certain areas. This is evident in the Telford/Shrewsbury area since the hearing centres are relatively closely located, but cover a largely rural catchment area with a low density of population.
2. The Tribunals Service has a duty both to the Treasury and the taxpayer to ensure that it manages its resources in the most efficient and effective way while still maintaining, or where possible, improving the service it provides to tribunal users.
3. A lease opportunity has arisen to exit the Telford venue during 2009 without incurring additional charges from the landlord. This provides an immediate annual saving of £76 527.00. The lease on the Shrewsbury

venue, however, will not allow for complete vacation before 2018 and any exit prior to that date would incur significant charges by the landlord. Such costs would be in excess of £2M which the Tribunals Service would be obliged to pay. For that reason, the closure of the Telford venue has clearly provided the most practical and economic solution to the duplication of hearing centre facilities in the area.

4. Accordingly, while taking into account the comments received from the consultation, the Tribunals Service remains persuaded that the economic arguments for the closure of the Telford venue outweigh the arguments put forward for its retention. The Shrewsbury venue fully meets all of the Tribunals Service's requirements and is compliant with the obligations laid down by the Disability Discrimination Act. In line with the proposals laid out in the original public consultation paper, the Telford hearing centre will therefore close on 31 May 2009.
5. However, in the light of comments made by the consultees, the Tribunals Service will take further steps to mitigate impact on tribunals users by taking the following actions:
 - Making more public parking available at the Shrewsbury venue.
 - Making alterations to the interior layout of the SSCS tribunal facility at Shrewsbury.
 - Offering, on an exceptional basis, the option of a hearing in Telford for those unable to travel to Shrewsbury. This would be at premises in Her Majesty's Courts Service in Telford town centre.

Consultation Co-ordinator contact details

If you have any complaints or comments about the consultation **process** rather than about the topic covered by this paper, you should contact Gabrielle Kann, Ministry of Justice Consultation Co-ordinator, on 020 3334 4496, or email her at consultation@justice.gsi.gov.uk.

Alternatively, you may wish to write to the address below:

Gabrielle Kann
Consultation Co-ordinator
Ministry of Justice
7th Floor
102 Petty France
London SW1H 9AJ

If your complaints or comments refer to the topic covered by this paper rather than the consultation process, please direct them to the contact given under the **How to respond** section of this paper at page 3.

The consultation criteria

The seven consultation criteria are as follows:

1. **When to consult** – Formal consultations should take place at a stage where there is scope to influence the policy outcome.
2. **Duration of consultation exercises** – Consultations should normally last for at least 12 weeks with consideration given to longer timescales where feasible and sensible.
3. **Clarity of scope and impact** – Consultation documents should be clear about the consultation process, what is being proposed, the scope to influence and the expected costs and benefits of the proposals.
4. **Accessibility of consultation exercises** – Consultation exercises should be designed to be accessible to, and clearly targeted at, those people the exercise is intended to reach.
5. **The burden of consultation** – Keeping the burden of consultation to a minimum is essential if consultations are to be effective and if consultees' buy-in to the process is to be obtained.
6. **Responsiveness of consultation exercises** – Consultation responses should be analysed carefully and clear feedback should be provided to participants following the consultation.
7. **Capacity to consult** – Officials running consultations should seek guidance in how to run an effective consultation exercise and share what they have learned from the experience.

These criteria must be reproduced within all consultation documents.

Annex A – List of respondents

Janine Perry, member of the public

Wayne Felton, member of the public

Thomas Lerwill, Age Concern Shropshire

Kate Watson, Deputy District Judge

Rebecca Low, Telford & Wrekin Council

Deirdre M Gough, Deputy District Judge

David Wright, Member of Parliament for Telford

Tim Kearney, Public & Commercial Services Union

Tom Evans, A4U

Dr Robert Thompson, Medical Panel Member

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Alternative format versions of this report are available on request from Samantha Fagan whose contact details are on page 3.