

Response and recommendations on proposals for the rationalisation of the court estate

serving the community through the administration of justice

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1. Executive Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 On 29 January 2015 the Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service (NICTS) published a consultation document seeking views on proposals to rationalise the current court estate and close a number of court buildings. In summary the consultation sought views on:
- A reconfiguration of the existing court boundaries to take account of changes to local government districts in Northern Ireland;
 - A range of proposals to rationalise the court estate; and
 - The concept of dedicated civil and family centres and the brigading of criminal business.
- 1.2 The consultation document set out the challenges facing NICTS in the context of diminishing resources, before outlining the strategic response NICTS is taking through its Modernisation Programme. The objective of the Programme, which is consistent with the Executive's Programme of Public Sector Reform and Restructuring, is **"to ensure NICTS is structured and resourced to provide efficient and effective service delivery to users; and to have a workforce that is equipped to work in a new and increasingly challenging environment."** The Programme has five Projects, one of which is focused on rationalising the Court Estate.
- 1.3 The objective of the Rationalisation Project is to maximise the potential of NICTS estate in order to deliver efficiencies in running costs, while at the same time ensuring that NICTS can **provide efficient and effective service delivery to users**. The consultation, which centred on a number of key questions, outlined why change is necessary. In summary it set the proposals in the context of diminishing financial and staff resources; falling business volumes; and the underutilisation of many court buildings.
- 1.4 In publishing the consultation NICTS acknowledged the sensitivities surrounding the proposals and noted the impact court closures would have on service users. In summary NICTS asked for views on the permanent closure of five

Courthouses and one hearing centre. The locations highlighted in the document were:

- Lisburn Courthouse
- Ballymena Courthouse
- Newtownards Courthouse
- Enniskillen Courthouse
- Armagh Courthouse and
- Strabane Hearing Centre

1.5 The consultation also confirmed the closures of the hearing centres in Limavady and Magherafelt announced previously in 2012. However in the case of Magherafelt we sought views on the transfer of business to a different venue from that originally proposed.

The Need for Rationalisation

1.6 The consultation noted that NICTS, like every other public sector organisation, is facing unprecedented challenge. Since 1 April 2014 our funding allocation from the Department of Justice has reduced by £4.5m or 10.8%. In addition our income from the fees we charge for processing civil business has reduced by £2.9 m or 10% due to falling business volumes.

1.7 During the same period the number of staff posts within NICTS has fallen by 77 (10.5%). In the context of such change and given that operating and maintaining the court estate accounts for £9m of NICTS budget, it is no longer considered feasible to continue to manage the estate in its current form.

1.8 In making our proposals to rationalise the court estate it is worth noting the scale of efficiencies NICTS has already delivered. Since 1 April 2014 we have:

- Reduced the number of staff posts by 77;
- Relocated the Enforcement of Judgments Office, Tribunal Hearing Centre and the Office of the Parole Commissioners

from leased accommodation to Laganside House, the Royal Courts of Justice and Laganside Courts respectively;

- Temporarily closed the Old Townhall Building;
- Streamlined our corporate service function;
- Reduced the size of our senior management team; and
- Reduced the costs associated with contracted services.

1.9 However, it is anticipated that these measures alone will not be sufficient to allow NICTS to operate within budget in future years. Although there is much uncertainty, it is not unreasonable to assume that NICTS will continue to face significant financial cuts in the years to come. In terms of scenario planning, if NICTS were to face year on year cuts of say 5% over the next few years that would result in a budget reduction of around £1.9m per annum. In addition NICTS would anticipate having to fund its inflationary pressures which total approximately £750,000 per annum.

1.10 Consequently we need to strategically position the organisation to face the challenges ahead. Our Modernisation Programme is therefore seeking to deliver efficiencies and reduce expenditure, while at the same time increase income through a fundamental review of our court fees charging model. Rationalising the court estate is central to delivering our strategy as is the project reviewing our service delivery models. In essence NICTS is required to carefully consider both where we do our business and how we do our business.

1.11 In the consultation paper NICTS set out proposals to accommodate the current level of court business within a consolidated estate. This will allow NICTS to serve the community in buildings that are capable of hearing the full range of court business i.e. our more modern or larger courthouses. It will also enable us to focus diminishing resources on a smaller number of venues and it will facilitate the collocation of judiciary and staff to provide flexibility in deployment. There will also be benefits for other justice partners such as the NI Prison Service.

1.12 Looking to the future, NICTS believe that Northern Ireland requires a court estate that:

- Is capable of providing appropriate access to justice for the people of Northern Ireland;
- has the capacity and flexibility to manage the changing landscape of court business including the trend of lower business volumes as well as any potential increases that might occur;
- can be maintained and, where possible, improve the facilities and services for court users by focusing our funding on a reduced number of venues; and
- is affordable in the long term.

1.13 Later in this document we will summarise the key themes that have emerged during the consultation; the written responses to the questions in the consultation document; and the concerns raised at the public meetings, before setting out NICTS response to the issues raised with us and outlining our recommendations for the way forward in terms of a proposed closure programme.

1.14 Although not a response to the consultation, it is worth highlighting the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) follow-up inspection on the adequacy of the court estate which was published in July 2015 - [CJINI Follow Up Report - Adequacy of the Court Estate 2015](#)

1.15 In that document CJINI supported our rationalisation proposals and made the following comments:

“The costs of maintaining a significantly under used court estate has hastened the closure of some courthouses and more must follow, particularly those where the facilities do not reach current standards.”

“The NICTS should consider the reduced utilisation at Laganside and Lisburn as an opportunity to transfer business from a court building (Lisburn) that has very poor custody accommodation and vehicle access to one of the most modern courts in the NICTS estate. Similar conditions pertain in the case of Armagh and Newry courts and these

changes could be implemented without influencing the longer term proposals for the remainder of the estate.”

1.16 NICTS welcomes the findings of the CJINI follow-up inspection as we do the contributions made by all those who took part in the consultation process.

Consultation Outcome

1.17 The consultation document indicated that in assessing which court venues should close NICTS would use the following evaluation criteria:

- Caseload of each court venue;
- The physical condition of the buildings;
- The numbers of courtrooms available at each building and their characteristics i.e. can they accommodate a range of court business;
- Existing technology available at venues;
- Facilities for victims and witnesses, such as separate waiting areas, voluntary sector offices/rooms and remote link rooms for video evidence;
- Accessibility of facilities for victims, witnesses and vulnerable users;
- Travel time to an alternative venue;
- The cell capacity and access to courtrooms for prisoners; and
- Potential for public sector re-use or disposal or re-sale.

1.18 Following careful consideration and analysis of the 97 responses we received and having taken account of the views expressed at seven public meetings we held, we have revisited our initial proposals and modified our recommendations for closure, in the context of the assessment criteria listed above. The outcome of our considerations are summarised below.

- As a result of the capital investment required to provide a Family Justice Centre commensurate with the needs of users it is recommended that Old Townhall Building should remain closed. The potential to develop it as a Family Justice Centre in the future should be considered as an option in the context of the DOJ Estate Strategy.

- It is recommended that Lisburn close and the business transfer to Laganside Courts. However, as this recommendation is a variation on that contained in the consultation paper, consultees will be invited to submit any further views they may have before a final decision is taken by the Minister.
- It is recommended that Newtownards is retained at this time.
- It is recommended that Ballymena is closed. Following a review of court business levels we believe that with some modest adjustment to the court calendar all business can be transferred to Antrim rather than being split between Antrim and Coleraine.
- It is recommended that Armagh is closed and all business transferred to Newry.
- It is recommended that Enniskillen be retained but that it is designated as a hearing centre and will be open only on those days when a court is sitting.
- It is recommended that Strabane is closed and business transferred to Omagh.
- Following the earlier decision to close Magherafelt, it is recommended that the business transfer to Dungannon.

1.19 The consultation paper noted that the earlier decision to close Limavady and transfer the business to Coleraine was confirmed. NICTS is recommending that this closure should now proceed.

1.20 NICTS recognises that regional centres of specialism can deliver a range of benefits to improve both case management and the court user experience. As part of the consultation proposals we indicated how the introduction of this concept could be facilitated and sought the views of our stakeholders and users on progressing these. However it is clear from the responses received that

there is no overwhelming appetite for such a development at this time. This could be because of the small jurisdiction we have in Northern Ireland, the robust approach to maintaining judicial consistency in court cases and the further travel requirements that this might impose on users.

- 1.21 However this is a concept that is regarded positively by the Lord Chief Justice and we are aware that other jurisdictions are proceeding with specialist centres where possible. The Lord Chief Justice has initiated a review of current arrangements for the administration of civil and family justice and this may impact on how justice is delivered within these areas. We look forward to seeing the outcome of these considerations in due course.

2. Consultation Process

- 2.1 The consultation document issued on 29 January 2015 in line with guidance published by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. Notification of the consultation exercise was sent to a wide range of stakeholders including political parties, the Judiciary, the legal profession and a variety of other organisations with an interest in the court system. A copy of the document was also published on NICTS website (www.courtsni.gov.uk).
- 2.2 The formal consultation phase was preceded by a series of discussions with a number of key public sector stakeholders involved in the justice system. In addition, public meetings were held at seven venues during the period 16 March 2015 to 23 April 2015 to allow local stakeholders and those likely to be impacted by the proposed closures the opportunity to express their views directly to senior NICTS officials.
- 2.3 The initial 12 week consultation period was extended by a further two weeks and closed on 18 May 2015 although two responses received following closure were also accepted.
- 2.4 NICTS received **41 template responses using the response format within the consultation paper** and **56 non-template responses**¹, in the form of correspondence either to NICTS or the Minister
- 2.5 Generally individuals, political representatives and councils responded on a localised basis and did not support the proposals affecting their areas. Other respondents, particularly criminal justice partners, provided wide ranging commentary which generally supported the proposals.
- 2.6 The format of the consultation document meant some respondents replied on a regional basis (North Eastern, South Eastern and Western) and relative only to the venue(s) of particular interest to them. It is therefore appropriate to provide a more qualitative than quantitative approach to our analysis, however a quantitative assessment of the balance of opinion has also been provided.

¹ We received 58 generic responses from NIPSA members; these have been recorded as one non template response.

- 2.7 Although it is not practicable to publish all of the views expressed by respondents these have been recorded and analysed to draw out the key points, themes and concerns that were expressed throughout the consultation process.
- 2.8 A number of key themes emerged from the responses which are explored in Section 4 with a more in depth consideration of responses to questions and NICTS response provided in Section 5.

3. Consultation Summary Analysis

- 3.1 NICTS received 41 template responses and 56 non-template responses.
- 3.2 Of the 41 template responses six either supported or were neutral towards our proposals, 35 did not support the proposals. Of the 56 non-template responses three either supported or were neutral towards our proposals, one response supported some but not all of the proposals and 52 did not support the proposals.
- 3.3 Responses from individuals, political representatives and councils were mainly in relation to the local venues and generally were not supportive of the proposals. Other respondents, particularly our criminal justice partners, provided comments on the range of proposals and were broadly supportive.

Venue Analysis

- 3.4 The format of the consultation document meant that a number of respondents replied on the specific regional basis and some or all of the venues in those areas, while others covered the range of venues in the consultation document. This means that the totals below, which show the number of responses per venue, exceed the total number of responses received.

	Template Responses	Non Template Responses
North Eastern Division		
Ballymena	13	5
Newtownards	5	9
Lisburn	6	6
Limavady	7	1
South Eastern Division		
Armagh	12	14
Western Division		
Strabane	7	2

Enniskillen	11	27
Magherafelt	8	0
General Response	-	11
Total	69	75

Respondent Analysis

- 3.5 Set out in Annex 2 is the full list of respondents who completed, or partially completed, the template document issued with the consultation. Annex 2 also provides a list of the respondents who provided a response other than in the template form - this includes correspondence to NICTS or the Minister which contained comments on the consultation proposals.
- 3.6 Where possible we have tried to identify the “type” of respondent but where this has not been possible we have recorded as an “individual”. If a respondent did not give us their name or other details we have recorded them below as an anonymous respondent. If a respondent asked for their response, or part of their response, not to be published we have recorded them below but will not include any individual comments they have made.

Public Meetings

- 3.7 In addition to the written consultation exercise we also held public meetings at seven of the venues to allow us to listen to and record the views of local representatives and members of the public. We asked those attending, who wished to do so, to record their attendance with officials. We have set out below the attendance recorded at each of the meetings.

Venue	Recorded Attendance
Ballymena	38
Armagh	34
Strabane	18
Enniskillen	73

Magherafelt	4
Newtownards	77
Lisburn	43

3.8 Although it is not possible to publish all of the views expressed at the public meetings these were recorded and these are reflected in sections 4 and 5.

4. Key Themes

4.1 The consultation responses and the views expressed at the public meetings have been analysed by NICTS and collated into a number of key themes. The themes identified and NICTS response to each of them have been recorded below. The themes are:

- Access to justice
- Impact on court users
- Impact on local communities
- Impact on overall public expenditure
- Impact on the administration of justice
- Impact on receiving court venues

Access to justice

4.2 Many respondents suggested that the proposals would restrict local access to justice. Concerns expressed related to:

- a reduction in the level of local participation and visibility;
- increased journeys for court users; and
- more widespread closures than neighbouring jurisdictions.

NICTS Response

4.3 We recognise the strength of feeling expressed by respondents however we remain satisfied that the implementation of our proposals will not prevent access to justice.

4.4 Access to justice should not be about the number of courthouses within the jurisdiction, our focus should be on ensuring that those citizens who need to use the justice system are supported and have access to appropriate services. NICTS would contend that our proposals do not restrict access to justice as they do not prevent an individual's ability to:

- pursue legal advice to initiate proceedings;

- seek appropriate legal aid funding; or
- obtain a fair and timely court hearing.

4.5 NICTS would also contend that even though we will have fewer courts, access to justice will still be available albeit on a slightly wider geographical basis than before. If all the recommendations contained in this document are approved, Northern Ireland with a population of circa 1.8m people covering a geographical area of circa 14,000 km² would be serviced by the following 12 court buildings:

- The Royal Courts of Justice
- Laganside Courts Complex
- Newtownards Courthouse
- Downpatrick Courthouse
- Newry Courthouse
- Craigavon Courthouse
- Dungannon Courthouse
- Enniskillen Hearing Centre
- Omagh Courthouse
- Londonderry Courthouse
- Coleraine Courthouse
- Antrim Courthouse

4.6 While not every citizen in Northern Ireland will require the services provided by NICTS, or ever need to attend a court venue, it is important that when that need arises the services we provide are of a high standard and accessible to everyone. If NICTS does not take action to rationalise the current court estate it is our anticipation that we will not have the funding to adequately maintain even our most modern buildings. In such circumstances there is no question that such an outcome would have a detrimental impact on the facilities we offer and the services we provide. Consequently, through our rationalisation programme, NICTS is seeking to ensure that those citizens that do need to attend court have the best facilities we can provide and we are aiming to do it within a reasonable travelling distance.

- 4.7 We do not believe that a reduced court estate need necessarily reduce participation in the justice system or adversely impact on transparency and visibility. One concern raised with us centred on the ability of provincial newspapers to provide appropriate coverage of court business. NICTS would accept that fewer court building may in some cases present local difficulties but we do not believe these are insurmountable.

Traveling Distance

- 4.8 We have always accepted that our proposals could mean longer journeys for some court users; however in setting the tolerance² in the consultation document for additional journeys we tried to ensure that this impact was reasonable for the majority of the population. Some court users already have to make longer journeys for certain types of court business e.g. High Court business is heard exclusively in the Royal Courts of Justice in Belfast, Crown Court cases are predominately heard in one location within a county court division and Family Care Centres are based in four locations across Northern Ireland.
- 4.9 Our tolerance was comparable with the parameters used during the consultation on the future of the hearing centres in 2011 and also the parameters set in other jurisdictions when they previously considered travel and distance impacts³. England and Wales have recently revised their tolerance to a measure of 95% of citizens travelling by car to make the journey to court within one hour and also based their travel calculations on a central point within geographical areas.

Comparison with other Jurisdictions

- 4.10 Other jurisdictions have also faced the situation of diminishing resources and an ageing court estate and have reduced the number of court buildings accordingly. Respondents suggested that the net effect of the closures we are proposing would be to reduce the court estate by much more than other jurisdictions.

² In the consultation document we sought to ensure that the journey time by public transport from the current to the alternative court venue should not as far as possible exceed 60 minutes.

³ Ireland - between 30 and 60 miles distance between alternative court venues; England and Wales - a travel time to court for the public of 1 hour; and Scotland - ability to travel by public transport to arrive by the start of proceedings and to return home by public transport the same day. Scotland also narrowed their closure considerations to venues within 20 miles of an alternative venue.

However in 2010 Northern Ireland had 22 court venues in operation, by 2014 this had reduced to 19 venues following the temporary closure of the Old Townhall Building and the permanent closures of Bangor and Larne. Under our proposals the number of operational court venues will reduce to 13 which would be a 41% reduction on the 2010 numbers.

- 4.11 A direct comparison with other jurisdictions is difficult given the nature of the makeup of their court estates which can include freehold, leasehold and casual hire premises. However, it is of interest to note that England and Wales have recently published consultation proposals to reduce their court estate by a further 91 venues. This is in addition to the 140 closures which occurred between 2011 and 2014. In 2010 England and Wales had almost 600 court buildings which would indicate an overall reduction of 38% since 2010 should they proceed with all of the closures in their consultation.
- 4.12 In Scotland rationalisation has reduced the numbers of courthouses from 58 in 2013 to 41 in 2015, a reduction of 30%, with an earlier programme of amalgamation of services having begun in 2011. Similarly, the number of operational courthouses in the Republic of Ireland has been reduced from 131 in 2012 to 95 in 2015, a reduction of 28%, however the Irish Courts Service is also building a small number of new courthouses. Overall since 1999 when the Irish Courts Service was established the total number of courthouses has reduced from 240 to 95 (a reduction of 60%).
- 4.13 The approach we are taking to rationalising our estate allows us to generate efficiencies and preserve the essential judicial and staff resources to operate the system as a whole. It also allows future investment, particularly in facilities for jurors, victims and witnesses and in technology, to be targeted across a smaller group of buildings. This will ultimately benefit users by improving the baseline facilities at our court locations and make this comparable across all venues in the court estate. We can target our limited resources on fewer venues and thereby improve the fabric of our remaining buildings and our maintenance programmes.

Impact on court users

4.14 Understandably the majority of respondents and those attending the public meetings expressed concerns about some court users having to travel greater distances to attend court. The tolerance that we set in the consultation document was challenged by a number of respondents in relation to:

- the impact on the most outlying areas;
- the fact that the tolerance applied was based on 'court to court' journeys rather than users 'home to court' journeys; and
- the perception that insufficient information and analysis had been carried out in relation to the impact of our proposals on journey times for court users.

NICTS Response

4.15 The term "court user" is a very broad one and covers a very wide range of individuals e.g. a defendant in a criminal matter, a member of the legal profession, a victim, a witness, a party to a civil action, a juror in a Crown Court case, a party in a family matter, a police officer or other expert witness etc. Not all court users are necessarily vulnerable, but we do recognise that different court users have very different needs and expectations. In developing our proposals we were mindful of the needs of all of our users. NICTS believes that should the recommendations contained in this document be implemented we will still be in a position to meet the needs of all court users, indeed we would argue that implementation will enable us to do so in better court facilities.

4.16 We accept that court closures will, in some cases, result in additional travel distance and cost to court users. In developing our consultation proposals we identified the distances and journey times by private and public transport between a proposed closing venue and the alternative venue proposed. In doing so we looked at the impact that might be caused by the proposals and set what we consider to be a reasonable tolerance level. Put simply, we indicated that:

"the journey time by public transport from the current to the alternative court venue should not, as far as possible, exceed 60 minutes and that

people will be able to arrive at the start of the case in which they are concerned and be able to return home by public transport each day”.

- 4.17 This was consistent with the measure used in our previous consultation on the closures of the hearing centres in 2011; however we accept that many respondents asked us to look at this in a different way, i.e. to focus on the home to new court journey distance and time rather than the court to court distance and time.
- 4.18 There was also considerable comment on the lack of public transport. NICTS would accept that access to public transport is limited in some of our more rural areas. Indeed since we published our consultation document Translink embarked on a similar exercise.
- 4.19 Our starting point in conducting our analysis has to be our own exit survey, conducted in 2011, on how users made the journey to court. This survey indicates that over 62% of those attending court used their own vehicle and this rises to 66% in Enniskillen (with 3.2% using public transport) and 76% in Magherafelt (with 1.1% using public transport). The full results of the survey by venue and mode of transport are contained in Annex 5.
- 4.20 While we still consider the tolerance we set as a reasonable one, we recognised the very real concern that respondents expressed. We therefore undertook some further research and analysis on overall journey impacts.
- 4.21 This analysis was divided into two distinct areas:
- Analysis 1: To review the total journey distance and time by car from a random sample of postcodes within the petty sessions districts of a venue selected for closure, and to compare to distance and time to the current court venue(s) and the proposed court venue(s)
 - Analysis 2: To review the impact our proposals would have had on the journey from residential postcodes of actual PPS civilian witnesses who travelled to magistrate court proceedings throughout the court estate in 2014.

Analysis 1:

- 4.22 We examined sample postcodes from within each of the petty session districts of a venue selected for closure and considered the current journey distance and duration to court venues that courts users are already undertaking. We then compared this to the “new” journey required to reach the alternative court venues.
- 4.23 The analysis showed that for the majority of our proposals the maximum new journeys would be less than 35 miles or a driving time of 58 minutes. There are however two of our proposals where the analysis shows that these would be exceeded:
- the proposal to move Enniskillen business to Omagh would result in some court users undertaking a journey of 40 miles (taking 61 minutes);
 - the proposal that Ballymena civil business, which also incorporates business from the Larne area, moving to Coleraine would result in some court users undertaking a journey of 53 miles (taking 72 minutes).
- 4.24 As a result of the concerns raised by respondents and the additional information from our analysis we have modified our proposals in relation to both of these areas. This analysis also provided reassurance that while there will undoubtedly be an impact on court users, this did not always manifest itself as a significantly more difficult or longer journey and in some cases there was a reduced journey.

Analysis 2:

- 4.25 We carried out an analysis based on information available from the Public Prosecution Service on civilian witnesses attending for magistrates’ court contests during 2014. This enabled us to consider the impact on the journeys for a sample group of 10,319 witness records. For 7,321 witnesses (71%) there would be no change to the journey distance. For 2,998 (or 29%) of witnesses there would have been a change to their journey distance and time
- 4.26 We examined the impact on those 2998 witnesses attending the courts proposed for closure and assessed how the changes would impact on their journeys. We

also considered what percentage of the affected witnesses and the overall number witnesses this impact would apply to. This is set out in the table below.

Impact on Witness	Number Affected	As % of Witnesses Affected	As % of Overall Witnesses
A shorter journey	744	25%	7%
An increased journey under 10 miles	1282	43%	12%
An increased journey between 10 and 20 miles	768	25%	7%
An increased journey over 20 miles	204	7%	2%

We have included, at Annex 3 and Annex 4, the full results of all of the further analysis on a location specific basis.

- 4.27 We consider that this indicates an acceptable impact level but also accept that there may be locations within each area which might be affected more detrimentally by the closures we proposed. However these locations are also likely to have a lower population count with an even smaller number of citizens who may, or may not, ever need to use the services provided at a court building.
- 4.28 Respondents were also concerned about the impact on police witnesses and that PSNI officers would be spending additional time away from front line duties. The Chief Constable’s Office was consulted before we launched the consultation process and as part of the formal consultation process vis-à-vis the impact our proposals would have on the PSNI. The Chief Constable has not raised this as a concern with NICTS.
- 4.29 However given the concerns raised by other respondents we have discussed this further with senior PSNI colleagues. They advised that under the auspices of the PSNI restructuring to align with the new council areas, measures are currently being considered which will significantly reduce the

number of police witnesses who will be required to spend time physically attending court to give evidence. Arrangements have been introduced, initially in Belfast, to allow police witnesses to attend at their designated local police station, rather than court, until such time as the case in which they are involved is ready to proceed to trial. Police officers waiting to attend court will undertake productive “front line” policing duties rather than populate court waiting rooms and will be immediately deployed to operational duties if their attendance is no longer required. It is expected that this will be rolled out fully to all other police areas by mid-2016.

Impact on local communities

- 4.30 A number of responses, and those attending the public meetings in particular, commented on the potential impact of our proposals on the local economy. Respondents also raised concerns regarding the loss of heritage and civic identity for towns and cities that would arise from the closures and suggested there was no possibility of re-sale and buildings would therefore remain empty and derelict.
- 4.31 Respondents were also critical that we did not include the re-sale values within our estimations and suggested that the sale of one building would provide more revenue than the estimated savings from all of the court closures.

NICTS Response

- 4.32 We recognised that communities value the presence of local courthouses and that our proposals would therefore have an impact at a local level. Consequently we appreciated the concerns raised about the potential financial impact on local economies, however without quantifiable evidence it is not possible to reach evidence based conclusions on the extent the impact of closures would have. Equally it would be disingenuous to suggest there would be no impact. The recommendations to rationalise the court estate are borne out of a very real need to produce essential efficiencies within NICTS budget, consistent with fiscal pressures facing the public sector as a whole.

- 4.33 We recognise that some communities regard the presence of a courthouse, even one that is used infrequently, as an important element of that community's heritage and civic identity. NICTS values the sense of dignity and authority that some of these aesthetically pleasing venues afford in a local setting.
- 4.34 However our statistical evidence demonstrates that business levels across court tiers continue to fall; in 2014/15 criminal magistrates' business received had reduced by 27% in comparison with 2010/11 business levels. The average overall utilisation rate in our courtrooms had fallen to 56% in 2014/15 a drop of 11% on the 2011 utilisation rate – annex 1. These rates have been established on the basis of the court being utilised at any point in a given day, the duration of the sitting has not been taken into consideration. While CJINI endorsed this method of measurement and used it as part of their recent follow-up report on the adequacy of the court estate, they also noted that the measurement method used means that even at 100% utilisation there would still be a level of capacity as courts do not sit for complete days in most instances. This demonstrates that the continued presence of so many venues at local level cannot be easily justified. It is the view of NICTS that our business, with minimal impact on service levels, can be delivered in a more cost effective way with a smaller number of venues that are better equipped.
- 4.35 We will remain in consultation with local communities and Councils and hope to find alternative uses for court houses that are selected for closure. A Victorian estate has by its nature limited scope for redevelopment but experience tells us that these opportunities do exist e.g. the original Antrim and Coleraine courthouses have been successfully reinvented within their communities. Currently the courthouses selected for closure remain assets of NICTS and DOJ and as such we are fully committed to ensuring that any vacated buildings including those with a listed status will be maintained. For those that are listed buildings this will be in accordance with the protocol for the management and disposal of listed buildings.

4.36 During the consultation process NICTS invited the Strategic Investment Board to obtain advice on the potential for re-sale of the court buildings we have identified for closure. NICTS knows that such buildings would not necessarily be easy to market and for this reason we did not include potential re-sale of buildings within the savings forecast in our consultation document. However we do have information on the potential re-sale value and marketability of each venue. This is an indicative opinion of potential realisable values, based on a desk review, from a commercial property company.

Court Venue	Potential proceeds if sale progresses within the next 12 months
Armagh Courthouse	£375,000 - £450,000
Ballymena Courthouse	£250,000 - £350,000
Limavady Courthouse	£140,000 - £200,000
Lisburn Courthouse	£250,000 - £300,000
Magherafelt Courthouse	£250,000 - £300,000
Strabane Courthouse	£100,000 - £140,000

4.37 However the re-sale of a court building is governed by accounting principles which restricts how capital receipts realised from the sale of an asset can be used. Any funds from the re-sale of a court building cannot simply be retained by NICTS and offset against the running costs of the organisation.

Impact on overall public expenditure

4.38 Many respondents, particularly those at the public meetings, challenged us on the potential impact on overall public expenditure with a focus on additional Legal Aid expenses and additional costs to the Police Service, Prison Services and Probation Board and the Health and Social Care Trusts.

NICTS Response

4.39 It remains our view, having consulted the various organisations likely to be affected, that the impact on other parts of the justice system will be neutral.

In our consultation, we reported on the pre-consultation discussions we had with a number of key stakeholders which acknowledged the wider benefits of the proposals to their own organisations and agencies.

4.40 This position was confirmed in the formal responses to the consultation that we had from many of our partner agencies. In particular:

- PSNI said that “the reduction of courts will allow for the streamlining of hearings and increased efficiency around certain processes, such as prisoner transfer to court and the use of Court Liaison Officers.”
- Southern Health and Social Care Trust said it “recognises the potential for improved co-ordination and management of services. The reduction in the court estate should not mean a reduction in staff levels from the judiciary downwards so improved co-ordination should be possible.”
- South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust said it “agrees that the reduction in the number of Court locations will assist in the more efficient management of resources”.
- Probation said that a “reduced number of court locations will assist PBNI in making better use of our diminishing resources. Whilst travel time to the courts will be increased for some staff, a smaller number of courts would allow us to better coordinate and manage our resources.”

Legal Aid

4.41 Specifically in relation to the legal aid budget, respondents, particularly solicitors, were keen to ensure that we had accurately “costed” the legal aid implications of the proposals. The NI Legal Services Agency also asked us to consider any potential impact of the proposals on legal aid costs.

4.42 While legal aid payments for representation will not be affected by the proposals there is the potential for an impact on travel and mileage expenses

payable to solicitors and barristers when representing clients who are legally aided.

- 4.43 The rules governing legal aid travel time and mileage allowances are complicated and depend on the type of court business, the designated local courthouse for a firm of solicitors and the location at which the business will be dealt with. We are also conscious that there are a number of on-going reforms to legal aid which may influence the impact of these proposals in the future, however the following assessment is based on existing legal aid rules.
- 4.44 Most of the business conducted in the courthouses proposed for closure is magistrates' courts criminal and family business. Only a few venues hear civil business and none of the venues deal with any significant number of Crown Court cases. We therefore based our considerations on legal aid in magistrates' courts criminal and family business and we have consulted on our assumptions with colleagues in the Legal Services Agency.
- 4.45 When conducting business in the magistrates' courts solicitors are currently entitled to claim for travel and mileage to courthouses other than their designated local courthouse once per attendance regardless of how many cases they deal with in one day. Therefore, should the current designated local courthouse close, a solicitor firm may indicate the courthouse to which that business transfers is the new designated local courthouse for the firm. We have considered the impact our proposals might have on a generic basis, and, overall for the majority of cases we consider that this is not likely to result in additional travel costs in respect of legal aid payments to solicitors. It is however probable that this will result in an impact on travel costs for solicitor firms.
- 4.46 We have set out below some generic principles that we believe will apply and the impact of these on legal aid travel costs. To provide some context we have based these on potential impact under our proposals for Armagh and Newry courts.
- 4.47 A solicitor firm that is located in Armagh and has a designated local courthouse Armagh. If Armagh closes and business moves to Newry courthouse then:

- Currently the firm will receive no payment for travel in attending Armagh courthouse; however they would receive payment for travel to attend at Newry courthouse for any cases they deal with there.
- If Armagh courthouse closes and the designated local courthouse for the firm becomes Newry courthouse then the firm will receive no payment for travel in attending Newry courthouse for any of the work that would have previously been heard at Armagh courthouse or for any case they deal with at Newry courthouse.

Overall this will have a **positive impact on legal aid travel costs by reducing the amount** that would previously have been paid to the firm for travel to Newry courthouse; but undoubtedly this will impact on the travel costs for the solicitor firm in attending a courthouse that will be further away from their office base.

4.48 Likewise solicitor firms in Newry (who have designated Newry as their courthouse) would have been entitled to claim for travel to Armagh courthouse for any work they undertook there. As this business will now be dealt with in Newry courthouse they will not be entitled to claim for travel and mileage and there will be a **positive impact on legal aid travel costs by reducing the amount** that would previously have been paid to the firm; as solicitors will not be required to undertake an additional journey there should be no impact to the firms' costs.

4.49 However there will be a number of instances in which there could be a negative impact on legal aid travel costs, for example, a solicitor firm that is located in Portadown and has a designated local courthouse of Craigavon.

- Currently the firm will receive payment for travel in attending Armagh courthouse or Newry courthouse for any cases dealt with there.
- If Armagh courthouse closes and business transfers to courthouse Newry then the firm would be entitled to claim travel and mileage in attending Newry courthouse.

- As Newry courthouse is further away from the firm's office base than Armagh courthouse then there would be a **negative impact on legal aid travel costs by increasing the amount** that would previously have been paid to the firm. As the solicitor will have to undertake additional travel, but will be recompensed for this, there should overall be no impact on the firm's costs.

4.50 In cases where the legal aid certificate is granted to allow for representation by counsel we have considered the potential for legal aid impact on travel and mileage. The majority of counsel are paid travel and mileage to court if the venue is greater than 20 miles from the Head Post Office in Belfast, therefore on a generic basis the impact on legal aid costs for travel and mileage are set out in the table below:

Current Venue	New Venue	Impact on Legal Aid in respect of travel for Counsel
Lisburn	Belfast	Lisburn is currently within the 20 mile limit from Belfast and therefore barristers are not entitled to travel costs to this venue currently. No impact.
Ballymena	Antrim	Antrim is within the 20 mile limit from Belfast and therefore barristers would not be entitled to travel costs. Any legal aid impact would be a reduction in travel costs.
Limavady	Coleraine	Coleraine is slightly closer to Belfast (approx. 6 miles) therefore any legal aid impact would be a slight reduction in travel costs
Magherafelt	Dungannon	Dungannon is slight farther away from Belfast than Magherafelt (approx. 7 miles) therefore any legal aid impact would be a slight increase in travel costs

Strabane	Omagh	Omagh is closer to Belfast than Strabane (approx. 20 miles) therefore any legal aid impact will be a reduction in travel costs.
Armagh	Newry	Newry and Armagh are approximately equidistant from Belfast therefore there should be no legal aid impact in travel costs.

4.51 When counsel is engaged this would have the potential to result in a **positive impact on legal aid travel costs by decreasing the amount** that would previously have been paid to counsel. However as counsel would not be required to undertake the additional journey they, as individuals, should not be impacted negatively by this change.

4.52 Overall we have confirmed with the Legal Service Agency that the impact of the recommendations for closures would result in a reduction in terms of legal aid costs from travel and mileage.

Impact on the administration of justice

4.53 A number of respondents expressed concerns that the proposals would result in a significant reduction in the number of available sitting days and delay to the hearing of cases. Concerns expressed related to:

- reduction in scheduled court sitting days;
- increased court list sizes;
- extended court sitting times;
- delays in listing cases.

NICTS Response

4.54 The consultation document clearly indicated that the proposals were not predicated on a reduction in the number of scheduled sitting days and that remains our position. They were instead based on the current number of

scheduled court sittings transferring directly to readily available courtrooms on a like-for-like basis at alternative court venues. Nor do we anticipate any widespread increase in the size of existing court lists or the length of time to hear cases at alternative venues.

- 4.55 In preparing our proposals we conducted an analysis of the court schedules, the size of all court lists and court sitting times across all business types. We are confident that the capacity exists to accommodate the business from closing venues into the receiving courts without any detrimental effect of business delivery. Both judicial and administrative staff will relocate with the business and we fully expect that a consistent level of performance will be maintained across all courts.
- 4.56 Our approach has been to accommodate all the existing sittings into the receiving venues; however we believe there is merit in examining the court calendar given the falling volumes of business and lower court sitting times. Listing is a judicial function and we very much welcome the Lord Chief Justice's commitment to review court lists to establish if some court lists could or should be amalgamated.
- 4.57 This work is underway and a number of scheduled days have already been identified by the Presiding District Judge for removal. This will release approximately 13 days per month across Northern Ireland courts. NICTS will continue to work with the judiciary to progress further reforms to the number of scheduled sitting days.

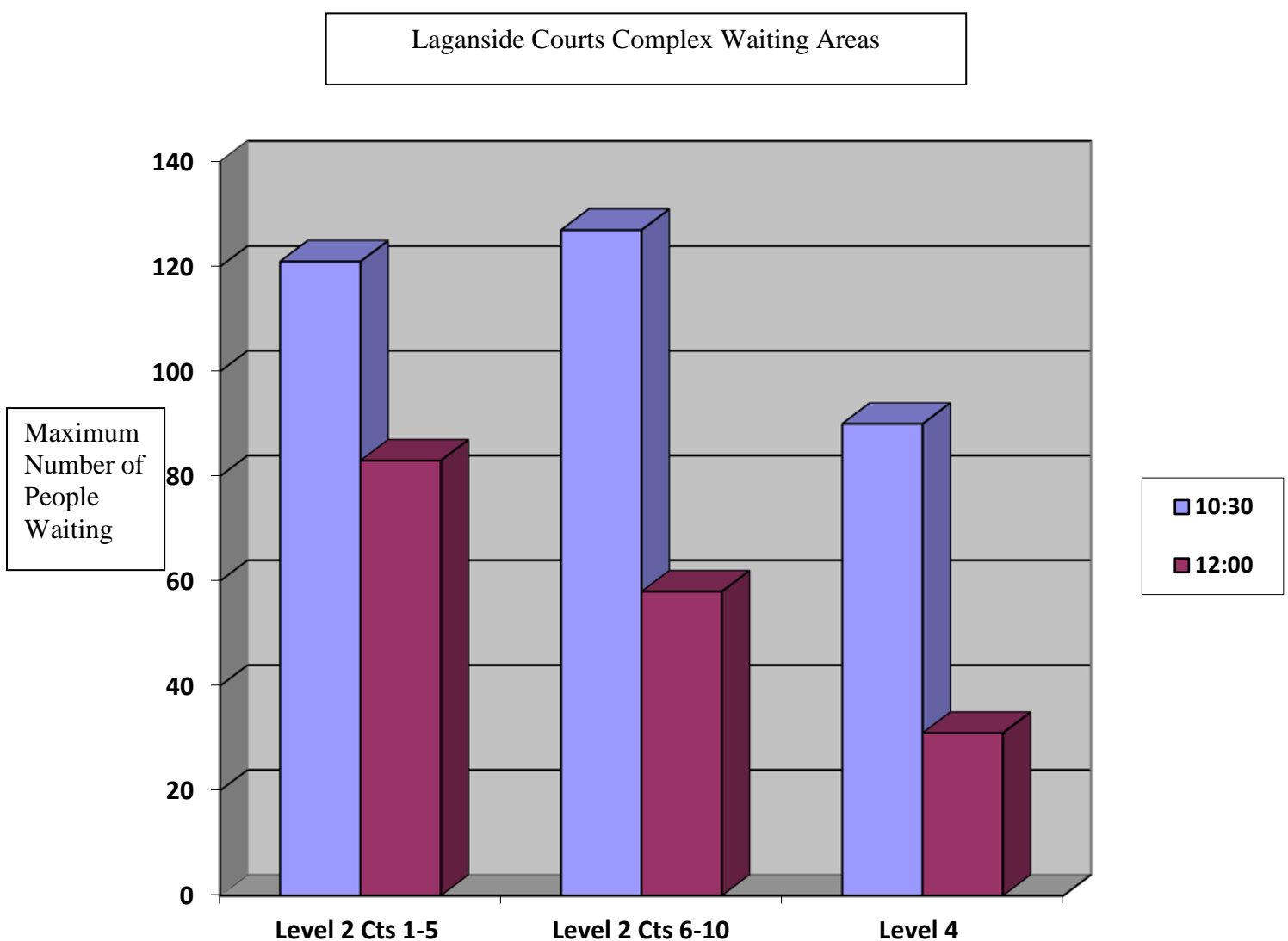
Impact on receiving court venues

- 4.58 Respondents also raised some concern on the capacity of receiving venues to deal with the additional number of court sittings as well as other business such as Tribunal hearings. They raised issues around overcrowding in waiting areas and consultation room capacity in particular.

NICTS Response

4.59 We accept that court venues, even at present, are busy at the start of each court day, with a large number of legal and other professionals and members of the public in attendance. However these numbers generally reduce significantly as the morning progresses and often by mid-day court buildings experience a much lower foot-fall and are often far from crowded.

4.60 The pressure point tends to be between 10.00 am and 11.30 am as can be seen below from information gathered in Laganside Courts during April 2015.



4.61 When we developed our proposals we looked carefully at the current business in each venue which indicated that for the majority of courts in those venues the business was concluded by early afternoon. However we also recognise that

average times do not necessarily reflect the full picture and there will be occasions when courts are required to sit well into the afternoon. Any attempt to schedule business across the full court day would have to be done in such a way as to minimise the risk of contested business, which is generally heard later in the day, not being concluded. NICTS believe this is achievable.

4.62 The Lord Chief Justice in his response to the consultation indicated that he would:

“work with the Presiding District Judge (Magistrates’ Courts) to consider staggering the start times of court lists to reduce overcrowding. This would mean not everyone would have to turn up for their cases at the same time to be heard. This may also cut down on the time that witnesses have to wait for their cases to be heard.”

4.63 NICTS is grateful to the Lord Chief Justice for his cooperation in this matter. It is recognised that careful and focused scheduling of court business has the potential to address overcrowding issues while at the same time providing benefits to victims and witnesses.

4.64 We suggested in the illustrative court calendars contained in the consultation document how business from transferring courts could be scheduled into receiving venues on days when fewer courts were sitting to mitigate as far as possible the increased attendances. It is our objective to ensure that listing potential is maximised at our proposed alternative venues on days that are currently underutilised while maintaining the general segregation of court types within venues. We are confident that the receiving venues can cope with the additional attendances from transferring business.

4.65 Some respondents, specifically at the Armagh and Newtownards public meetings, asked us about the usage of court venues by Tribunals and if there was capacity to accommodate those in the future. The tribunals for which NICTS has statutory responsibility are located within the Tribunal Hearing Centre in the Royal Courts of Justice. It is anticipated that the recommendations for the new court estate will continue to provide sufficient capacity and appropriate facilities to list these tribunal hearings should it be appropriate or necessary to do so.

- 4.66 The Department of Social Development retains statutory and financial responsibility for The Appeals Service while NICTS has administrative responsibility. This extends to the scheduling of appeal hearings in a wide range of venues, including some court venues, providing a valuable regional service to appellants and their representatives. It is anticipated that the future listing of tribunals in the court estate will be subject to further consultation with the Department of Social Development and the President of the Appeals Tribunal.
- 4.67 NICTS recognises that not all courthouses offer appropriate facilities for tribunal hearings nor are there sufficient volumes of hearings held regionally that would justify the retention of those courthouses recommended for closure.

5. Response to Questions

5.1 In this section we look at the specific concerns that were raised by respondents to the questions we asked in the consultation document and also the localised concerns raised in the non-template responses and at the public meetings. This chapter should be read in conjunction with the key themes explored in section 4 as many of these apply across all venues and areas. The tables set out at the beginning of each section below show the quantitative analysis of the template responses we received. It was not possible to analyse the non-template responses in the same way as these were largely venue specific. However the comments made in all of the written responses and those expressed at the public meetings have been considered on an equal footing and reflected in the narrative below.

Drivers for Change

5.2 Section 3 and Questions 1-3 in our consultation document set the background to the consultation proposals and drivers for changes to the court structure. We asked:

Q1. Do you agree that in the current financial position it is right to consider the management of court business at fewer courthouses where there is a suitable courthouse within a reasonable travelling distance?

Q2. Do you consider that the reduction of the court estate will adversely impact on the community's confidence in the justice system? What, if any, steps could the NICTS take to ensure that confidence is maintained at a local level following any closures?

Q3. Do you agree that a reduced number of court locations will assist NICTS and our partner organisations to better co-ordinate and manage resources for the benefit of court users?

Consultation Responses

5.3 All of the 41 template consultation responses considered some, if not all, of these contextual questions. The template response breakdown was as follows:

QUESTION	RESPONSE			
	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	N/A
1	9	20	10	2
2	35	4	0	2
3	3	31	7	0

5.4 As with the overall response theme the respondents from other criminal justice agencies (PSNI, PPS, Probation) or other government agencies (Health and Social Care Trusts) were either supportive or neutral as regards the reasons for change that we set out. They generally agreed that reduced numbers of court venues would assist them by providing opportunities to better co-ordinate and manage their resources.

5.5 Other respondents, while recognising that there were financial pressures to be faced, did not support the closures of courthouses – particularly in their local area. Many respondents suggested that venues could be operated on reduced days or that business could be moved into venues from other locations.

5.6 A number of respondents suggested that closing court venues would increase court sitting times; add delay into the system and increase travelling times and distances for those using the courts.

NICTS Response

5.7 The underlying reality in respect of court business and courtroom utilisation is that there are too many courtrooms, sitting for short periods of time, in too many locations to support the reducing business in a cost effective manner. This has been endorsed by the CJINI follow-up report on the adequacy of the court estate which said

“the facts remain that utilisation has fallen and the cost of maintenance and the need to upgrade the court buildings to meet modern standards is beyond the resources available to the NICTS. Retaining the current estates infrastructure is not an option.”

5.8 As we indicated in the consultation document year on year court business has been reducing. This is a pattern which is continuing and from 2010/11 to 2014/15 the trend has been:

- Crown Court business received decreased by 7%
- adult magistrates’ court business received decreased by 27%,
- youth magistrates’ court business received decreased by 44%,
- county court civil business received decreased by 6%,
- Children Order applications received decreased by 1%.

5.9 Some of the reasons for this downward trend are due to a number of initiatives and changes that have occurred over recent years reducing the business that is brought before the court. These include the increased use of fixed penalties for minor motoring matters, the introduction of other fixed penalty notices for minor offences, and the introduction of youth engagement clinics. We also believe that this trend will continue with the introduction of prosecutorial fines for lower level criminal cases, and the use of mediation and other forms of alternative dispute resolution for civil disputes and family matters.

5.10 The suggestion from respondents that business could be re-located from one venue to another to make better use of venues does not address this underlying position and would simply result in the utilisation rates in one location being increased by reducing those in another location. Nor would it generate the efficiencies NICTS must produce in relation to our budget.

5.11 Similarly there was a suggestion that business that has previously been amalgamated across venues should be split back to all local court offices. For example, family proceedings courts only sit at particular venues across Northern Ireland. If family proceedings business was listed at all local court venues the lower volumes would be insufficient to make effective use of a regular allocated

court day. The result would be an increase in sitting days with consequential additional cost for judicial and staff resources.

- 5.12 Some respondents suggested that instead of closing venues completely we should consider reducing them to hearing centres and as a result they would be open on a reduced number of days. While we understand that this would address some of the concerns with maintaining a court presence in local towns, savings would be minimal and we would still be required to maintain the court estate to an appropriate standard for on-going use. We know from our experience in operating hearing centres over the last few years that partial closure does not realise significant savings in running costs. However we understand the importance of this suggestion and have re-visited the proposed closures in light of it.
- 5.13 NICTS fully accepts, as we recognised in the consultation document, that the proposals we set out will impact on the time and travelling distance for some court users. When developing the proposals we set what we considered was a reasonable tolerance level to reflect this, which was consistent with those set by neighbouring jurisdictions.
- 5.14 We recognise that the limited availability of public transport was raised by a number of respondents who suggested that court users would be reliant on public transport to undertake the journey to court. We accept that this is the case for some users however our own data collected in 2011 reflects that only a small minority rely on public transport to attend court.
- 5.15 The additional research we have carried out has broadly confirmed our understanding of the potential impact when we developed the proposals in the consultation document. It also confirms that although there will be an impact, it will affect a small proportion of the total number of court users and will not be as widespread as perhaps had been suggested by respondents.
- 5.16 It is perhaps of interest to note that this would be supported by information from the last census which indicated that 77% of households in Northern Ireland had access to a vehicle, with 36% having access to more than one. This also

indicated that households in rural areas were more likely to have access to multiple vehicles⁴ while Belfast has the highest percentage of households without access to a vehicle (40%).

- 5.17 We consider that the analysis conducted, as explored under the key themes in section 4, is a sound basis on which to proceed with our recommendations. Further information is reflected in the location specific recommendations.
- 5.18 We have considered all of the additional information we have gathered and listened to the concerns raised during the consultation process. While the research has in the main supported our rationale on the potential impact it did highlight a few instances which we consider require us to modify our recommendations from the initial proposals. Further information in relation to these has been provided in the following location specific sections of this document.

⁴ Source Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency Key Census Data
www.nisra.gov.uk/Census/key_stats_bulletin_2011.pdf

Court Boundaries

5.19 Section 4 and Questions 4-5 in our consultation document we explained the historical background to the current court structure of petty sessions districts and county court divisions and set out our proposals for a new Administrative Court Division Structure. We asked:

Q4. Do you agree that it is appropriate to preserve the link between the new Administrative Court Divisions and the new local government districts? If not is there an alternative model that you would suggest?

Q5. Is the proposed three Administrative Court Divisions' model as set out in Figure 3 the most appropriate? If you consider that the boundary of any of the suggested Administrative Court Divisions should be redrawn, please specify what changes you would like to see made, and give your reasons for the changes you propose.

Consultation Responses

5.20 Again virtually all of the 41 template responses had considered at least one of these questions. The template response breakdown was as follows:

QUESTION	RESPONSE			
	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	N/A
4	7	22	9	3
5	7	16	15	3

5.21 The respondents from other criminal justice agencies (PSNI, PPS, Probation), one of the Health and Social Care Trusts, Ards and North Down Solicitors Association and indeed some individuals, recognised the background and advantages to maintaining the link between court divisions and Local Government Districts and supported the continuation of this as a basis for identifying the Administrative Court Divisions.

5.22 The remainder of the responses disputed the need to link the new Divisions to the new Local Government Districts and questioned the geographical area to be covered by the suggested Divisions. Respondents also expressed concerns that some of the new Local Government Districts, and therefore local councils, would not have a courthouse within the council area.

NICTS Response

5.23 While it is true that under our proposals not every local council would have a courthouse within its area, this was also the position prior to the Review of Public Administration e.g. Newtownabbey, Carrickfergus, Ballymoney, Moyle council areas did not have local courthouses.

5.24 We suggested that each Administrative Court Division would be made up of a number of Local Government Districts as historically business was allocated to courts in this way and it has worked well in providing a framework for listing business. The PSNI have also recently restructured to reflect the new Local Government Districts and given the close links between the police and the courts, it is suggested that maintaining this as a basis for allocation would be of benefit to both organisations.

5.25 Each of the Divisions will contain a number of court venues capable of dealing with the range of court business and generally a case will be allocated to the most appropriate court venue within the Administrative Court Division. However on the introduction of the single jurisdiction reform⁵ there will be additional flexibility to allocate business to another venue for the benefit of court users. This could arise where a party lives close to the boundary, works in an alternative Division, or because transport links make another venue more convenient.

⁵ The single jurisdiction reforms abolish the rigid, statutory court boundaries for county courts and magistrates' courts and create a single Northern Ireland wide jurisdiction the same as already applies in the Crown Court. Administrative boundaries will exist to inform general listing practices but these will be flexible.

Recommendation

- 5.26 On balance we remain satisfied that the link between Administrative Court Divisions and Local Government Districts should be preserved as it provides a readily understood framework for business allocation.
- 5.27 While it is intended to proceed with the three Division model that we set out in the consultation document, there have been some minor changes to take account of the revised recommendations around court closures. A map showing the revised Administrative Court Divisions and court locations can be found in section 6.

Administrative Court Division Responses

5.28 As many of the responses, and particularly the comments at the public meetings, were location specific, we have set out in the following sections the responses to the consultation in each of the Administrative Court Divisions and by each individual venue.

5.29 Respondents did raise many of the same issues which applied across all of the locations and where possible we have tried to deal with these within the key themes. However it should be noted that where an issue was raised in more than one location within an Administrative Court Division we have replied fully in the first location section and limited the comments in following sections to avoid repetition.

North Eastern Division

5.30 Section 5 and Questions 6-9 in our consultation document detail proposals for the new North Eastern Division. The proposals were:

- to re-open the Old Townhall Building, to operate as a family justice centre;
- to close Lisburn and Newtownards and transfer business to Belfast – criminal business to Laganside and family business to the re-opened Old Townhall Building;
- to close Ballymena, with magistrates' court business transferring to Antrim and county court business to Coleraine.

The consultation document confirmed the earlier decision to close Limavady and transfer business to Coleraine.

5.31 In this section we asked:

Q6. Are there any significant factors which you consider would preclude the closure of any of the proposed courthouse(s) in this Division?

Q7. Do you support the proposal to establish Old Townhall Building as a specialist Family Court Centre for Belfast, Lisburn and Newtownards and to list criminal and youth business from these areas in Laganside.

Q8. If Ballymena is closed, would it be preferable to transfer the business to Antrim or Coleraine?

Q9. What impact (positive or negative) would our proposals for closure and transfer of court business have on you? Please give reasons for your answer.

Consultation Responses

5.32 The template response breakdown was as follows:

QUESTION	RESPONSE			
	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	N/A
6	3	25	3	10
7	6	18	5	12
8	Antrim 10, Coleraine 1	10	4	16
	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Neutral	N/A
9	1	25	4	11

The template and the non-template responses tended to focus on individual local areas rather than look at the Administrative Court Division as a whole. Many respondents, particularly from Newtownards and Lisburn court areas, commented on the re-opening of the Old Townhall Building and the capacity of Laganside courts to absorb additional business; we have therefore commenced this section by considering those points raised.

Laganside Courts and Old Townhall Building

5.33 Our proposals included Laganside Courts taking on the criminal and civil business from Newtownards and Lisburn courts and the re-opening of the Old

Townhall Building as a Family Justice Centre dealing with all family work for Belfast, Newtownards and Lisburn.

Consultation response to Laganside Courts and Old Townhall Building

5.34 Respondents, particularly at the Newtownards and Lisburn public meetings, raised concerns about the predicted savings as a result of the closures of Newtownards and Lisburn when balanced against the costs involved in re-opening the Old Townhall Building.

5.35 They suggested that the Old Townhall Building was not physically suitable and required substantial repair and upgrading to re-open. Respondents noted that detailed costings for the re-opening of the Old Townhall had not been provided as part of the consultation exercise.

NICTS response in respect of Old Townhall Building

5.36 We knew that the closure of both Newtownards and Lisburn and the combined transfer of business could not be accommodated within Laganside and that the re-opening of the Old Townhall Building was essential to deal with some of the business from the transferring locations. We considered this an opportunity to explore the establishment of a dedicated Family Justice Centre model in the Old Townhall Building. However we were conscious that this was a consultation process and that the underlying principles of the proposals had to be tested with consultees before we developed further the concept of a Family Justice Centre.

5.37 A small number of respondents, including some working closely with children in the justice system, welcomed the concept of a Family Justice Centre. Various stakeholders also identified the need to invest substantially in the services and infrastructure within the building to ensure it was commensurate with a quality Family Justice Centre.

5.38 As part of the consultation process we have explored the costs of establishing a Family Justice Centre in conjunction with the wider DOJ Estate Review. The conversion of the Old Town Hall to a bespoke Family Justice Centre would

involve extensive modifications to the existing building to provide four substantial court rooms to the specifications required. The costs provided to NICTS are initial estimations from consultants deployed by SIB, who are experienced in this particular type of building work. They used the best information available at this time to estimate the costs however modification of listed buildings can often prove problematic to quantify before work commences and the full extent of the status of the structure is confirmed. On this basis it is estimated that costs, including an appropriate amount of contingency, are likely to be in the region of £3.5m

- 5.39 The capital budget allocation for NICTS would not be sufficient to meet this cost in addition to the current infrastructure programmes that NICTS has committed to. Without sufficient capital investment we cannot at this stage recommend the re-opening of the Old Townhall Building as a Family Justice Centre, but we remain committed to the overall concept. We will consider the potential for the Old Townhall Building to be used in the future as a specialised family centre, civil justice centre or for an alternative business purpose that supports other areas within the responsibility of the Department of Justice.
- 5.40 It is therefore our recommendation that we continue the temporary closure of the Old Townhall Building. This will mean that NICTS will continue to benefit from the annual savings in running costs of £336,000.
- 5.41 However, consequentially this recommendation will directly impact on the proposals we set out in the consultation document for Lisburn and Newtownards. We explore these issues further in the sections below but fundamentally without the re-opening of the Old Townhall Building we accept that we cannot accommodate both Lisburn and Newtownards business within Laganside Court.
- 5.42 Laganside Court is the newest, largest and most efficient building in the court estate and was designed to cope with the operation of 16 courtrooms simultaneously. Having developed the proposals in the consultation, we are satisfied that there is capacity within Laganside Court to cope if we increase the number of court sittings as a result of transferring in business from other locations.

5.43 Concern was raised by a number of respondents in relation to Laganside's ability to absorb additional business and to accommodate youth business in a separate environment. We can confirm that plans are at an advanced stage which will see the creation of a separate youth court facility within the building and provide more waiting areas and consultation rooms. Specifically:

- Youth Court: - Work is underway to establish a separate Youth Court on Level 1 providing a fully compliant courtroom with direct access to the cell area, four consultation rooms, witness waiting areas, secure access to video link facilities/vulnerable witness room and separate accommodation for NSPCC Young Witness Service and Youth Justice Agency staff. It is expected to be fully operational by the end of 2015 and will provide a discrete youth court environment separately located from all other courts sitting at this venue.
- Consultation facilities: - The development of the separate Youth Court and its additional waiting areas and consultation room provision, will in turn free up space on Level 2 for consultation rooms and waiting areas.

5.44 We accept that for a short period each morning parts of the building are extremely busy; however there are ways to alleviate this. The Lord Chief Justice has indicated that he has already asked the judiciary to consider other ways to manage court lists to reduce overcrowding in the mornings and limit the time that witnesses have to wait at court for their cases to be heard.

5.45 We know that Laganside Courts could not accommodate the business of both Lisburn and Newtownards without the additional capacity that a re-opened Old Townhall Building would provide. We have therefore re-considered the options available to us in relation to both venues. We carefully considered the business levels and the scheduled sitting days at both Lisburn and Newtownards court and how these could be accommodated into Laganside Courts. It is clear that while Laganside Courts could accommodate all the business from Lisburn court, it could not subsume all of the business from Newtownards court.

5.46 In addition to the difficulties in accommodating the business levels our further examination of the travel impact for users did indicate that this will be more significant for those from the Newtownards petty sessions area. It is also accepted that users from the Lisburn area enjoy greater and more flexible transport links with Belfast than those from the outer areas of the Ards peninsula.

Newtownards

5.47 Currently Newtownards deals with magistrates' court (adult, youth, and departmental, domestic and family proceedings) and county court (civil bills and small claims). Family Care cases from the area are dealt with in Belfast and Crown Court cases in Downpatrick.

5.48 Business volumes for Newtownards for the past 3 years are set out below:

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Adult Magistrates	2246	3510	3519
Youth Magistrates	226	266	242
Civil Bills	763	885	912
Small Claims	251	248	161
Family	931	1052	915

5.49 Newtownards is not a listed building and was built in the late 1960's. The courthouse is centrally located within the town with good transport links to neighbouring towns and to Belfast. It has four courtrooms, and can deal with Crown Court cases if required. However, it is an old building which, in comparison to Laganside Court, lacks modern facilities and infrastructure. It is a busy courthouse which has recently absorbed the business from Bangor hearing centre when it closed in 2013. It has a particularly high volume of family cases as it also deals with all family proceedings from the Downpatrick area.

5.50 The distance from Newtownards courthouse to Laganside is 9.2 miles and the furthest distance that anyone would be required to travel would be from the Portaferry area, a distance of approximately 30 miles taking approximately 58 minutes by car. Newtownards also deals with business from Bangor petty

sessions district and the furthest distance that anyone would be required to travel would be from the Groomsport area, a distance of approximately 16 miles taking approximately 30 minutes by car

Consultation responses to Newtownards

- 5.51 Newtownards respondents thought that the proposals would cause unreasonable travel, inconvenience and expense for users especially from the peninsula area. They asked if consideration had been given to designating Newtownards as a family centre for the area and if the Old Townhall Building proved too expensive to re-open would Newtownards be retained. They also pointed out the increased volume of business going into Laganside would put additional strain on waiting areas and consultation rooms.
- 5.52 Respondents asked if the PSNI had been properly consulted and voiced concern that taking officers into Belfast for lengthy court attendances would impact on local policing. There were also comments focused on the feasibility and rationale for centralising all of the business into Belfast, particularly in view of the current high levels and types of business at these courts. It was suggested that Laganside did not have adequate consultation areas, cell capacity and other facilities to cope with additional business on this scale.
- 5.53 Respondents also suggested alternative methods of raising revenue such as increased usage from Tribunals, increasing fees and better fine recovery rather than closing courthouses.

NICTS response in respect of Newtownards

- 5.54 As we outlined in our key themes we re-examined the travel and transport options under the proposals. In relation to Newtownards we re-examined travel from all areas of Newtownards petty sessions district to Belfast and as a result confirmed that there is sufficient provision of public transport to facilitate the closure of Newtownards courthouse and the transfer of business to Belfast.

- 5.55 As also outlined in the key themes we discussed with the PSNI the potential impact on police witnesses and the concerns raised that they would be spending additional time away from front line duties. PSNI have advised that measures are currently being rolled out which will reduce significantly the number of police witnesses who will be required to spend time physically attending court to give evidence. The response from the Chief Constable does not raise any concerns about this issue.
- 5.56 We also discussed again with the Prisoner Escort and Court Custody Service (PECCS) about any potential issues for prisoner transportation and cell capacity in respect of all of our proposals. Specifically in respect of this proposal they confirmed that Laganside courts, with 25 cells, had sufficient capacity to cope with the additional prisoners from Newtownards.
- 5.57 The suggestion from respondents that Newtownards could be retained and designated as a family centre, rather than re-open the Old Townhall Building, was considered. However the additional travel impact using public transport that this would have for those court users from the Lisburn area was considered excessive – they would be required to travel into Belfast, passing the courthouses there, and then travel out of the city again to Newtownards.
- 5.58 As we explained at the public meeting alternative revenue raising options for NICTS are limited. Although we are exploring all avenues a simple fee increase universally applied, as suggested by some respondents, would not be compatible with the principles of full cost recovery as set out in Managing Public Money. It could lead to over-recovery in some areas of business and adverse impact on some court users. Likewise the enhanced fine collection processes introduced will not result in increased revenue as this money is surrendered to central government and not retained by NICTS.
- 5.59 In developing the proposals in the consultation document we considered the additional impact of increased business transferring into Laganside and on the premise that the Old Townhall Building would re-open were confident that this could be accommodated. However as a result of our conclusion that the Old Townhall Building should not be re-opened at this time we re-evaluated the

proposals in respect of Newtownards and Lisburn. Business volumes in Newtownards are significantly higher than Lisburn across all areas of business and with four courtrooms, one of which has the ability to facilitate jury trials Newtownards undoubtedly has greater scope than Lisburn, to accommodate a wider range of court business.

5.60 We have therefore revised our proposals in light of the continuing closure of the Old Townhall Building to recommend the retention of Newtownards court at this time. The future retention of Newtownards will be tied to the outcome of the ongoing consideration of the potential future use of the Old Townhall Building. We also recommend that Newtownards be re-assigned into the South Eastern Division, thus providing greater flexibility to continue to use the other venues in that area for Crown work that emanates from the Newtownards area.

5.61 Should this recommendation be accepted, it will be necessary to carry out some maintenance work to Newtownards courthouse. It is estimated that this work will cost in the region of £310,000 and will be implemented in due course as part of our planned programme of works.

Lisburn

5.62 Currently Lisburn deals with magistrates' court (adult, youth, and departmental, domestic and family proceedings) and county court (civil bills and small claims). Family Care cases and Crown Court cases are dealt with in Craigavon.

5.63 Business volumes for Lisburn for the past three years are set out below:

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Adult Magistrates	2294	2162	2026
Youth Magistrates	116	80	101
Civil Bills	351	313	274
Small Claims	8	12	10
Family	385	368	377

- 5.64 The distance from Lisburn courthouse to Laganside courthouse is 10 miles approximately. The furthest distance that anyone would be required to travel would be from Ballinderry to Laganside courts, a distance of 23 miles.
- 5.65 Lisburn courthouse is not a listed building and was built circa 1970 and is centrally located in the city beside the railway station. It has two courtrooms but cannot deal with Crown Court cases as it has no facilities for juries. It is an old building which, in comparison to Laganside lacks modern facilities and is limited in the space available for waiting and consultation rooms. Lisburn has a high population and has good transport links to Belfast – both by rail, bus and car.

Consultation responses to Lisburn

- 5.66 Comments about Lisburn focused on the feasibility and rationale for centralising all of the business into Belfast, particularly in view of the current high levels and types of business at these courts and the additional business transferring in from Newtownards. It was suggested that Laganside did not have adequate consultation areas, cell capacity and other facilities to cope with additional business on this scale. As with Newtownards respondents asked if consideration had been given to designating Lisburn as a family centre for the area.
- 5.67 Respondents were particularly concerned about the potential detrimental impact on local trade and businesses, and that the city status and strong legal professions in Lisburn required the retention of a courthouse.
- 5.68 As in other locations respondents suggested that the proposals would cause unreasonable travel, inconvenience and expense for court users in travelling into Belfast. Respondents asked if alternative means of increasing revenue or reducing expenditure had been explored.
- 5.69 Lisburn respondents feared that there may be implications for policing in the Lisburn area if officers were removed from their duties to attend court in Belfast. They thought that the PECCS savings would be minimal given its proximity to Maghaberry Prison and questioned the basis of the savings forecasts.

Respondents were also concerned about the detrimental impact on Trust services in relation to family work.

NICTS response in respect of Lisburn

- 5.70 As part of the key themes we re-considered the travel and transport options from all areas of Lisburn petty sessions district to Belfast. As a result we have confirmed that there is sufficient provision of public transport between the two locations and the wider Lisburn area so that any impact remains well within the tolerance levels we had set.
- 5.71 As we outlined in our exploration of key themes section we discussed the potential impact on police witnesses and the concerns raised that they would be spending additional time away from front line duties. PSNI advised that measures are currently being rolled out which will reduce significantly the number of police witnesses who will be required to spend time physically attending court to give evidence. The response from the Chief Constable does not raise any concerns about this issue.
- 5.72 The response from the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust indicated that they understand the rationale behind the proposals and recognise that a reduced number of locations would assist in the more efficient management of resources. Although they indicated that there may be additional travel time for staff, overall they noted that the impact of this should be minimal.
- 5.73 As we have explained in the previous sections the options for alternative savings or increased revenue are limited and although they are being explored to date we have not seen options that would allow NICTS to make the level of savings required
- 5.74 We fully appreciate all of the sentiments expressed by the respondents from the Lisburn area but it still remains the case that the building has limited scope to take on additional court business and is within a reasonable travel distance to Laganside which is a high quality, modern and large location capable of absorbing all of Lisburn's business. The suggestion that Lisburn could be

designated a family centre and take on Newtownards business raises the same issues for users who would be undertaking considerable journeys and passing other court locations in travelling to Lisburn. It is also not possible for Lisburn, with just two courtrooms, to take on any significant family business from either Belfast or Newtownards.

5.75 We have therefore decided to recommend the closure of Lisburn and the transfer of all business into Laganside courts. However as this recommendation is a variation on that contained in the consultation paper, we consider it appropriate to allow time for consultees to submit any further views they may have in relation to our revised recommendation before a final decision is taken by the Minister of Justice. Consequently NICTS would recommend a further targeted consultation in the context of the continued closure of the Old Townhall Building and the transfer of Lisburn business to Laganside.

Ballymena

5.76 Currently Ballymena deals with magistrates' court (adult, youth, departmental and domestic and family proceedings) and county court (civil bills and small claims). Family Care cases are dealt with in Belfast and Crown Court cases in Antrim.

5.77 Business volumes for the past three years are set out below:

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Adult Magistrates	1470	1607	1619
Youth Magistrates	59	58	44
Civil Bills	530	549	243
Small Claims	215	180	119
Family	622	549	471

5.78 The distance from Ballymena courthouse to Antrim courthouse is 11.5 miles with an estimated journey time of 22 minutes by car and from Ballymena courthouse to Coleraine courthouse is 25.7 miles with an estimated journey time of 38 minutes by car. The furthest distance that anyone would be required to travel

from Ballymena petty sessions area to attend the court at Antrim would be from the ward of Slemish, a distance of 21 miles, taking approximately 34 minutes by car. The furthest distance that anyone would be required to travel from Ballymena petty sessions area to attend the court at Coleraine would again be from the ward of Slemish, a distance of 34 miles, taking approximately 51 minutes by car.

5.79 Ballymena also deals with business from the Larne petty sessions district and the impact from the proposals in relation to wards from this area would see the ward of Islandmagee with a travel distance of 53 miles to Coleraine, taking approximately 72 minutes by car and the ward of Carnlough with a travel distance of 27 miles to Antrim, taking approximately 40 minutes by car.

5.80 Ballymena has a large population and enjoys good transport links to and from neighbouring towns by bus and train. The transport links from Larne to Antrim are relatively good however the transport links to Coleraine are more difficult and in some cases require a journey via Belfast and multiple changes.

5.81 The courthouse is a grade B1 listed building, centrally located in a centre of town. It has three courtrooms, one in the original building and two in the administrative building. However, in comparison to both Antrim and Coleraine courthouses, it lacks comparable modern facilities that can be modified and expanded, is less flexible in its ability to facilitate jury trials and has limited capacity for enhanced universal access. In addition there is often pressure upon victim and witness accommodation and it cannot always provide a high level of service in this regard.

Consultation responses to Ballymena

5.82 Those who responded to the Ballymena proposal raised a number of key points in particular the burden placed on users having to travel to an alternative venue in either Coleraine or Antrim in terms of cost, time and inconvenience and that this would impact upon the access to justice of clients and increase waiting time for solicitors

- 5.83 They also emphasised the substantial size of the local population of Ballymena and its surrounding areas in comparison to both Antrim and Coleraine and pointed out that the new council area of Mid and East Antrim would not have a court. Respondents also suggested a more strategic review of justice services should be undertaken before decisions are made.
- 5.84 The cost of repairs made to the building in recent years was also raised; NICTS confirmed that it was necessary to make a capital investment of just over £1.4 million in Ballymena in the last 5 years. Respondents also raised the impact on local jobs and businesses if the courthouse closed and referred to the recent job losses at Gallaghers and Tesco which added greater pressure to the local area, making local services all the more important.
- 5.85 There was concern that the closure could impact on the PSNI coverage for the local area. Respondents also suggested that more thought could have been given towards sharing court facilities with other services and amenities, to maximise utilisation of public buildings.
- 5.86 There was a preference that Ballymena court business in its entirety should be transferred to Antrim rather than separating civil business and moving it to Coleraine. However some respondents suggested that Antrim did not have the capacity to absorb the additional business from Ballymena. Two respondents suggested that the business could be split between Coleraine and Antrim by address or location of the originating offence.

NICTS response in respect of Ballymena

- 5.87 NICTS accepts there has been significant capital expenditure on the building as a result of a requirement to carryout essential repairs to the roof costing almost £1.2m in 2010/11. In providing this information it is perhaps worth noting that the completion of the work to the roof was both urgent and essential to maintain the integrity of the building. Even if a decision had been taken to close the courthouse in 2010/11 NICTS would have been required to carry out this work.

5.88 A consistent theme through some of the correspondence during this consultation has been the desire to have a courthouse for a particular size of town or city, county or council area. However, there is no requirement for any such administrative entity or population centre to have a courthouse. NICTS has developed these proposals based on the ability of a court to carry out the full range of essential justice functions and offer the best facilities. It remains the view of NICTS that both Antrim and Coleraine courthouses provide better facilities than can be provided at Ballymena.

5.89 We listened carefully to the concerns expressed by respondents on the suggestion of listing civil business from Antrim and Ballymena into Coleraine and centralising criminal business at Antrim. Looking again at the listing patterns in Ballymena and Antrim we believe that it is possible to facilitate a straight transfer of all business to Antrim without causing an adverse business impact. Although the scheduling of court business is a judicial function, we believe that with some modest changes to the Antrim court calendar all Ballymena business could be accommodated at that venue. Consequently NICTS would recommend that all Ballymena business should be transferred to Antrim. As a result of the consultation process we believe this will be a more convenient location for the majority of those living within the Council boundary.

5.90 NICTS will continue to liaise with local representatives in relation to the potential for the building to be used for alternative purposes.

5.91 It remains the case that both Antrim and Coleraine courthouses can cater for a greater range and level of court hearings than Ballymena and also that travel links between Ballymena and Antrim are satisfactory and will support the transfer. It is also the case that for those travelling from the Larne area the journey to Antrim would be comparable to the current journey they are undertaking to Ballymena.

Limavady

5.92 Although we were not consulting on the closure of Limavady, as the decision to close had previously been taken in 2012, a number of respondents did include comments on this venue.

Consultation response to Limavady

5.93 These reflected that travel, particularly in bad weather, to Coleraine or Londonderry was of concern. There was also a suggestion that Limavady could remain open to help relieve pressure on Londonderry and Coleraine courts.

NICTS response in respect of Limavady

5.94 The decision to close this venue remains unchanged from the previous consultation which concluded in 2012. The consultation document included reference to Limavady only to complete the holistic picture of the court estate going forward. It did not seek to re-open any further consultation on its future.

5.95 Currently court users in Crown, youth, domestic and family cases have to travel from Limavady to Londonderry to have their case heard. The transfer of all Limavady business to Coleraine will in the majority of cases mean a shorter journey as demonstrated in the tables at Annex 3. It will also move this business from one of the busiest venues in the court estate (Londonderry utilisation 80.9%) to one which is less busy (Coleraine utilisation 48%).

5.96 At the time of the original consultation on Limavady hearing centre local judiciary had expressed the view that the reduction in the youth court, in particular, had the potential to free up some court time in Londonderry. In addition the youth, domestic and family courts are held in the office block in Londonderry, where waiting areas and consultation rooms are limited, therefore any reduction in the number of parties attending these courts will have a positive impact on these facilities. This should mitigate against the risk of congestion which was a recurring theme of the consultation responses.

Recommendation – North Eastern Division

5.97 Having revised our proposals for closure to reflect the outcome of the consultation, NICTS recommends that:

- the Old Townhall Building will remain closed at this time and the potential to develop it as a Family Justice Centre will be considered as an option in the context of the DOJ Estate Strategy.
- Lisburn courthouse closes and the business transfers to Laganside Courts. However, as this recommendation is a variation on that contained in the consultation paper, consultees will be invited to submit any further views they may have before a final decision is taken by the Minister.
- Newtownards courthouse is retained at this time.
- Ballymena courthouse closes. Following a review of court business levels we believe that with some modest adjustment to the court calendar all business can be transferred to Antrim rather than being split between Antrim and Coleraine.
- the earlier decision to close Limavady and transfer the business to Coleraine is confirmed.

5.98 As a result we have also reconfigured the Administrative Court Divisions to take account of some of the concerns expressed about the relative geographical spread of these. The re-configured Administrative Court Divisions are set out in the map in section 6.

5.99 We will keep business levels and utilisation rates under review for all of the venues within the Administrative Court Division and we may revisit the allocation of business again in the future.

South Eastern Division

5.100 Section 6 and Questions 10-12 in our consultation document detail proposals for the new South Eastern Division currently including Armagh, Craigavon, Downpatrick and Newry. The proposals were to close Armagh and transfer business to either Craigavon or Newry.

Q10. Are there any significant factors which you consider would preclude the closure of Armagh Courthouse?

Q11. Which option for the transfer of business within this Division are you more supportive of: Specialist Court Centre (Option 1) or Straight Transfer (Option 2)?

Q12. What impact (positive or negative) would our proposals for closure and transfer of court business have on you? Please give reasons for your answer?

Consultation Responses

5.101 The template response breakdown was as follows:

QUESTION	RESPONSE			
	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	N/A
10	3	19	1	18
11	Option One 7, Option Two 4	9	5	16
	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Neutral	N/A
12	2	21	2	16

Armagh

5.102 Currently Armagh deals with magistrates' court (adult, youth, departmental and domestic proceedings and County Court (civil bills and small claims). Family proceedings cases are dealt with in Newry, Family Care cases in Craigavon and

Crown Court cases are usually dealt with in Newry. Armagh does occasionally facilitate jury trials.

5.103 Business volumes for the past three years are set out below:

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Adult Magistrates	1325	1087	1045
Youth Magistrates	31	33	29
Civil Bills	11	75	48
Small Claims	165	138	76
Family	2	0	2

5.104 In relation to Option 1, the distance between Armagh and Craigavon courthouse is 13.8 miles and an estimated journey time of 20 minutes and between Craigavon and Newry courthouse is 25.8 miles and an estimated journey time of 40 minutes. The furthest distance that anyone would be required to travel from outlying wards would be from the area of Derrynoose to Craigavon, a distance of 27.4 miles, which takes approximately 45 minutes by car, or from Gawley's Gate to Newry a distance of 27 miles, which takes approximately 50 minutes by car.

5.105 In relation to Option 2, the distance between Armagh and Newry courthouses is 18.4 miles with an estimated journey time of 27 minutes by car. The furthest distance that anyone would be required to travel would be from the area of Killylea to Newry, a distance of 28.4 miles, which takes approximately 40 minutes by car.

5.106 Respondents referred to the historic status of Armagh courthouse; its value to local tourism and culture; and comparisons were made with the present condition of this building to both Craigavon and Newry courthouses. Some respondents queried the logic of closing a building which has been assessed by CJINI as 70% 'fit-for-purpose' and moving business to buildings with only slightly higher assessments.

Consultation response for Armagh

Option 1: Specialist Court Centre

5.107 The benefits of specialist centres for specific business types was attractive to some respondents as it could lead to more co-ordinated work and uniformity within each court business type.

5.108 Among some of these respondents there was agreement that a reduction in court locations would assist other services in managing their resources and there was some support for the specialist family justice centre proposal, although this was tempered by the concern that this would only exacerbate travel for users and it was felt that access to justice for rural dwellers would be reduced.

5.109 In particular for this option respondents thought that it wasn't feasible for Newry to manage all of the Crown Court and magistrates' criminal work from Craigavon. There were particular concerns in relation to the use of courtroom 4 in Newry.

Option 2: Straight Transfer

5.110 Those respondents who favoured Option 2 included the local Health & Social Care Trust who commented that closing Armagh would not be significant providing family matters are transferred to Newry, which would retain the business in the same court Division and mean less change for families and Trust staff.

5.111 Again, others agreed that minimising travel for court users was more important than provision of specialist centres. One respondent advised that Newry should be retained as a family centre to retain the good cross border links with Dundalk.

General Responses

5.112 In general however, consultees responded about the closure of the building rather than in respect of either option, with many commenting that there was no alternative being offered to the closure of Armagh. One respondent felt that because of good road links in this area either option could be made to work.

Whilst acknowledging additional travel distances, PBNI said that the need to rationalise was understood before concluding that there were no significant factors to preclude the closure of Armagh.

5.113 However some respondents queried the ability of either Craigavon or Newry to deal with the proposed transferred business; suggesting that Craigavon required significant repair and that the courts in Newry could not accommodate all of the criminal business from both Armagh and Craigavon. There were claims that Craigavon court was in a poor state of repair and may be marked for demolition.

5.114 A number of respondents did not support either option as both propose that court 4 in Newry be used for criminal cases which, it was contended, is wholly unsuitable for this purpose.

5.115 As with other divisions the impact of increased travel and the additional costs placed on the public and others was raised by some respondents as a concern within either of the options.

5.116 The challenges of maintaining a closed, listed building and in particular the impact the closure would have on the historical city were pointed out. There was a view that once closed it will be difficult to find an alternative use for it and it will be near impossible to sell. It was suggested that this proposal was a short sighted false economy and that the closed building will continue to be a liability on tax payers whilst costs would be shifted elsewhere.

5.117 At the public meeting the view was expressed that the cumulative effect of the efficiencies in the delivery of justice and other recent cuts to public service would cripple the city and that the options provided gave no alternative to that of closing Armagh.

5.118 Solicitors comments were in relation to increased travel time and costs which may not be remunerated under legal aid proposals. They pointed to the additional time out of the office which could not be used for generating income, while travelling further can cause higher stress and anxiety to litigants and their professional advisers. It may also lead to increased road and parking congestion.

5.119 Finally, it was suggested that NICTS should seek to maximise the use of tribunals within the court estate, rather than paying significant sums for rental of rooms for tribunal hearings.

NICTS response in respect of Armagh

5.120 NICTS would agree that Armagh courthouse is an impressive building within a uniquely attractive setting. However the need to secure budget efficiencies means that we must find solutions that work within current court requirements.

5.121 While the building has been restored to a very high standard, it cannot regrettably offer the flexibility to hold an increased number of court hearings simultaneously as it only has three courtrooms, unlike the neighbouring courthouses in Craigavon and Newry which have four and five courtrooms respectively.

5.122 The utilisation rate for Armagh remains one of the lowest in the court estate and as we have said previously the re-allocation of business from one location to another just serves to drive down other utilisation and fails to deliver budget efficiencies. It remains the position that the levels of court business have fallen and continue to fall. NICTS does not have the resources to run all of the court venues and must therefore make changes to our business delivery to reflect this.

5.123 At the public consultation meeting in Armagh it was suggested that NICTS relocate tribunal hearings into Armagh courthouse to increase revenue and utilisation rates. The tribunals for which NICTS has statutory responsibility are co-located within the Tribunal Hearing Centre in the Royal Courts of Justice where business requirements are well served.

5.124 The Department of Social Development retains statutory and financial responsibility for The Appeals Service, while NICTS has administrative responsibility. This extends to the scheduling of appeal hearings in a wide range of venues providing a regional service to appellants and their representatives.

Armagh offers good facilities for Tribunal hearings but there are not sufficient business volumes to justify retention on this basis.

- 5.125 NICTS considers the concept of specialist court centres to be both positive and commendable with the potential to deliver benefits on a number of levels. It is a concept that is regarded positively by the Lord Chief Justice and we are aware that other jurisdictions are proceeding with specialist centres where possible. We agreed to seek the views of our stakeholders and users as part of the consultation proposals however it is clear from the responses received that there is no particular appetite for such a development at this time. This could be because of the small jurisdiction we have in Northern Ireland and the robust approach to maintaining judicial consistency in court cases.
- 5.126 We recognise that regional centres of specialism can deliver a range of benefits to improve both case management and the court user experience. There is potential to improve the consistency and quality of service, and thereby increase public confidence, however this has to be considered in conjunction with the frequency of demand and further travel requirements that this might impose on users.
- 5.127 The Lord Chief Justice has initiated a review of current arrangements for the administration of civil and family justice and this may impact further on the business levels and how justice is delivered. We look forward to seeing the outcome of these considerations in due course.
- 5.128 Contrary to many comments made during the course of the consultation and the public meeting in Armagh, Craigavon courthouse does not require significant remedial maintenance work. We have considered the concerns raised about the suitability of courtrooms in Newry and are content that they would meet the needs of the transferring business, particularly given the additional capacity that Downpatrick offers to support the listing of Crown Court business.

Recommendation – South Eastern Division

- 5.129 As the establishment of a civil and family justice centre at Craigavon did not have significant support from court users in the area, NICTS would recommend that Armagh is closed and all of its current business is transferred to Newry – option 2.
- 5.130 We acknowledge the importance of the listed status of Armagh courthouse and the civic pride it generates. We also appreciate our responsibilities under the protocol for the management and disposal of listed buildings and will work with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency should our recommendation be accepted.
- 5.131 As indicated in the North Eastern section, to reflect the retention of Newtownards courthouse we have reconfigured the Administrative Court Divisions. The South Eastern Division will now include Newtownards courthouse as well as Downpatrick, Newry and Craigavon. At this time Newtownards business will continue to be allocated as at present with Crown Court matters being heard in Downpatrick.
- 5.132 We will keep business levels and utilisation rates under review for all of the venues within the Administrative Court Division and we may revisit the allocation of business again in the future.

Western Division

5.133 Section 7 and Questions 13-16 in our consultation document detail the proposals for the new Western Division. The proposals were:

- to close Strabane and Enniskillen and transfer business to Omagh, and
- confirmed the previously announced closure of Magherafelt but proposed the transfer of business to Dungannon.

5.134 In this section we asked:

Q13. Are there any significant factors which you consider would preclude any of the proposed closures in this Division?

Q14. If Strabane is closed, do you agree that Omagh is the most appropriate alternative court venue?

Q15. If Enniskillen is closed, do you agree that Omagh is the most appropriate alternative court venue?

Q16. Does the proposal to list Magherafelt business in Dungannon rather than Antrim give rise to any different considerations?

Q17. What impact (positive or negative) would our proposals for closure and transfer of court business have on you? Please give reasons for your answer?

Consultation Responses

5.135 The template response breakdown was as follows:

QUESTION	RESPONSE			
	Not Preclude	Preclude	Neutral	N/A
13	2	20	1	18
	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	N/A
14	3	14	3	21
15	2	18	2	19
16	2	15	6	18
	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Neutral	N/A
17	1	20	3	17

The template and the non-template responses tended to focus on individual local issues rather than at the Administrative Court Division as a whole. Likewise at the public meetings the focus and comments were largely location specific. For that reason we have set out this part of the analysis and response in a location specific format.

Enniskillen

5.136 Currently Enniskillen deals with magistrates' court (adult, youth, departmental and domestic proceedings) and county court (civil bills and small claims). Family proceedings cases are dealt with in Omagh; Family Care and Crown Court cases are dealt with in Dungannon.

5.137 Business volumes for the past three years are set out below:

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Adult Magistrates	1542	1260	1122
Youth Magistrates	109	164	88
Civil Bills	4	30	9
Small Claims	185	157	49
Family	0	2	0

5.138 The distance between Enniskillen and Omagh courthouses is 26.6 miles with an estimated journey time of 41 minutes by car. The furthest distance anyone attending the courts listed above would be required to travel would be from the area of Florencecourt & Kinawley to Omagh, a distance of 39.4 miles, which is estimated to take just over an hour by car.

5.139 Enniskillen courthouse is a Grade B listed building, centrally located in the town but servicing a mostly rural population and the county generally has limited transport links to other courthouses. The courthouse is an old building which is unsuitable for cases involving children or vulnerable witnesses; it has only two courtrooms and therefore is limited in being able to hold a variety of business types simultaneously. However it has one Crown courtroom so jury trials can be accommodated.

Consultation response to Enniskillen

5.140 In respect of Enniskillen responses, three main aspects appeared most frequently; the remoteness of parts of County Fermanagh, the additional travelling time and cost that those attending court would incur, and the impact on other professions and services.

5.141 The rurality of the area and the impact of travelling distances and times, for court users from the far western and southern parts of this geographical area, was raised by virtually every respondent. It was pointed out that Fermanagh would be the only county in Northern Ireland without a courthouse and that the administration of justice would be greatly diminished by the lack of an available court.

5.142 Respondents felt that the closure would be in contravention of the government policy of rurality; whereby residents should have the same access to government services as urban dwellers.

5.143 Respondents felt that public transport links between the outlying areas within Fermanagh would entail two substantial bus journeys; firstly from the nearest town to Enniskillen, followed by an estimated one hour journey to Omagh.

Respondents made particular reference to victims of domestic violence having to travel for over an hour on the bus to reach a court and the possibility that this journey may be alongside the perpetrator.

5.144 Respondents asserted that those from the Fermanagh area have fewer private cars than elsewhere in the province, the lowest access to services and the highest deprivation rates.

5.145 Respondents felt there would be an impact on local services and the community. In particular they voiced concern that PSNI officers would be travelling to Omagh to attend court, leaving Fermanagh without adequate local policing on court days. They also suggested that Omagh did not have sufficient space or access to cope with the extra business, particularly in relation to the cell capacity for prisoners on busy court days, and accessibility for people with a disability or with mobility impairment.

5.146 It was also felt that the negative impact on the economic, social and historical character of Enniskillen and the county should be a key factor in these decisions. Respondents also noted the adverse impact on the local business community due to a reduction in footfall by both service users and their professional representatives. Concerns were also raised on the detrimental effect on the provision of other services (e.g. Probation) to the community.

NICTS response in respect of Enniskillen

5.147 NICTS understands that the impact on journey times and travel was a significant concern for users from the Fermanagh area. While we did consider travel impacts carefully when drawing up the proposals, NICTS does accept that the rurality of the area will make it more challenging in terms of distance for court users to make the full journey from their home to the new venue of Omagh.

5.148 During the course of this consultation NICTS has looked in greater detail at the actual travel distances that would be involved in the proposals. For some outlying wards (Rosslea, Newtownbutler, Derrygonnelly, 'Boho, Cleenish & Letterbreen' 'Florencecourt & Kinawley' and Derrylin) the distance to Omagh is

just under 40 miles with an estimated driving time of over one hour. While the Lord Chief Justice helpfully suggested that cases could be listed in Omagh later in the morning for those travelling from the outlying areas of Fermanagh, we understand that this still poses a very real issue for some users.

5.149 In developing the initial proposals NICTS did consider the guidance provided by Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (DARD) on rural proofing. This guidance advises policy makers to *“ensure fair and equitable treatment of rural communities and that a policy does not indirectly have a detrimental impact on rural dwellers and rural communities”* and also *“policies should treat rural areas in a fair or reasonable way. This does not mean that rural areas should have an equal level of resources as urban, but rather that policies demonstrate proportionality to rural areas, taking into account their unique characteristics.”*

5.150 While it is correct that some Fermanagh areas are placed towards the top of the list of the most deprived in relation to the category of “access to services”, this is not to be unexpected given the very rural nature of the area. In the overall multiple deprivation ranking carried out by NISRA in 2010 taking all of the criteria into consideration (Income, Employment, Health Deprivation and Disability, Education, Skills and Training, Proximity to Services, Living Environment and Crime and Disorder) the top 20 most deprived areas are mainly within Belfast and Derry City with Lisburn areas (Twinbrook and Colin Glen) and East Strabane and Greystone in Limavady also featuring. The most recent census indicated 77% of households in Northern Ireland had access to a vehicle, whilst rural areas were more likely to have access to multiple vehicles.

5.151 Regarding prisoner and cell facilities in Omagh, NICTS has liaised with the Prisoner Escort and Court Custody Service (PECCS) during the consultation process and will continue to do so. This is discussed in more detail in paragraph 5.170 below.

5.152 Taking all of the comments on board and in consideration of our further analysis of the greater distances involved in this area led us to revisit our original proposal for Enniskillen courthouse. We now recommend retaining the courthouse and designating it as a hearing centre opening on a limited number of days per week.

This does not allow us to achieve the same level of savings we had previously estimated in the consultation document; however it would alleviate the concerns around transport that have been raised for this area and retain a court in the locality at this time.

5.153 We have looked at the current number of scheduled sittings required and are content these can be accommodated on a reduced number of days. We will therefore designate Enniskillen as a hearing centre which will be open only on those days when a court is sitting.

5.154 NICTS is aware that there will still be shortcomings in the quality of the accommodation and facilities at this venue which cannot be readily addressed in the current economic climate. The age and design of Enniskillen prevents significant modification and thus it will remain limited in its capacity to deliver a full range of services as some of its counterparts in the same Division.

5.155 In particular we acknowledge the concerns that groups such as the NSPCC and Victim Support have expressed in relation to the building and quality of facilities for vulnerable witnesses. We will work with them to mitigate this as much as possible and also with the judiciary to accommodate cases with particular requirements in alternative more suitable venues within the court estate.

Strabane

5.156 Currently Strabane deals with magistrates' court (adult, youth, departmental and domestic proceedings) and county court (civil bills and small claims). Family proceedings cases are dealt with in Omagh; Family Care and Crown Court cases are dealt with in Dungannon.

5.157 Business levels for the past three years are set out below:

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Adult Magistrates	1248	1234	1253
Youth Magistrates	42	29	30
Civil Bills	2	10	1
Small Claims	0	0	0
Family	0	0	2

5.158 The distance between Strabane and Omagh courthouses is 20.2 miles with an estimated journey time of 33 minutes by car. The furthest distance that anyone attending the courts listed above would be required to travel would be from the area of Slievekirk to Omagh, a distance of 29.1 miles, which takes approximately 45 minutes by car.

5.159 Strabane courthouse has a courtroom which is fully accessible and the building has good prisoner access and a high level of security. However, there is limited scope for additional consultation rooms and there are only two courtrooms, neither of which can cater for Crown Court cases. Facilities for victims and witnesses are relatively limited.

Consultation responses to Strabane

5.160 Respondents expressed the view that Omagh did not have the capacity to absorb all of the business of Strabane and Enniskillen and that the existing court facilities in Omagh were unsuitable for the transfer of additional business. They particularly raised concerns with public car parking, capacity of consultation rooms and waiting areas in Omagh, security access and cell capacity. They also suggested that in Omagh some defendants would have to be escorted through public areas from the cells to courtrooms.

5.161 Respondents also suggested that not all courtrooms in Omagh are Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant and that no improvements or adjustments have been made to Omagh since the last consultation when a decision was taken to retain Strabane.

- 5.162 Some respondents suggested that Strabane's court business could be transferred to Londonderry rather than Omagh, which would align court business with the local policing districts. However some respondents also indicated that travelling from Strabane to Omagh was considered less difficult and some respondents felt that the road and bus infrastructure from Strabane to Omagh was suitable to permit this transfer. Other respondents suggested that residents within Strabane petty sessions district would be required to spend up to two hours travelling to Omagh depending on where they live and bus scheduling.
- 5.163 Respondents pointed out issues such as the higher deprivation levels in Strabane and the proposals would mean the transfer of costs to others including the voluntary services and the loss of employment in the area.
- 5.164 Respondents also commented that victims of domestic violence would be further traumatised by having to travel to Omagh. They commented that the proposals would mean that local people, often at a time of great personal distress, are required to travel to a location that has insufficient space to meet their needs in a sensitive and humane manner.

NICTS response in respect of Strabane

- 5.165 When the Minister decided to retain Strabane courthouse following the hearing centres consultation in 2012 he did so on the basis that it offered better facilities than the other four hearing centres which were subsequently earmarked for closure at that time. When we were developing the consultation proposals we looked at all of the remaining court buildings and assessed the characteristics of each. Strabane rated among the lowest grade buildings within the estate.
- 5.166 In particular the ability of a venue to accommodate additional sittings and a range of court business was a key factor. Strabane would not have the capability to accommodate the sittings of both Omagh and Enniskillen or to deal with the range of business required such as Crown trials. Omagh has considerably greater scope to accommodate various types of court hearings simultaneously, as the courthouse has four courtrooms while Strabane has only

two. Omagh also has greater cell capacity with five cells while Strabane has only two cells.

5.167 Strabane has limited facilities for victims and witnesses and there is no witness link for vulnerable witnesses to give evidence from outside of the courtroom. Currently all such cases listed at Strabane are required to be transferred to either Omagh or Enniskillen. The facilities for victims and witnesses are very good at Omagh and, contrary to some responses; the accommodation for Victim Support, NSPCC and Women's Aid is excellent, having been upgraded in 2010. Omagh also has ample additional space on the first floor which has the potential to be easily adapted for consultations or other services.

5.168 Travelling times and links between Strabane and Omagh and Strabane and Londonderry are similar, however we do not consider that current capacity within Londonderry courthouse is sufficient to absorb all of Strabane's business.

5.169 NICTS recognises that Strabane has been assessed as ranking highly on the Multiple Deprivation Measure which was reported in 2010. While we recognise this is an important issue for the area we do not accept that it is a factor which should change the decision in respect of this courthouse.

5.170 Some concerns were raised about cell provision at Omagh and whether the building could accommodate additional prisoners with the transferring business. A further concern was the lack of space at the exterior of the building for prisoner transportation vans. Security and appropriate cell provision are paramount, and we do acknowledge that provision of secure parking at Omagh courthouse is an issue regardless of any decision in respect of Strabane and Enniskillen. NICTS has therefore sought the advice of colleagues in NIPS and PECCS and will continue to do so.

5.171 However, current advice suggests that cell provision and prisoner access at Omagh is sufficient to support the business of both Enniskillen and Strabane business transferring to Omagh. Details of the current number of cells and maximum cell capacity within the current division, is included in the table below. CJINI recognize that NICTS and PECCS work closely to monitor adequate cell

capacity in general, and that in specific instances security measures are implemented to manage high risk cases.

Location	Number of Cells	Total Capacity
Dungannon	9	36
Enniskillen	4	12
Omagh	5	15
Strabane	2	6

Magherafelt

5.172 Magherafelt is currently operating as a hearing centre and a decision was made in 2012 to close the venue and transfer business to Antrim. The new proposal to transfer Magherafelt's business to Dungannon instead would maintain the link with the new council area boundaries and afford Antrim the capacity to subsume the workload from Ballymena.

5.173 Currently Magherafelt deals with magistrates' court (adult, youth, departmental and domestic proceedings) and county court (civil bills and small claims). Family proceedings cases Family Care and Crown Court cases are dealt with in Londonderry.

5.174 Business volumes for the past three years are set out below:

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Adult Magistrates	1042	921	706
Youth Magistrates	48	48	28
Civil Bills	0	19	3
Small Claims	0	0	1
Family	3	2	2

5.175 The distance between Magherafelt and Dungannon courthouses is 20.9 miles with an estimated journey time of 22 minutes by car. The furthest distance that anyone attending the courts listed above would be required to travel would be from the Clady area of to Dungannon, a distance of 31 miles, which is estimated to take under an hour by car.

5.176 Magherafelt is an architecturally pleasing building and convenient to court users from the mid-Ulster mostly rural location. The limitations of this building led to the decision taken in 2012 for full closure.

Consultation responses to Magherafelt

5.177 Some respondents raised the concern that two thirds of the area is rural and not in the Dungannon direction. They suggested that Magherafelt's business would be more appropriately transferred to Antrim rather than Dungannon – which was the original suggestion in 2012.

5.178 Respondents also indicated that bus services, while available, were not ideal between Magherafelt and Dungannon. They suggested that the present opening of Magherafelt for a few days a week should continue.

5.179 Respondents raised concern on the availability of parking at Dungannon and that public parking facilities were not near the courthouse.

NICTS response in respect of Magherafelt

5.180 NICTS recognises that it may seem more appropriate to some in this area to transfer Magherafelt's business to Antrim rather than Dungannon. However, there are a number of factors which influenced this proposal. Firstly, court capacity issues, as Antrim would not be able to absorb the additional courts from both Magherafelt and Ballymena and secondly, the wish to mirror the new local government areas as closely as possible with the Administrative Court Divisions. As discussed earlier the single jurisdiction arrangements will afford greater flexibility for court users to have business listed at an alternative, more convenient court venue.

5.181 In addition, the facilities available at Dungannon are superior to those at Magherafelt. Dungannon is one of our most modern courthouses providing a suite of rooms for victims and witnesses and eight consultation rooms.

5.182 We would accept that public transport from Magherafelt to Dungannon is less frequent; however it is still suitable to allow users to attend at court hearings. We are aware of the concerns generally over car parking at Dungannon and when considering the illustrative calendar for incorporating Magherafelt's business into Dungannon we have, as far as possible, allocated business to days when other courts were limited.

Recommendation – Western Division

5.183 We listened carefully to the concerns raised by respondents who commented on this Administrative Court Division. While we still maintain the full closure of Enniskillen is preferable, as it cannot provide the level of user experience that we aspire to deliver, particularly for young and vulnerable witnesses, we are prepared at this stage to move to a hearing centre option for this venue.

5.184 It is therefore recommended that:

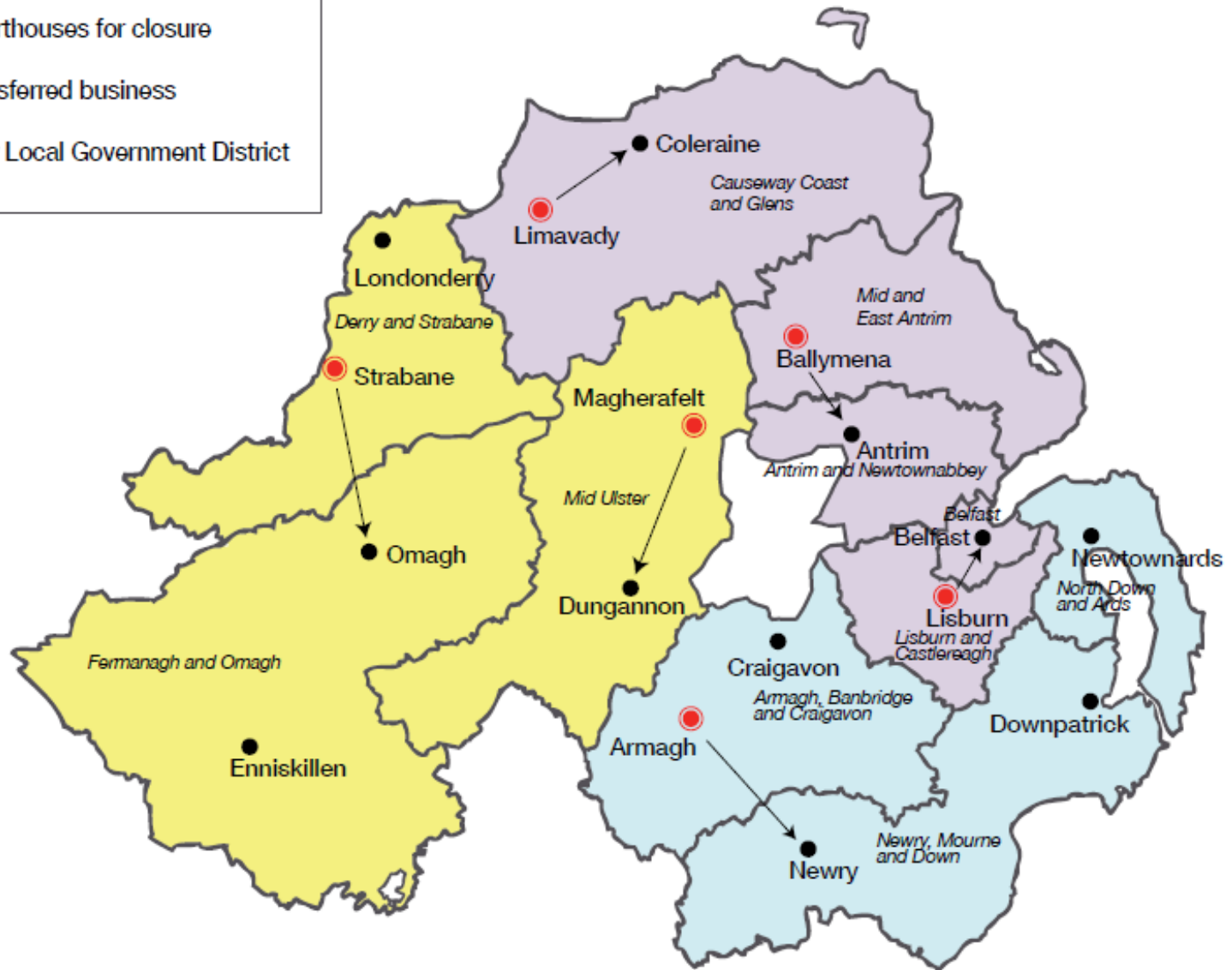
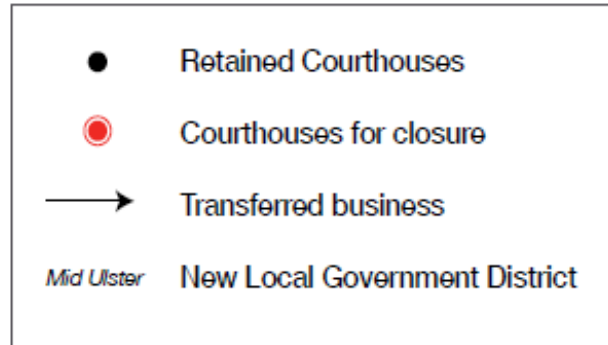
- Enniskillen is designated as a hearing centre, opening only on those days when a court is sitting. On the remaining days staff and services will operate from Omagh courthouse,
- Strabane courthouse is closed and business is transferred to Omagh,
- Magherafelt courthouse is closed and business is transferred to Dungannon.

5.185 We will keep business levels and utilisation rates under review for all of the venues within the Administrative Court Division and we may revisit the allocation of business again in the future.

6. Court Structures and Boundaries

- 6.1 Set out in the map on the following page is the reconfigured Administrative Court Divisions following the revision of our closure plans.
- 6.2 This reflects the allocation of business to the three new Administrative Court Divisions on a straight transfer basis. However we are conscious that the implementation of the single jurisdiction provisions contained within the Justice NI Act 2015 will, when enacted, give further flexibility for the allocation of business.
- 6.3 The allocation of future business will however be under the principles set out in the Lord Chief Justice's Direction.
- 6.4 The new structures and location will be as follows:

Administrative Court Division	Court venues within the Division	New Local Government District
North Eastern	Laganside Courts Antrim Coleraine	Belfast Lisburn and Castlereagh Antrim and Newtownabbey Mid and East Antrim Causeway Coast and Glens
South Eastern	Craigavon Newry Downpatrick Newtownards	Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Newry, Mourne and Down North Down and Ards
Western	Londonderry Omagh Dungannon Enniskillen	Derry and Strabane Mid Ulster Fermanagh and Omagh



7. Financial Summary

- 7.1 As we set out in the consultation document, like other public sector bodies, NICTS has faced significant budget reductions in the last few years. As highlighted in section 1 we have already made significant savings in some areas such as streamlining our corporate services, introducing leaner administrative processes and reducing staff numbers. However imposing further cuts in these areas will undermine our capacity to deliver the administration of justice to the high standard we aim for in Northern Ireland.
- 7.2 Since 1 April 2014 NICTS funding allocation from the Department of Justice has reduced by £4.5m or 10.8%. In addition, our income from the fees we charge for processing civil business has reduced by £2.9 m or 10% due to falling business volumes.
- 7.3 Given that the court estate makes up a considerable proportion of NICTS budget, it is no longer feasible for us to continue to manage the estate in its current form. The proposals we set out in the consultation document were aimed at reducing our running costs by closing some venues and consolidating business into our more modern, larger buildings. While we understand that many court users felt that closures should not be considered, the reality is that NICTS cannot continue operating 19 courthouses in numerous locations and therefore we need to rationalise the court estate.
- 7.4 During the consultation, and particularly at the public meetings, many respondents raised with us the possibility of NICTS increasing income from other areas to forestall the closure proposals – these included:
- Selling one or two venues to realise similar values of £1m;
 - Increasing fines collection to support running costs;
 - Increasing court fees across the board;
 - Savings from other areas of DOJ.

- 7.5 The reality of government accounting principles mean that many of the suggestions made are just not possible for us to utilise in order to subsidise our resource budget allocation. For example, there are restrictions on how capital receipts realised from the sale of an asset can be used, and any funds from the re-sale of a court building cannot simply be retained by NICTS and offset against the running costs of the organisation. The savings we estimate from the closures are also annual recurring savings and not one-off savings, so will have a cumulative effect on future budget allocations.
- 7.6 NICTS is exploring all avenues in relation to income generation, however a simple fee increase universally applied, as suggested by some respondents, would not be compatible with the principles of fee recovery. It could lead to over-recovery in some areas of business and have an adverse impact on some court users. Likewise, the enhanced fine collection processes introduced recently will not result in increased revenue for NICTS as this money is surrendered to central government.
- 7.7 As NICTS is now into a new financial year and we have changed some of our proposals, we have also reviewed the savings we expect to realise from the recommended closures. These reflect the changes to our proposals and also updated figures in terms of contract costs, rates costs etc.

Venue	Estimate Annual Recurrent Savings
Old Townhall Building	£336,000
Armagh Courthouse	£232,000
Ballymena Courthouse	£221,900
Strabane Hearing Centre	£97,700
Magherafelt Hearing Centre	£57,900
Limavady Hearing Centre	£30,600
Enniskillen Courthouse *	£26,300*
Lisburn Courthouse **	£141,600**
Total	£1,144,000

*Savings based on hearing centre status.

**Subject to further consultation

- 7.8 The new recommendations for closure, although slightly modified from those in the consultation document, would still deliver recurrent savings of just over £1.1m per annum.
- 7.9 During the consultation a number of respondents challenged us on the savings and queried if these reflect the costs of maintaining a closed building. We wish to stress that the expected maintenance costs for “warm storage” of all of the buildings have already been netted off the savings figures we quoted.
- 7.10 NICTS and DOJ are, and will continue to be, responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of buildings within the court estate regardless of their status as functioning or non-functioning courthouses. NICTS remains committed to ensuring that any vacated buildings, including those with a listed status, will be maintained in accordance with the protocol for the management and disposal of listed buildings. However, they will also be considered for other suitable DOJ business and for any wider government usage, community planning usage or community asset transfer should those opportunities arise.

8. Summary and Next Steps

- 8.1 Having carried out the analysis of responses to the consultation on the rationalisation of the court estate, NICTS remains satisfied that it can continue to deliver administrative support to the justice system in a reduced court estate without any degradation to existing service levels.
- 8.2 Our overarching proposal was to replace the current seven statutory court divisions with three administrative areas, known as the North Eastern, the South Eastern and the Western Divisions; this remains our recommendation. However, we have listened carefully to the views expressed during the consultation process and re-examined the cost implications of modifications to the Old Townhall and we have revisited our proposed closures in light of these.
- 8.3 We therefore recommend the implementation of the following:

Venue	Future
Old Townhall Building	It is recommended that Old Townhall Building will remain closed and the potential to develop it as a Family Justice Centre will be considered as an option in the context of the DOJ Estate Strategy.
Newtownards Courthouse	It is recommended that Newtownards is retained at this time, with future retention being tied to the outcome of ongoing consideration of the potential future use of the Old Townhall Building.
Lisburn Courthouse	It is recommended that Lisburn close and the business transfer to Laganside Courts. However, as this recommendation is a variation on that contained in the consultation paper, consultees will be invited to submit any further views they may have before a final decision is taken by the Minister.

Ballymena Courthouse	It is recommended that Ballymena is closed. Following a review of court business levels we believe that with some modest adjustment to the court calendar all business can be transferred to Antrim rather than being split between Antrim and Coleraine.
Magherafelt Hearing Centre	Following the earlier decision to close Magherafelt, it is recommended that the business transfer to Dungannon.
Strabane Hearing Centre	It is recommended that Strabane is closed and business transferred to Omagh.
Enniskillen Courthouse	It is recommended that Enniskillen be retained but that it is designated as a Hearing Centre and will be open only on those days when a court is sitting.
Armagh Courthouse	It is recommended that Armagh is closed and all business transferred to Newry.

8.4 The consultation paper noted that the earlier decision to close Limavady is confirmed.

8.5 These closures, although slightly modified from those in the consultation document, would still deliver estimated recurrent savings of just over £1.1m per annum. This is despite retaining two of the proposed venues on the basis that the original estimated annual savings gleaned from the extended closure of the Old Townhall have offset this.

8.6 However we wish to acknowledge the concerns that have been raised with us during the consultation process. They are; the risk of overcrowding; the potential for increased delay; and our ability to operate effectively in a reduced estate. We believe that in working with the judiciary and other stakeholders we can address these issues and mitigate the impact of the closures. With modest alterations we aim to address the risk of over-

crowding and the segregation of vulnerable court users. We will continue to support our judiciary in their review of the constitution of court calendar in locations that will subsume the business of closing venues.

- 8.7 Achievement of our longer term vision of a modernised, high grade court estate incorporating greater online services together with models of best practise for housing criminal, civil and family business will require significant investment that is not available now or in the near future. The recommendations in this report are designed to deliver more immediate short and medium term change allowing us to focus future investment across a smaller group of buildings while maximising the benefit of that investment in the services delivered to court users.
- 8.8 These recommendations are proportionate and remain based on the provision of court services within local jurisdictions, albeit that these jurisdictions are now larger geographically. It has traditionally been the case that the most serious and complex business of the courts i.e. Crown Court cases, cannot practicably be held locally, and in most County Court Divisions there is one designated Crown Court venue. Our recommendations do not change fundamentally the distribution of court business at a local level – they simply consolidate court business into centralised venues within larger local areas.
- 8.9 We cannot provide affordable and sustainable access to justice by avoiding change. While most respondents favoured retaining the status quo, there was a measure of acceptance that against a backdrop of financial constraint, justice reform, reducing business demand in our courts and a need to harness benefits from information and communications technology some element of change was required.
- 8.10 The vehicle to deliver this change is the Modernisation Programme. The individual strands of the Programme have been forged in a manner that should allow each strand to complement and enhance the other i.e. by reviewing court fees we could increase revenue to ease pressures elsewhere,

by expanding the horizons of our IT model we could reduce our running costs in an estate that will be 're-sized' to a more efficient model. We aim to maximise these benefits to help us address the fiscal challenges ahead and in doing so we aim to address many of the concerns raised by respondents. It is not possible to address all of them and in doing so some very difficult decisions will be taken.

Courtroom Utilisation Rates

Venue	Number of Courtrooms	% Courtroom Utilisation				
		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Laganside	16	68.5%	67.0%	66.2%	67.7%	70.8%
Old Town Hall	4	42.3%	44.3%	43.6%	44.2%	37.7%*
Newtownards	4	61.0%	59.7%	53.0%	65.8%	62.8%
Bangor	1	43.4%	41.8%	41.1%	10.0%**	-
Lisburn	2	56.6%	64.1%	64.5%	62.9%	60.1%
Antrim	3	57.3%	56.0%	58.5%	59.3%	57.7%
Ballymena	3	23.7%	30.5%	46.0%	49.7%	39.0%
Larne	1	39.0%	37.8%	37.5%	8.8%**	-
Coleraine	3	50.3%	48.9%	44.0%	42.6%	48.0%
Limavady	1	28.5%	33.7%	33.1%	25.7%	23.4%
Newry	5	54.8%	59.8%	58.0%	56.7%	64.4%
Armagh	3	26.6%	24.9%	27.7%	26.0%	29.7%
Craigavon	4	58.2%	65.3%	62.2%	62.9%	67.4%
Downpatrick	4	40.7%	49.0%	41.3%	45.2%	41.9%
Londonderry	4	74.4%	70.9%	71.0%	77.8%	80.9%
Dungannon	4	48.4%	47.7%	46.9%	50.2%	57.0%
Magherafelt	2	25.1%	25.1%	22.2%	21.1%	20.8%
Omagh	4	37.2%	39.2%	34.0%	41.8%	39.6%
Strabane	2	30.5%	30.5%	29.2%	29.5%	29.8%
Enniskillen	2	43.8%	42.2%	49.4%	42.4%	42.9%

* Old Townhall Building Closed November 2014 and business transferred into Laganside.

** Bangor and Larne closed on 31 March 2013 and business transferred to Newtownards and Ballymena respectively.

Sittings are presented on the basis of the court being utilised at any point in a given day – duration of sitting has not been taken into consideration;

Sittings have been adjusted to include periods when the court room was formally reported as being unavailable;

Available days are presented on the basis of week days during the calendar year 2014;

Although Magistrates Courts' sit throughout the year, the higher courts work according to legal terms.

The non-sitting periods are referred to as recess – approximately twelve weeks per annum. Public and Bank holidays have been excluded;

This resulted in 248 'available' days over the period, which have been applied uniformly across all court rooms.

Annex 2

Name of Respondent	Type of Respondent
Stephen Richards Thomas Taggart & Sons	Solicitor
Anonymous	Individual
Paul Livingstone Samuel Cummings & Son	Solicitor
Anonymous	Individual
David Harrison	Individual
Mathew McKillen McKillens (Ballymena) Ltd	Business
Stephen Williamson	Individual
Mark Boreland	Individual
George Robinson	MLA
Alderman Alan Robinson	Mayor of Limavady
Cllr J E Scott	Councillor
Cllr James McCorkell	Councillor
David Gilmour	Individual
Paul Mallon Stewart Solicitors	Chair Antrim and Ballymena Solicitors Association
Richard Monteith, Solicitor	Lurgan, Portadown & Craigavon Solicitors Association
Cllr Alexander Redpath	Councillor
Sonya Williamson	Individual
Andrew Heaney	Individual
Chris Wales	Ballymena Borough Chamber of Commerce & Industry
Colin Reynolds	Individual
Chris Noble T/ACC PSNI	PSNI
Paul Morgan	Director of Children and Young People's Services, SH&SCT
Tom Elliott	MLA
Karen Knowles	Individual
Paul Crawford Crawford Scally & Co Solicitors	Secretary Strabane Solicitors Association
Vilma Patterson, MBE Chairman of the Board PBNI	PBNI
Ronan McManus Murphy McManus Solicitors	Fermanagh Bar Association
Clive Fullerton Trevor Smyth & Co Solicitors	Chairman Ards and North Down Solicitors Association
Fiona Magee Trevor Smyth & Co Solicitors	Solicitor
Catherine Hartley	Individual
Tony Caher, Cherith Crymble, Ann Roulston, Catherine Sides, Solicitors	Lisburn Solicitors Association
Trevor Edgar	Individual

NI Lay Magistrates Association	Judiciary
Stewart Whyte	Children's Services NH&SST
Jim Caldwell First Division Association	Trade Union
Ciaran McQuillan, Assistant Director	Public Prosecution Service
Peter Coiley BL	Barrister
Lisburn Court Staff	Individuals
Council of District Judges	Judiciary
Cllr Gareth Keating	Councillor
Catharine McWhirter Community Planning Manager	Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council

Set out below is the list of respondents who provided a response other than in the template. This includes correspondence NICTS or the Minister received which contained comments on the consultation proposals.

Name of Respondent	Type of Respondent
Eric Williamson	Individual
K Armstrong	Individual
B Armstrong	Individual
Noleen Smylie, Secretary to the Board	Legal Services Commission
Michelle McIlveen	MLA
Gregory Campbell	MP, MLA
Robert Somerville	Individual
Ethne Nixon	Individual
Amanda Martin, Head of Administration	Ards Borough Council
Dr Vincent Davidson	Forensic Medical Officers - G District
Jim Nicholson	MEP
D McSorley Interim Chief Executive	Derry City and Strabane District Council
Sandra McDonald Policy Officer	Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
Lorraine Finlay Witness Services Manager	Victim Support NI
Alice Warren Legal Policy Officer	Association of Personal Injury Lawyers
John Treacy, Manager	Fermanagh Enterprise Ltd
Margaret McMahon Head of Policy and Strategic Services	Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
NIPSA Trade Union	58 Individual Members
Commissioner and Chief Executive	NI Commissioner for Children and Young People
Pat Conway , Director of Services	NIACRO
Elaine Campbell Corporate Planning and Consultation	South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Manager	
Very Rev Dr T Norman Hamilton and Rev Trevor D Gribben	Council for Church in Society Presbyterian Church in Ireland
Gerald McAlinden QC	Chairman of Bar Council NI
Coral Hunter	Individual
Desmond Mitchell	Individual
Archbishop Richard Clarke and Archbishop Eamon Martin	Church
Jackie Crooke	Individual
Dr D Khew	Individual
Danny Kennedy	MLA
R Wilson, Chief Executive	Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
Graham Kent, Treasurer	Derrygonnelly Community Centre Support Group
Barry Lynam Solicitor	McHugh Lynam Solicitors
Committee of Garrison Community Group	Community Group
Jane Carney Solicitor	Fahy Corrigan Solicitors
Margaret Corrigan Vice Chairman	Boho Community Association
Donal & Anna Corrigan	Individual
Paul Dougan, Solicitor	John J Rice & Co Solicitors
TR Gibson & Co Solicitors	Solicitors
Oisin Toner Gus Campbell Solicitors	Secretary Armagh Solicitors Association
Sean Lynch	MLA
Alan Hunter, Chief Executive	Law Society of NI
Barry Boyle Network Co-ordinator	Fermanagh Rural Community Network
Women's Aid Federation NI	Voluntary
Lord Chief Justice and Judiciary of NI	Judiciary
Jim Shannon	MP
Nicola McVeigh Chief Executive	Ulster Architectural Heritage Society
Strabane Sinn Féin	Political Party
Mark Durkin	MLA
Robert Gibson, Acting Chief Executive	Fermanagh District Council
Stephen Williamson	Individual
Jeffrey Donaldson	MP
Cllr Paul Robinson	Chairman of Fermanagh Policing & Community Safety Partnership
Ian Dawson & Co	Solicitors
Sarah Harrison, Secretary	The Mall Residents Association
Cllr Bert Johnson MBE	Fermanagh District Council
Lady Hermon	MP

Travel Distance Analysis

Ballymena Proposal

Currently Ballymena deals with:

- Magistrates Court – Adult, Youth, Departmental and Domestic and Family Proceedings
- County Court – Civil bills and small claims

Family Care cases are dealt with in Belfast

Crown cases are dealt with in Antrim

<u>Electoral Ward</u>	<u>Sample Postcode</u>	Travel Distance to Ballymena Court (m) BT43 6DY	Driving Time (minutes)	Travel Distance to Antrim Court (m) BT41 4AQ	Driving Time (minutes)	Travel Distance to Coleraine Court (m) BT52 1NY	Driving Time (minutes)
Castle Demesne	BT43 5EH	0.2	1	11.4	19	25.7	35
Academy	BT42 1AT	0.5	2	11.8	20	26.1	37
Moat	BT42 4AJ	0.8	3	12.1	18	26.5	38
Fair Green	BT43 6HQ	0.9	4	13.7	20	25.8	36
Park	BT43 5HP	0.9	4	12	21	25.3	35
Ardeevin	BT42 2EW	1	4	11.6	19	26.6	38
Ballyloughan	BT43 5JE	1.2	4	17.1	22	24.5	32
Dunclug	BT43 6PY	1.3	4	14	20	26.1	35
Ballee	BT42 3BW	1.4	6	10.4	16	29.6	38
Galgorm	BT42 1QW	1.4	5	11.7	19	26.5	37
Summerfield	BT43 7EY	1.5	5	13.9	20	26.1	36
Harryville	BT42 2LE	1.7	6	9.9	15	29.1	37
Ballykeel	BT42 4DU	1.9	7	12.2	20	28.9	39
Craigyarwarren	BT43 6ST	2.9	8	16.9	23	23.8	33

Cullybackey	BT42 1DT	2.9	6	14	23	24.4	34
Glenwhirry	BT42 3HW	3	8	9	14	29.1	38
Broughshane	BT42 4JW	3.7	8	14.4	20	28.1	37
Ahoghill	BT42 1LW	4.2	10	14	24	28.6	41
Dunminning	BT42 1PT	4.8	10	15.7	26	23.7	33
Kells	BT42 3HF	5.4	11	8.3	13	32.6	41
Glenravel	BT43 6QZ	7.4	15	19.4	29	23	36
Portglenone	BT44 8AF	9.4	18	16.2	26	22.6	36
Grange	BT41 3RT	9.6	18	11.2	21	30.2	47
Slemish	BT42 4LW	10.1	23	20.7	34	34.4	51

Ballymena Proposal as affecting Larne Petty Sessions area

Currently Ballymena deals with Larne business:

- Magistrates Court – Adult, Youth, Departmental and Domestic and Family Proceedings
- County Court – Civil bills and small claims

Family Care cases are dealt with in Belfast

Crown cases are dealt with in Antrim

<u>Electoral Ward</u>	<u>Sample Postcode</u>	Travel Distance to Ballymena Court (m) BT43 6DY	Driving Time (minutes)	Travel Distance to Antrim Court (m) BT41 4AQ	Driving Time (minutes)	Travel Distance to Coleraine Court (m) BT52 1NY	Driving Time (minutes)
Kilwaughter	BT40 2PH	18.2	26	19	30	44.2	56
Carnlough	BT44 0HB	16.5	29	27.2	40	40.8	57
Harbour	BT40 1AY	21.4	31	22	34	47	62
Central	BT40 1HR	21.1	31	21.7	35	47.2	61
Craigy Hill	BT40 2EN	20.8	31	21.4	35	46.9	61
Ballyloran	BT40 2BD	20.6	31	21.2	35	46.6	61
Antiville	BT40 2AD	20.8	31	21.5	35	47	61
Glynn	BT40 3DT	21	32	17.8	29	47	62
Glenarm	BT40 2TL	16.5	32	22.4	39	40.8	60
Town Parks	BT40 1NS	21.1	32	21.7	35	47.1	62
Gardenmore	BT40 1QD	21.1	32	21.7	35	47.2	62
Blackcave	BT40 1HA	21.4	34	22.1	37	47.5	64
Carncastle	BT40 2HH	21.6	34	22.2	37	47.7	64
Ballycarry	BT40 3JD	23.2	38	22.7	37	49.3	67
Island Magee	BT40 3RB	27.1	42	24.2	39	53.3	72

Newtownards Proposal

Currently Newtownards deals with:

- Magistrates Court – Adult, Youth, Departmental and Domestic and Family Proceedings (inc Downpatrick cases)
- County Court – Civil bills and small claims

Family Care cases are dealt with in Belfast

Crown cases are dealt with in Downpatrick

<u>Electoral Ward</u>	<u>Sample Postcode</u>	Travel Distance to Newtownards Court (m) BT23 4LP	Driving Time (minutes)	Travel Distance to Downpatrick Court (m) BT30 6AB	Driving Time (minutes)	Travel Distance to Belfast Court (m) BT1 3LL	Driving Time (minutes)
Ballyrainey	BT23 4PQ	0.6	3	21.6	36	11.1	24
Bradshaw's Brae	BT23 4EU	0.6	2	21.9	37	10.9	24
Central	BT23 7AG	0.75	3	21.7	38	14.5	27
Glen	BT23 4GG	1.1	4	22.3	39	13.8	26
Whitespots	BT23 7BT	1.4	5	22.3	39	14.9	28
Movilla	BT23 3RH	1.4	5	22.3	39	14.9	28
Gregstown	BT23 8UA	1.4	5	22.4	38	12.6	29
Scrabo	BT23 4QX	1.8	6	20.6	34	12.7	28
Loughries	BT23 8GG	2.7	8	23.6	43	13.9	32
Comber North	BT23 5JL	4.5	10	18	33	10.9	28
Comber East	BT23 5PE	5	13	17.8	30	10	25
Lisbane	BT23 5YY	5.1	12	18	30	10.3	25
Comber West	BT23 5PG	5.5	12	17.1	28	9.3	23
Donaghadee South	BT21 0NE	7.5	15	28.4	49	19.5	36
Millisle	BT22 2BY	7.5	16	28.4	50	19.5	37
Donaghadee	BT21 0DP	7.9	15	28.9	50	18.3	34

North							
Carrowdore	BT22 2TY	8.0	15	28.1	48	20	37
Ballygowan	BT23 5TJ	8.2	17	14.4	25	9.6	24
Ballywalter	BT22 2PB	10.1	19	30.3	51	21.6	42
Killinchy	BT23 6PL	10.9	20	12.3	22	14.8	33
Kircubbin	BT22 2QR	11.6	23	31.8	54	23.1	46
Portavogie	BT22 1GB	15.2	28	35.5	60	26.8	51
Portaferry	BT22 1NW	18.9	35	10.2	51	30.1	58

Newtownards Proposal as affecting Bangor Petty Sessions area

Currently Newtownards deals with Bangor Business as follows:

- Magistrates Court – Adult, Youth, Departmental and Domestic and Family Proceedings
- County Court – Civil bills and small claims

Family Care cases are dealt with in Belfast

Crown cases are dealt with in Downpatrick

<u>Electoral Ward</u>	<u>Sample Postcode</u>	Travel Distance to Newtownards Court (m) BT23 4LP	Driving Time (minutes)	Travel Distance to Downpatrick Court (m) BT30 6AB	Driving Time (minutes)	Travel Distance to Belfast Court (m) BT1 3LL	Driving Time (minutes)
Harbour	BT20 3FD	4.8	12	25.7	46	12.4	24
Bloomfield	BT19 2RG	4.8	11	25.7	45	12.9	24
Whitehill	BT20 4ED	4.9	11	25.8	46	12.9	25
Rathgael	BT20 3HA	5	13	25.9	47	12.4	24
Conlig	BT19 7GS	5.1	11	26	46	13.3	26
Clandeboye	BT19 1WX	5.2	12	26	46	11.8	23
Dufferin	BT19 1PE	5.2	12	26.5	48	11.5	23
Spring Hill	BT19 1NL	5.2	11	26.5	47	11.4	22
Silverstream	BT20 3LS	5.3	13	26.3	47	12.4	24
Bryansburn	BT20 3QN	5.7	14	26.5	48	12.7	24
Ballycrochan	BT19 6YP	5.8	13	26.8	47	14.3	29
Bangor Castle	BT20 4SX	6	14	26.9	48	12.9	25
Ballymagee	BT19 2XU	6.3	15	27.3	49	14.6	29
Ballymacconnell	BT19 2EJ	6.5	14	27.5	49	15.1	29
Princetown	BT20 3TD	6.9	15	26.9	49	13	26
Broadway	BT20 4QJ	7	16	27.9	20	14.3	30
Churchill	BT20 5BU	7.1	15	28.1	50	14.9	29

Groomsport	BT19 2JG	7.8	17	28.8	51	15.5	30
Ballyholme	BT20 5NZ	7.9	17	28.8	51	14.1	29
Crawfordsburn	BT19 1UP	8.1	15	28	48	10	18
Loughview	BT18 9PB	14.9	26	34.1	40	4.6	11
Hollywood Demesne	BT18 9HW	15.2	27	34.4	41	4.9	11
Hollywood Priory	BT18 0QA	16.3	29	35.5	43	6	13
Cultra	BT18 0LR	18.3	28	35.7	42	6.2	12
Craigavad	BT18 0HG	18.5	33	37.6	46	8.2	17

Lisburn Proposal

Currently Lisburn deals with:

- Magistrates Court – Adult, Youth, Departmental and Domestic and Family Proceedings
- County Court – Civil bills and small claims

Family Care cases are dealt with in Craigavon

Crown cases are dealt with in Craigavon

<u>Electoral Ward</u>	<u>Sample Postcode</u>	Travel Distance to Lisburn Court (m) BT28 1XR	Driving Time (minutes)	Travel Distance to Craigavon Court (m) BT64 1AP	Driving Time (minutes)	Travel Distance to Belfast Court (m) BT1 3LL	Driving Time (minutes)
Wallace Park	BT28 3NJ	0.7	3	21.9	30	10	22
Lisnagarvey	BT28 3EB	0.8	3	21.5	28	10.3	22
Tonagh	BT28 1UP	1	6	18.9	27	11.6	23
Hillhall	BT27 5DH	1.2	6	20.9	23	10.1	16
Old Warren	BT28 1RJ	1.4	6	18.1	24	11.9	24
Lagan Valley	BT28 1LH	1.4	6	20.5	25	13.1	21
Ballymacash	BT28 3JL	1.4	5	22.1	30	10.2	21
Harmony Hill	BT27 4NT	1.8	7	22.7	29	9.1	18
Knockmore	BT28 2QW	1.9	7	18.4	25	11.4	24
Ballymacross	BT28 2UR	1.9	6	19.6	28	10.2	21
Magheralave	BT27 4NY	1.9	7	22.9	30	8.9	18
Blaris	BT27 5LP	2.2	9	21.9	26	11.1	19
Lambeg	BT27 4UQ	2.3	8	22.2	28	9.6	20
Hilden	BT27 4UN	2.5	8	22.1	28	9.8	21
Maze	BT27 5RG	3.9	12	18	25	14.1	24
Seymour Hill	BT17 9BE	4.7	14	26.3	35	7	17
Twinbrook	BT17 0BZ	4.8	14	25	36	7.8	18

Hillsborough	BT26 6HX	5	12	21.7	25	14.9	23
Kilwee	BT17 0FW	5	14	28.8	34	7.1	15
Ballymacbrennan	BT27 5GA	5.4	16	24.9	32	7.5	21
Collin Glen	BT17 0QY	5.4	16	29.5	36	7.8	18
Derryaghy	BT17 0WB	5.7	16	29.9	36	8.2	18
Dunmurray	BT17 0PZ	5.8	14	28.8	34	7.1	15
Poleglass	BT17 0PP	6.2	14	29.1	34	7.5	15
Glenavy	BT28 3ST	6.2	14	21.9	31	13.2	26
Maghaberry	BT67 0JW	7	17	13.3	17	19.3	26
Drumbo	BT8 8LD	7.3	19	26.7	35	6	18
Ballinderry	BT28 2ET	8.8	18	17.1	22	23.2	31
Moria	BT67 0QT	9.2	22	14	20	20.4	30
Dromara	BT25 2BF	12.1	25	19	37	22	35

Limavady Proposal

Currently Limavady deals with:

- Magistrates Court – Adult and Departmental
- County Court – Civil bills (District Judge only) and small claims

Magistrates Court Youth, Domestic and Family Proceedings are dealt with in Londonderry

Family Proceedings cases are dealt with in Londonderry

Family Care cases are dealt with in Londonderry

Crown cases are dealt with in Londonderry

<u>Electoral Ward</u>	<u>Sample Postcode</u>	Travel Distance to Limavady Court (m) BT49 0EY	Driving Time (minutes)	Travel Distance to Londonderry Court (m) BT48 6PQ	Driving Time (minutes)	Travel Distance to Coleraine Court (m) BT52 1NY	Driving Time (minutes)
Coolessan	BT49 9BQ	0.6	3	17.4	32	14.7	24
Rathbrady	BT49 0BW	0.8	4	17.5	32	14	22
Ballykelly	BT49 9HJ	0.8	2	17.2	31	15.7	23
Greystone	BT49 0RW	1.1	6	18.1	35	14.8	24
Enagh	BT49 0ST	1.4	6	18.6	35	14.4	23
Forest	BT49 0QF	1.5	6	18.4	35	14.7	23
Roeside	BT49 0DP	2.1	4	18.1	32	13.5	19
Magilligan	BT49 9DZ	3.3	8	17.9	34	17.8	27
Aghanloo	BT49 0QU	5.2	11	21.3	39	12.3	20
Glack	BT49 9JJ	7.2	13	14.6	28	21.4	33
Greysteel	BT47 3TT	7.3	13	10.3	21	21.8	33
Dungiven	BT47 4LZ	8.9	15	18.8	29	19.3	30
The Highlands	BT47 4QL	9.1	15	19.7	31	18.4	29
Feeny	BT47 4TR	13	22	16.7	30	23.5	40
Upper Glenshane	BT47 4SG	14.6	31	24.4	45	24.7	46

Armagh Proposal

Currently Armagh deals with:

- Magistrates Court – Adult, Youth, Departmental and Domestic Proceedings
- County Court – Civil bills and small claims

Family Proceedings cases are dealt with in Newry

Family Care cases are dealt with in Craigavon

Crown cases are usually dealt with in Newry

<u>Electoral Ward</u>	<u>Sample Postcode</u>	Travel Distance to Armagh Court (m) BT61 9DJ	Driving Time (minutes)	Travel Distance to Newry Court (m) BT35 6JD	Driving Time (minutes)	Travel Distance to Craigavon Court (m) BT64 1AP	Driving Time (minutes)
Downs	BT61 7DH	0.6	3	18.3	28	14.4	23
Observatory	BT61 7JR	0.6	3	18.8	30	14.4	23
The Mall	BT61 9DP	0.6	3	18.4	28	13.8	21
Abbey Park	BT61 7SD	1.1	3	19.3	30	14.9	24
Callan Bridge	BT60 4DG	1.2	5	18.6	28	14.8	24
Demesne	BT60 1JJ	1.9	6	17.5	25	14.8	24
Milford	BT60 3NG	2.6	8	20.3	32	16.4	29
Ballymartrim	BT61 8BP	4.5	10	22.7	36	18.3	31
Killeen	BT60 2AP	4.6	11	16.8	28	18.4	32
Hamiltonsbawn	BT60 1QH	6.6	13	13.2	20	13.2	22
Rich Hill	BT61 9PT	6.9	11	17	26	9.4	15
Hockley	BT61 8NW	6.9	12	19.2	30	9.4	15
Charlemont	BT71 7SD	7.1	11	25.4	39	14.9	25
Carrigatuke	BT60 2QL	7.2	16	18.4	31	21	36
Markethill	BT60 1TB	7.5	15	11.4	19	15.1	26
Keady	BT60 3TS	8.3	16	21.5	35	22.2	37

Loughgall	BT62 1SQ	9.4	17	23.9	39	9.9	17
Poyntz Pass	BT60 2DH	10.3	17	8.5	14	17.9	29
Killylea	BT60 4JG	10.8	18	28.4	42	24.6	39
Laurelvale	BT62 2NW	10.9	18	16.2	29	9.1	17
Tandragee	BT62 2GD	11.4	21	13.9	24	8.3	17
Derrynoose	BT60 3DY	13.6	25	26.8	44	27.4	45

Armagh Proposal Option 1 Specialist Court Centre

Under the specialist court centre option travel impacts would be felt not only by court users from Armagh (as set out in the table above) but also court users from the Craigavon petty sessions area who would be required to travel to Newry for criminal cases.

<u>Electoral Ward</u>	<u>Sample Postcode</u>	Travel Distance to Craigavon Court (m) BT64 1AP	Driving Time (minutes)	Travel Distance to Newry Court (m) BT35 6JD	Driving Time (minutes)
Drumgor	BT64 9BE	1.4	4	20.4	36
Killycomain	BT63 5JD	1.9	5	19.8	35
Taghnevan	BT66 8AG	2.1	5	21.6	37
Kernan	BT63 5HN	2.2	4	23.9	36
Drumgask	BT65 5DZ	2.5	6	19.6	33
Court	BT66 6BB	3.0	7	21.4	37
Edenderry (Craigavon)	BT63 5HA	3.1	9	19.3	34
Mourneview	BT66 8NL	3.3	8	20.9	36
Church	BT66 8HX	3.5	8	21.1	37
Annagh	BT62 3LD	3.8	9	19.1	34
Brownstown	BT62 3QA	4.0	8	21.3	34
Parklake	BT66 7BW	4.0	12	21.4	37
Tavanagh	BT62 3EB	4.1	9	21.1	33
Woodville	BT66 6LZ	4.2	10	22.7	43
Bleary	BT63 5PF	4.2	9	17.9	31
Drumnamoe	BT67 9LT	4.3	12	22.9	43
Corcrair	BT62 IHA	4.6	9	23.8	37
Ballybay	BT62 4EG	4.7	10	22.2	35

Knocknashane	BT66 7HF	4.9	12	21.8	34
Magheralin	BT66 7UA	5.0	13	22.5	36
Waringstown	BT66 7PZ	6.0	13	20.6	32
Ballyoran	BT62 1PX	6.1	12	25.3	40
Derrytrasna	BT66 6PL	6.5	12	25.4	46
Aghagallon	BT67 0BG	6.9	17	25.6	48
The Birches	BT62 1QU	7.2	14	24.6	40
Donaghcloney	BT66 7GH	8.6	18	20.0	31

Enniskillen Proposal

Currently Enniskillen deals with:

- Magistrates Court – Adult, Youth, Departmental and Domestic Proceedings
- County Court – Civil bills and small claims

Family Proceedings cases are dealt with in Omagh

Family Care cases are dealt with in Dungannon

Crown cases are usually dealt with in Dungannon

<u>Electoral Ward</u>	<u>Sample Postcode</u>	Travel Distance to Enniskillen Court (m) BT74 7BW	Driving Time (minutes)	Travel Distance to Dungannon Court (m) BT71 6DE	Driving Time (minutes)	Travel Distance to Omagh Court (m) BT78 1DU	Driving Time (minutes)
Portora	BT74 6HQ	0.2	1	45.2	58	26.8	42
Erne	BT74 6DH	0.5	3	45.2	58	26.7	41
Castlecoole	BT74 6FE	1.2	4	42.3	56	26.5	40
Devenish	BT74 6EJ	1.2	5	46.2	62	25.9	40
Rossorry	BT74 7GR	1.6	5	46.8	63	27.6	44
Ballinamallard	BT74 4BW	2.7	8	41.6	57	24	41
Lisbellaw	BT74 4LW	4.3	10	42.7	55	27.3	48
Tempo	BT94 3LU	8.3	14	35.2	46	19.4	32
Maguiresbridge	BT94 4AX	8.8	13	36.7	46	26.1	41
Irvinestown	BT94 1GJ	9.8	16	44.1	63	17.3	26
Lisnaskea	BT92 0HL	12.1	19	40.5	53	30	48
Lisnarrick	BT94 1PY	12.2	21	51.4	68	21.7	32
Boho, Cleenish & Letterbreen	BT93 5FX	12.5	23	57.8	81	38.5	62
Derrylin	BT92 9LA	12.9	21	48.5	65	38	60
Derrygonnelly	BT93 6BR	13	21	58.2	79	39	60

Florencecourt & Kinawley	BT92 1BR	13.4	22	58.6	80	39.4	61
Donagh	BT92 0DF	14.2	25	42.6	58	31.9	53
Kesh, Ederney & Lack	BT93 0BH	16.1	27	47.5	60	16.6	24
Brookborough	BT75 0SU	18	26	30.3	41	19.8	36
Belcoo & Garrison	BT93 3BX	18.8	27	64	85	35.9	52
Newtownbutler	BT92 6FL	20.3	33	48.8	67	38.2	61
Rosslea	BT92 6PP	22.6	38	40.8	59	30.1	54
Belleek & Boa	BT93 3FY	24.2	36	67.1	88	36.3	52

Magherafelt Proposal

Currently Magherafelt deals with:

- Magistrates Court – Adult, Youth, Departmental and Domestic Proceedings
- County Court – Civil bills and small claims

Family Proceedings cases are dealt with in Londonderry

Family Care cases are dealt with in Londonderry

Crown cases are dealt with in Londonderry

<u>Electoral Ward</u>	<u>Sample Postcode</u>	Travel Distance to Magherafelt Court (m) BT45 5DG	Driving Time (minutes)	Travel Distance to Londonderry Court (m) BT48 6PQ	Driving Time (minutes)	Travel Distance to Dungannon Court (m) BT71 6DE	Driving Time (minutes)
Glebe	BT45 5RW	0.3	2	40	57	20.9	39
Town Park East	BT45 6QT	1.4	6	40.6	59	20.6	37
Town Park West	BT45 5NZ	1.5	6	40.6	59	19.8	36
Knockcloghrim	BT45 5EU	3.1	9	37.3	57	23.9	45
Castledawson	BT45 8BG	3.3	10	39.1	55	23.4	45
Ballymaguigan	BT45 6LG	3.6	8	50	58	22.3	40
Bellaghy	BT45 8LX	6	15	40.8	59	26.1	50
Lecumpher	BT45 5NP	6	13	32	56	22.3	42
Tobermore	BT46 5DH	6.7	12	32	46	25.3	44
Gulladuff	BT46 5RJ	7	12	32.3	46	27.2	45
Lower Glenshane	BT45 7HN	8.2	16	31.6	50	26.7	47
Draperstown	BT45 7LU	9.6	16	28.4	49	23.5	45
Swatragh	BT46 5NG	9.8	17	32.8	49	28.4	48
Valley	BT44 8NQ	10.3	19	41.3	61	30.5	54
Maghera	BT46 5GZ	10.3	18	32	48	28.9	49
Upperlands	BT46 5UW	11.8	21	35.8	54	30.3	52

Strabane Proposal

Currently Strabane deals with:

- Magistrates Court – Adult, Youth, Departmental and Domestic Proceedings
- County Court – Civil bills and small claims

Family Proceedings cases are dealt with in Omagh

Family Care cases are dealt with in Dungannon

Crown Cases are dealt with in Dungannon

<u>Electoral Ward</u>	<u>Sample Postcode</u>	Travel Distance to Strabane Court (m) BT82 8DT	Driving Time (minutes)	Travel Distance to Londonderry Court (m) BT48 6PQ	Driving Time (minutes)	Travel Distance to Omagh Court (m) BT78 1DU	Driving Time (minutes)
North	BT82 8BU	0.4	2	14.5	26	19.5	31
East	BT82 8HT	0.6	3	14.7	27	18.8	28
West	BT82 9EA	0.9	4	15.1	26	18.8	28
Ballycolman	BT82 9AQ	1.1	5	15.4	28	18.8	29
Finn	BT82 9GZ	1.6	6	15.2	27	19.6	30
Victoria Bridge	BT82 8PJ	3.1	8	17.2	32	16.8	32
Sion Mills	BT82 9QA	3.9	10	17.5	30	16.6	24
Artigarvan	BT82 0HE	4.2	9	12.4	22	24.2	38
South	BT82 9WY	4.9	11	14.1	27	24.9	40
Dunnamanagh	BT82 0QL	7.3	14	11.3	23	26	43
Slievekirk	BT47 2RZ	9.1	15	6.6	15	29.1	45
Newtownstewart	BT78 4JN	10	19	24.5	41	10.5	18
Plumbridge	BT78 4EE	10.5	19	25.1	41	9.8	16
Castledearg	BT81 7DH	11.3	20	25.8	42	18.5	31
Clare	BT81 7LU	11.6	21	26	44	17	29
Glenderg	BT81 7EA	12.4	23	26.9	45	18.2	31

WITNESSES AFFECTED BY RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis of 10,319 records show that for 7,321 witnesses there would be no change to the journey distance or time under the proposals - that is over 70% of this witness group. That means that 2,998 (or 29%) of witnesses would have had a change to their journey distance and time if the proposals as set out in the consultation were implemented.

Analysis of this would show that in terms of the journey distances the impact would be:

- 744 (or 7%) would have had a lesser journey distance,
- 1282 (or 12.5%) would have had an increased journey distance of under 10 miles,
- 768 (or 7.5%) would have had an increased journey distance of between 10 and 20 miles, and
- 204 (2%) would have had an increased journey distance of over 20 miles.

In relation to the time it would take to complete journeys to alternative court venues under the proposals in the consultation document

- 712 (or 7%) would have a reduced travel time,
- 293 (or 3%) would have an increased journey time of less than 10 minutes,
- 687 (or 7%) would have an increased journey time of 10 to 20 minutes,
- 501 (or 5%) would have an increased journey time of 20 to 30 minutes,
- 351 (or 3.5%) would have an increased journey time of 30 to 40 minutes,
- 63 (or 0.5%) would have an increased journey time of 40 to 50 minutes,
- 206 (or 2%) would have an increased journey time of 50 to 60 minutes,
- 69 (or 0.5%) would have an increased journey time of 60 to 70 minutes,

- 116 (or 1%) would have an increased journey time of 70 to 80 minutes.

Source: Data for civilian witnesses in magistrates' court criminal contests from Public Prosecution Service during 2014

Location Specific Numbers

Venue: Ballymena to Antrim	Number of Witnesses	% of Witnesses
Witnesses with a shorter journey	134	32%
Witnesses with an increased journey (under 10 miles)	113	27%
Witnesses with an increased journey (10 to 20 miles)	173	41%
Witnesses with an increased journey (over 20 miles)	0	-

Excludes 25 witnesses with a postcode outside NI or the postcode was incorrect or missing.

Venue: Lisburn to Belfast	Number of Witnesses	% of Witnesses
Witnesses with a shorter journey	119	20%
Witnesses with an increased journey (under 10 miles)	463	80%
Witnesses with an increased journey (10 to 20 miles)	0	-
Witnesses with an increased journey (over 20 miles)	0	-

Excludes 124 witnesses with a postcode outside NI or the postcode was incorrect or missing.

Venue: Newtownards to Belfast	Number of Witnesses	% of Witnesses
Witnesses with a shorter journey	310	38%
Witnesses with an increased journey (under 10 miles)	498	62%
Witnesses with an increased journey (10 to 20 miles)	0	-
Witnesses with an increased journey (over 20 miles)	0	-

Excludes 126 witnesses with a postcode outside NI or the postcode was incorrect or missing.

Venue: Armagh to Newry	Number of Witnesses	% of Witnesses
Witnesses with a shorter journey	53	18%
Witnesses with an increased journey (under 10 miles)	63	22%
Witnesses with an increased journey (10 to 20 miles)	176	60%
Witnesses with an increased journey (over 20 miles)	0	-

Excludes 70 witnesses with a postcode outside NI or the postcode was incorrect or missing.

Venue: Limavady to Coleraine	Number of Witnesses	% of Witnesses
Witnesses with a shorter journey	36	19%
Witnesses with an increased journey (under 10 miles)	34	18%
Witnesses with an increased journey (10 to 20 miles)	119	63%
Witnesses with an increased journey (over 20 miles)	0	-

Excludes 13 witnesses with a postcode outside NI or the postcode was incorrect or missing.

Venue: Magherafelt to Dungannon	Number of Witnesses	% of Witnesses
Witnesses with a shorter journey	1	1%
Witnesses with an increased journey (under 10 miles)	8	5%
Witnesses with an increased journey (10 to 20 miles)	99	66%
Witnesses with an increased journey (over 20 miles)	41	28%

Excludes 18 witnesses with a postcode outside NI or the postcode was incorrect or missing.

Venue: Strabane to Omagh	Number of Witnesses	% of Witnesses
Witnesses with a shorter journey	34	17%
Witnesses with an increased journey (under 10 miles)	47	24%
Witnesses with an increased journey (10 to 20 miles)	117	59%
Witnesses with an increased journey (over 20 miles)	0	-

Excludes 15 witnesses with a postcode outside NI or the postcode was incorrect or missing.

Venue: Enniskillen to Omagh	Number of Witnesses	% of Witnesses
Witnesses with a shorter journey	57	16%
Witnesses with an increased journey (under 10 miles)	56	16%
Witnesses with an increased journey (10 to 20 miles)	84	23%
Witnesses with an increased journey (over 20 miles)	163	45%

Excludes 99 witnesses with a postcode outside NI or the postcode was incorrect or missing.

Annex 5

Court Location	Walk	Cycle	Own Vehicle (Car/ Motorbike etc)	Lift from friend/ family	Taxi	Bus	Train	Brought here by PSNI/ Solicitor	Other	Don't know/ refusal/ missing	Total
Antrim	3.4%	0.0%	77.6%	4.3%	6.0%	4.3%	2.6%	0.0%	0.9%	0.9%	100.0%
Newtownards	10.3%	0.0%	67.5%	12.0%	3.4%	6.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Armagh	6.9%	0.0%	69.4%	15.3%	2.8%	2.8%	0.0%	0.0%	1.4%	1.4%	100.0%
Ballymena	17.4%	1.2%	61.6%	11.6%	4.7%	1.2%	0.0%	1.2%	1.2%	0.0%	100.0%
Bangor	16.3%	1.0%	59.6%	10.6%	3.8%	3.8%	0.0%	2.9%	1.0%	1.0%	100.0%
Coleraine	6.9%	1.0%	53.9%	23.5%	9.8%	3.9%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Craigavon	5.1%	1.0%	62.2%	17.3%	1.0%	6.1%	1.0%	6.1%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Londonderry	14.6%	1.0%	44.7%	20.4%	12.6%	4.9%	0.0%	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Downpatrick	3.9%	0.0%	68.9%	19.4%	1.0%	2.9%	0.0%	3.9%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Dungannon	1.1%	0.0%	78.0%	11.0%	3.3%	1.1%	0.0%	3.3%	1.1%	1.1%	100.0%
Enniskillen	16.8%	1.1%	66.3%	4.2%	5.3%	3.2%	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%	2.1%	100.0%
Laganside	17.6%	0.0%	45.8%	7.2%	9.8%	9.2%	3.3%	2.6%	2.0%	2.6%	100.0%
Larne	14.1%	1.6%	64.1%	10.9%	4.7%	1.6%	3.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Limavady	19.2%	0.0%	61.5%	13.5%	3.8%	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Lisburn	1.5%	0.0%	41.2%	17.6%	14.7%	13.2%	10.3%	0.0%	0.0%	1.5%	100.0%
Magherafelt	6.8%	0.0%	76.1%	8.0%	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%	2.3%	4.5%	1.1%	100.0%
Newry	2.7%	0.0%	76.6%	16.2%	0.9%	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%	0.9%	100.0%
Old Town Hall	23.6%	0.0%	48.2%	6.4%	8.2%	10.0%	2.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%	100.0%
Omagh	9.7%	0.0%	75.4%	8.2%	1.5%	3.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.2%	0.0%	100.0%
Royal Courts of Justice	21.7%	0.0%	57.3%	2.8%	4.2%	7.0%	3.5%	0.0%	0.0%	3.5%	100.0%
Strabane	10.8%	0.0%	54.1%	21.6%	6.8%	2.7%	0.0%	1.4%	0.0%	2.7%	100.0%
Coroners Office	0.0%	0.0%	80.0%	6.7%	0.0%	6.7%	6.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Tribunal	8.3%	0.0%	55.6%	8.3%	2.8%	11.1%	8.3%	0.0%	5.6%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	11.1%	0.3%	62.4%	11.8%	5.1%	4.7%	1.4%	1.3%	0.9%	1.0%	100.0%