



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

13 March 2014

Shailesh Vara MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
London
SW1H 9AJ

Dear Shailesh

HM Courts and Tribunals Service: Business delivery in Hereford and Worcestershire

I am writing to share my deep concern with you about HMCTS proposals to reorganise administration services at Hereford Magistrates Court, and to urge you to intervene.

In December 2013 I became aware that the Staffordshire and West Mercia Cluster of HMCTS were conducting an internal consultation on the future of administrative services in the region. Four of the seven options presented involved relocating administrative staff from Hereford Magistrates' Court, either to Worcester or Kidderminster. Both the preferred options (options 3 and 7) involve relocating Hereford-based staff to Worcester.

I immediately wrote to the Cluster Manager, outlining my strong concerns about the substance of the proposals and the lack of wider consultation. On the substance of the proposals, I urged HMCTS to consider the option supported by most of the staff and the Public and Commercial Services Union: to combine the administration teams in Hereford County Court and Hereford Magistrates Court.

On the lack of consultation, I stressed the potential for the proposed changes to have a far-reaching impact on the administration of justice in Hereford and suggested that it would be reasonable to give local stakeholders such as Herefordshire Citizens Advice Bureau, Victim Support and the local branch of the Law Society the opportunity to respond.

I was therefore deeply disappointed to learn that 12 of the 47 responses to the consultation – including my own – were disregarded on the grounds that the respondents were external to HMCTS. This is no way to run a consultation and shows a worrying lack of consideration for the staff and local stakeholders, who had thought it important to let me know about these proposals. **I find it astonishing that an unelected public body can disregard the submissions of a local MP when they are making decisions that will affect jobs and how public money is spent in their constituency.**



I also find it striking that HMCTS's response to the consultation makes no attempt to estimate whether there would be any cost saving associated with their proposal, or to analyse what potential risks are associated with it. The response gives short shrift to the strong level of opposition from respondents and the alternative proposals advanced by local staff.

HMCTS propose to start implementing their plan in April. I would urge you to put a pause on this until there has been a proper opportunity to consider the proposals put forward by local staff - and to take the 'external' responses to the consultation into account.

I enclose a copy of my original letter to HMCTS, plus the consultation documents for your consideration. I would be very happy to give you a more detailed briefing.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Jesse Norman', written over a large, stylized flourish.

Jesse Norman
Member of Parliament
Hereford and South Herefordshire

Enc

cc Lesley Wilby, Staffordshire and West Midlands Cluster Manager, HM Courts and
Tribunals Service