



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

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Dr Carolyn Wilkins
Chief Executive
Oldham Council
Civic Centre
West Street
Oldham
OL1 1UG

Our Ref: SB/OMBC01002/01150550

18 September 2015

Dear Carolyn

Re: Oldham Council Resolution – Closure of County and Magistrates Courts

Thank you for your recent letter regarding the above resolution that was passed by Full Council on the 9 September. Please be assured that I have already raised this issue with the Justice Minister in July and have attached my letter and the response I received in reply.

I fully support the resolution and assure you I will continue to pursue this issue on behalf of my constituents on the grounds I have already raised.

Yours sincerely

The Rt Hon Michael Meacher MP
Oldham West & Royton
Including Chadderton & Hollinwood

Encl.



Ministry
of Justice

Shailesh Vara MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of
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Rt Hon Michael Meacher MP
11 Church Lane
Oldham
OL1 3AN

Your reference: SB/MINI01001/01150465
MoJ ref: 24997

7th August 2015

HM COURTS & TRIBUNALS SERVICE ESTATE REFORM

Thank you for your letter of 24 July regarding HM Courts & Tribunals estate reform consultation and the proposed closure of Oldham County Court and Oldham Magistrates Court.

I would like to emphasise that this is a genuine consultation and no final decisions will be made until all consultation responses have been carefully considered.

As a first priority, the consultation aims to address surplus capacity within the HM Courts & Tribunals Service estate. It puts forward proposals that aim to reduce this surplus capacity by closing those courts and tribunals that are unused or underused. In the case of Oldham County Court and Oldham Magistrates Court, court room utilisation was recorded as 12% and 28% respectively for the 2014/2015 financial year and accordingly have been identified as being underused.

You raise the important matter of ensuring access to justice, in the context of travel time and cost. In an increasingly digital age, users will not always need to attend hearings in person in order to access the justice system and whilst we have already established alternative ways users can interact with our services, we are looking to expand these provisions to provide more choice than is currently available. For example through making better use of technology, including video conferencing, and exploring whether we can appropriately make use of civic buildings for certain types of hearing.

I am grateful for your views and the concerns you have raised on behalf of your constituents which will be fully considered as part of the consultation process.

Yours

SHAILESH VARA



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

Our Ref: SB/MINI01001/01150465

24 July 2015

Dear Shailesh

Re: HM Courts & Tribunals Service Estate Reform

Thank you for your letter of the 16 July regarding the above.

I am extremely concerned to learn that the current consultation proposes to close Oldham County Court and Oldham Magistrates' Court which are both situated within my constituency.

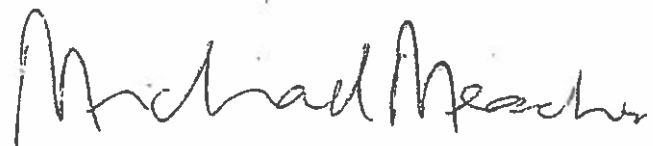
I made representations to the previous Minister when this was first aired on the grounds that moving work to Manchester will put jobs at risk for people employed in the court service and will cause hardship for local people due to the extended travelling required. Oldham has some of the most deprived wards in the country and travelling to and from Manchester will be financially difficult for a large number of people. Furthermore whilst the Magistrates' Court is quite a few years old it cannot be described as ageing and the county court is a relatively new building.

The closure of these smaller courts will have an extremely negative impact on both employees and those constituents who will be forced to travel long distances to access justice and I would therefore ask that you do everything possible to retain the courts on the following grounds –

- Oldham is a relatively poor area, with higher than average levels of unemployment and is considered a low wage economy.
- Travel costs to and from Manchester will be out of reach for many people
- Local solicitors and other legal representatives would have to travel further if Oldham courts are closed and this would incur extra costs that would almost certainly be passed on to local people
- The closure of services in Tameside will only make the situation worse

I cannot comment on other premises within the town being available for relocation, particularly considering that the County Court building is not very old. I would therefore stress that the courts need to remain open.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Meacher". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M'.

The Rt Hon Michael Meacher MP
Oldham West & Royton

Encl.