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Dear Oliver

HM COURTS SERVICE ESTATES

I am writing to let you know that tomorrow I will make a Written Ministerial Statement on the closure of a number of Magistrates' courts following a full public consultation.

Bridport and Sherborne Magistrates' Courts are included in this list. The courts have not heard cases since November 2008 and July 2006 respectively following local decisions on the listing of cases and before that time, both courts were underused, sitting on average two days per month. In addition the courts have insufficient facilities for victims and witnesses. Cases previously heard in Bridport are now heard in Weymouth Magistrates' Court; and those previously heard in Sherborne are now heard in Blandford – both of which are in the same Local Justice Area (West Dorset) to ensure continued local access to justice. These courts provide far superior facilities to users, and are accessible via public transport.

HMCS is continually reviewing the use of its estate to determine how it can best ensure that everyone has access to justice and that justice is provided locally. We need to ensure that we have a modern court estate that is properly aligned to where services are needed; that the estate is efficiently utilised; and that courts have the necessary facilities for victims and witnesses and to allow proper access for court users with disabilities.

A copy of the response paper will be placed in the libraries of both Houses and on the Ministry of Justice website. You may be interested to know that the consultation paper received seven responses, only one of which objected to the proposal to close these two courts.

Taking into account all responses, and the cost to the taxpayer of bringing the building up to the required standard, I believe that it remains the best option to close the court.

*Yours,
Jack*

JACK STRAW