

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board

**DATE:** 1<sup>st</sup> October 2015

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director, Community and Resources

**PORTFOLIO:** Community Safety

**SUBJECT:** Proposal on the Provision of Court and Tribunal Services in the North West Region – Consultation Paper

**WARDS:** Borough-Wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To invite Executive Board to agree a response to the Consultation Paper received from HM Courts and Tribunals Service on the proposal on the provision of Court and Tribunal Services in the North West region.

**2.0 RECOMMENDED: That HM Courts and Tribunal Service be notified that the Council does not agree with the proposals set out in the Consultation Paper, for the reasons contained in Appendix 2 of this report.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 The Council received a letter from HM Courts and Tribunal Service introducing a consultation on proposals to change the provision of the Court and Tribunal estate. This is wide-ranging across the country, and the Consultation Paper in so far as it relates to the North West region is attached as Appendix 1.

3.2 There are proposals to close Runcorn Magistrates Court, which are set out on page 34 of the Consultation Document. The work presently carried out at Runcorn would be transferred to Warrington Magistrates Court if, under a linked proposal, Warrington County Court is closed. Warrington Magistrates Court would then move into the Warrington Combined Courts Centre. The Warrington section of the proposals is at page 47 of the Consultation Document. In essence, if Warrington County Court were to be closed, then the work presently dealt with there would be split between Liverpool and Manchester.

3.3 The questions to which a response is invited are on page 52 of the Consultation Paper, and are primarily whether the consultee agrees with the proposals, and what the impact would be.

3.4 All Members of the Council have been invited to express their views to the Operational Director, Legal and Democratic Services, on the proposals, and regular Court users amongst the Council staff have also been asked for their opinions.

- 3.5 All of those who have responded have indicated that they do not agree with the proposal, and have asked that HM Court and Tribunal Service be notified of this. There have been a range of reasons given, and these have been summarised as far as possible in a draft response, which is at Appendix 2 of this report. The key areas are the increased cost and difficulty of travel for Halton residents, the impact on staff and their time, the pressure on Court provision, and the view that Runcorn Magistrates Court should be removed from the proposals as it is comparatively well used.

#### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There are no specific implications in respect of the Council's policy framework arising from this report.

#### **5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Implications for residents of the Borough and Council staff using the Courts are set out in detail in Appendix 2 to this report.

#### **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

- 6.1 Ensuring access to justice is a fundamental issue which cuts across many of the Council's priorities. The issues are highlighted in Appendix 2.

#### **7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

- 7.1 There is a risk that the implementation of the proposals contained in the Consultation will adversely impact on Halton residents and other Court users. For these reasons, Executive Board is invited to inform HM Courts and Tribunal Service that the proposals are not agreed.

#### **8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

- 8.1 It is intended that the response to the Consultation Paper demonstrates the Council's commitment to ensuring equality of access to Court provision.

#### **9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

- 9.1 Responses received from Members and Officers to the Consultation Paper are held by Mark Reaney, Operational Director Legal and Democratic Service, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Municipal Building, Kingsway, Widnes.