

September 2010

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Harro Magistrates' Court Report from the Challenge Panel

Members of the Challenge Panel

Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane (Chairman)

Councillor Susan Anderson

Councillor Christine Bednell

Councillor Vina Mithani

Councillor Sachin Shah

Councillor Stephen Wright

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1. Chairman's Introduction & Acknowledgements

This is the report from the Harrow Magistrates' Court Challenge Panel which took place on 19 August 2010. The Overview and Scrutiny committee commissioned the Challenge Panel to consider Ministry of Justice proposals to close Harrow Magistrates' Court with the intention that its comments and observations would feed into the Council's formal response to the public consultation, due to end on 15 September 2010. The panel comprised of:

Councillor Macleod-Cullinane (Chairman)
Councillor Anderson
Councillor Bednell
Councillor Mithani
Councillor Sachin Shah
Councillor Steve Wright

We are extremely grateful for the support we received from Harrow Police and the Bench at Harrow Magistrates' Court who very kindly attended the meeting and provided invaluable contributions. We would also like to thank officers from the Council's Legal Department and the Collections and Housing Benefits Department, who helped us to understand the potential impact of the proposals on the Council.

We are also grateful to Councillor Bill Stephenson, Leader of the Council and Councillor Susan Hall, Leader of the Conservative Group, for attending the panel and contributing to our investigation.

Finally, we would like to thank Her Majesty's Court Service for agreeing to send a representative to the Challenge Panel in order to outline the proposals in more detail.

The Challenge Panel concluded that Harrow Magistrates' Court should not be closed and that we should strive to protect local justice for local people. The Panel also heard mention of alternative arrangements for siting the Magistrates' Court in Harrow and felt that, if closure of the building was pursued, alternatives such as co-locating with the Crown Court or as part of a larger municipal re-development of the Kodak site should be explored as a matter of urgency.

It was also the conclusion of the Panel that the consultation was flawed, that it contained numerous inaccuracies and that, though being undertaken to save public money, closure of Harrow Magistrates' Court would, in fact, shunt significant costs on to other public sector bodies, such as Harrow Police and the Council, as well as on to local businesses and, above all, Harrow's residents. There was also concern expressed by the Panel that closure would result in more failed cases.

Overall, the Challenge Panel has been able to make a number of helpful observations and recommendations and, on behalf of all the Members involved, I commend this report.

Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane
Chairman of the Challenge Panel

2. Background

Following the formation of the new coalition government in May 2010, Kenneth Clarke was appointed the new Justice Secretary. On 23 June 2010, the Ministry of Justice announced proposals to modernise and improve the use of courts in England and Wales in order to eliminate waste and reduce costs. The consultation paper was entitled "*Proposals on the provision of magistrates' and county court services in London*". If implemented, the proposed changes will significantly alter the way in which Magistrates' Courts and County Courts in London operate. For Harrow, this would mean closure of Harrow Magistrates' Court, with cases being relocated to courts in Brent and Hendon.

Her Majesty's Court Service (HMCS) believe that the design, number and location of many of its courthouses does not reflect changes in the population, workload and transportation infrastructure that have occurred since many of the buildings were originally opened. As a result, HMCS asserts that some courts sit infrequently, hear too few cases and fail to provide suitable facilities for those attending hearings.

By utilising courthouses more efficiently, HMCS believes it can save public money whilst improving services for court users. If the proposals are implemented as per the consultation document, HMCS anticipates running cost savings of approximately £15.3m per year and a one-off maintenance saving of £21.5m. Over 25 years, reducing and merging courts would save an estimated £260m.

HMCS currently operates Magistrates' Courts in 34 locations across London, although the services and facilities offered at these locations varies considerably. Whilst a number of locations offer relatively new purpose-built courthouses, a significant number are still reliant on old buildings, most of which were not designed with the needs of modern courthouse users in mind. HMCS has stated that whilst many of these older facilities are operating at near maximum capacity, some of the newer courthouses are only using 50% of available courtroom space. HMCS argue that, whilst previous changes to management structures and the centralisation of administrative functions have helped to reduce running costs, continuing to support the same number of sites is no longer viable. As such, HMCS is recommending the closure of 11 Magistrates' Courts in London, one of which is Harrow Magistrates' Court.

In developing the estates rationalisation proposals for its Magistrates' Courts, HMCS have adopted a number of key principles, as originally detailed in the paper *Planning for the future of the Magistrates' Courts service in London* which was issued on 13 October 2009. These are as follows:

- *the provision of a magistrates' court service that is accessible to court users (in terms of the speed of case outcome, the quality and efficiency of the service provided, courthouse environment and geographical proximity);*
- *creation of a courthouse (and Local Justice Area) structure that is sufficiently flexible to enable the work of the courts to be dealt with in a timely way;*
- *provision of an appropriate and safe environment for court users and those who work in the justice system;*
- *demonstration of cost effectiveness and efficiency in comparison to the rest of the country; and*

- *not allowing existing boundaries to inhibit the creation of a structure that best fits future requirements to better serve court users.*

In line with this final point, another element of the proposals is to reduce the number of Local Justice Areas (LJA) by merging existing areas which had historically been defined on a borough basis. HMCS is proposing to merge the 28 existing LJAs that currently exist in London into nine. Under the proposals, Barnet, Brent and Harrow would merge to become known as the North West LJA. By merging existing LJAs and closing 11 Magistrates' Courts, HMCS believes that it can make better use of the remaining estate and significantly reduce costs both to HMCS and other agencies within the criminal justice system.

Harrow Magistrates' Court is a three court centre that has general criminal jurisdiction. It also takes traffic work from neighbouring LJAs and is the only Magistrates' Court within the current Harrow LJA. Under the proposals, the court would close and its work would be dealt with by courthouses within the newly created North West London LJA, namely Hendon and Brent Magistrates' Courts.

The consultation document provides the following justification for the closure of Harrow Magistrates' Court:

- *Whilst the Court has good utilisation levels, one third of work is traffic work transferred in from other LJAs;*
- *The main entrance is not suitable for access by wheelchair;*
- *There is a fundamental security issue as the public counter is accessible prior to passing through the security check;*
- *The concourse offers limited waiting space;*
- *There is no segregation between adult and youth courts;*
- *The witness accommodation is directly off the main concourse and there is no dedicated route to the courtrooms for witnesses;*
- *External security at the building is currently compromised as a victim support office is based in a separate building at the rear of the car park meaning public visitors have to pass unfettered through the court's car park;*
- *There is no secure van bay so defendants in custody arrive in an unsecure car park in full public view;*
- *The main heating pipework is buried within the floor and is in urgent need of replacement. The work would require full building closure and is prohibitively expensive.*

HMCS have estimated that operating cost savings per year will be in the region of £227,371 (based upon 2009/10 costs) and that closure would remove the need to undertake £60,000 worth of maintenance work. The consultation document states that "*the size of the courthouse, its operational deficiencies and the availability of modern facilities and spare capacity at Brent and Hendon means that it is difficult to justify the continued retention of this building*".

At its meeting on 27 July 2010, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee acknowledged that there had been significant concern raised by the Council, its corporate partners and residents

over the closure of the courthouse. As a result, the Committee agreed to arrange a Challenge Panel to consider the matter in more detail, with the intention that its findings and observations would feed into the Council's response to the public consultation which is due to end on 15 September 2010.

In order to assist and inform the work of the Challenge Panel, the following individuals were invited to attend as witnesses:

- **Julien Vantghem**, HMCS (Justices' Clerk for the West Clerkship)
- **Nigel Orton**, Harrow Magistrates' Court (Chair of the Bench)
- **Mike Wallis**, Harrow Magistrates' Court (Deputy Chair of the Bench)
- **Steve Holland**, Metropolitan Police (Criminal Justice Unit Manager)
- **Lynn Alaker**, Harrow Council (Revenues Service Manager)
- **Paresh Mehta**, Harrow Council (Senior Litigation Lawyer)
- **Councillor Susan Hall**, Harrow Council (Leader of the Conservative Group)
- **Councillor Bill Stephenson**, Harrow Council (Leader of the Council)

The meeting took the form of a round table discussion during which Members questioned witnesses on the potential impact of the proposals on their organisation or service. Based upon these discussions, Members of the Challenge Panel have made a number of observations which are detailed in the next section.

3. Observations

We accept that, in light of the current economic climate and the need to reduce the public deficit, there is a genuine need for HMCS, along with the rest of the public sector, to identify significant operational savings and that these savings will most likely require HMCS to reconsider the way in which it operates.

Whilst we do not dispute the need for HMCS to review the use of its estate, we are deeply concerned with the proposals which have been put forward for Harrow Magistrates' Court.

Our key concerns are as follows:

3.1 Inadequacy of the consultation document

3.1.1 Lack of financial analysis:

We are concerned that, despite the proposals for Harrow Magistrates' Court being financially motivated, the consultation document lacks any thorough financial analysis.

- Aside from basic travel cost calculations, no analysis has been done of the costs likely to be incurred by court users, including the Council and its partners, if the proposals are implemented;
- The operating costs referred to in the consultation document are poorly defined making it hard to properly scrutinise the proposals. Due to the lack of detail, it is also not possible to ascertain which operating costs would transfer to Brent Magistrates' Court and/or Hendon Magistrates' Court, or whether this has been factored into the figures provided by HMCS;
- No consideration has been given to the cost of maintaining Harrow Magistrates' Court should it cease to operate as a courthouse. HMCS would have a duty to maintain the building (which is listed) if it were to be closed and these costs do not appear to have been accounted for;
- No consideration has been given to whether the proposed savings could be found through alternative means, such as co-locating the Magistrates' Court at Harrow Crown Court or by making Harrow Magistrates' Court part of a wider civic services development on the Kodak site. At a time when public bodies are thinking imaginatively about how to deal with budget pressures, we were very surprised that the consultation document only considers one possible option: closure of Harrow Magistrates' Court and relocation of work to Brent and Hendon.
- No reference has been made to the fact that witnesses who are asked to attend court to give evidence for the prosecution can claim expenses. All expenses are the same whichever court is attended except for travel costs.

3.1.2 Inaccuracies concerning the suitability of the courthouse:

Having had the opportunity to speak to some of Harrow Magistrates' Court key users, including members of the Bench, the Police, and Council officers, we

believe that many of the statements in the consultation document concerning the unsuitability of the courthouse are not only inaccurate but, in some instances, misleading.

- The consultation document states that the main entrance is not suitable for access by wheelchair users but it makes no mention of the fact that disabled access is available via a conveniently located alternative entrance. None of the parties that attended the Challenge Panel felt that disabled access posed a significant problem. We are also informed that the Council's surveyor recently stated that the courthouse was fit for purpose;
- Whilst maintenance costs are cited as a key justification for closing Harrow Magistrates' Court, the consultation document does not acknowledge that Brent Magistrates' Court is also an old building with its own maintenance issues, including heating and air conditioning concerns;
- The consultation document states that the court house has 'limited waiting space', implying that more space is required. However, we were informed by members of the Bench that waiting space has not been a problem in the past and that recent spot checks have revealed that there is adequate capacity. Again, none of those that attended the Challenge Panel felt that waiting space was an issue. Whilst Harrow Magistrates' Court has less waiting space than Brent or Hendon, we refute the suggestion made in the consultation document that this is an operational deficiency;
- The consultation document listed five security 'issues' relating to the building and layout. However, the Health and Safety Incident Report Log (1) and the Security Incident Report (5), attached as Appendix Two do not support these assertions, containing no entries regarding issues of security occurring due to the building or layout.

All incidents happened either within Court or referred to damage to car park barrier caused by a contractor van reversing;

- When considering the suitability of Harrow Magistrates' Court, the consultation document fails to acknowledge that the courthouse is very well served by public transportation, including multiple bus routes and a train station.

3.1.3 Redefining the concept of local justice:

HMCS appears to be redefining 'local justice' to mean 'accessible justice', and this theme runs throughout the consultation document. HMCS has informed us that it believes 90 minutes to be an acceptable journey time and therefore believes that requiring those based in Harrow to attend Brent or Hendon is reasonable. However, we feel that any decision to redefine the concept of 'local justice' requires wider consideration and is not a decision that can simply be taken by civil servants.

3.1.4 No consideration of the courthouse's listed status:

We understand that HMCS would most likely attempt to sell Harrow Magistrates' Court should the proposals be implemented. Whilst the consultation document

acknowledges the listed status of the courthouse¹, it does not consider the difficulties that HMCS would likely face in finding a buyer. As the courthouse is listed both inside and out, it would be difficult for any future owner to make any modifications. As a result, HMCS is likely to struggle to sell the building and, as previously highlighted, would, in any case, be responsible for maintenance in the interim.

3.2 Cost Transference

During discussions, it became clear that HMCS has given little consideration to the way in which the proposals will create additional costs for court users, including the Council, the police and other partners. For example, whilst HMCS has estimated that the closure of Harrow Magistrates' Court will produce yearly savings in the region of £220,000 (based upon 2009/10 operating costs), the Council alone is expecting additional annual costs of nearly £80,000². We are greatly concerned that, taking into account the large number of public bodies that would be required to travel to Brent or Hendon, the overall cost to the public sector would most likely offset any organisational savings made by HMCS. Rather than making genuine savings, we believe that HMCS will simply transfer costs to other public bodies. At a time where public bodies are seeking to work closely with each other in order to reduce costs and share resources, we find it surprising that HMCS appears to be willing to significantly disadvantage other public organisations in an attempt to make relatively small savings. This outdated, "silo-thinking" is very much at odds with the current logic of the public sector which is exploring the concept of "total place" and examining all the costs and spending across the public sector in a particular area.

The proposals also mean that Harrow-based residents will face increased costs if they are required to attend court in Brent or Hendon. Whilst the specific costs involved for any individual may seem relatively small in comparison to the costs likely to be incurred by the Council and its partners, they are no less significant especially during these difficult times. When the extra costs incurred by all individuals (and their families and supporters) are included, this extra cost starts to significantly outweigh the supposed savings touted by HMCS. Moreover, for those on low incomes, the £7 additional travel costs cited by HMCS in the consultation document are a significant part of their income. If individuals travel to support friends or family members at the court, these costs start to rise further still.

3.3 Impact on Policing in Harrow

3.3.1 Police resources:

We acknowledge that Harrow is fortunate to have a Crown Court and that Brent Police regularly have to travel to Harrow to attend hearings. However, we do not accept HMCS's argument that Harrow Police should therefore be expected to travel out-of-borough to attend Brent or Hendon Magistrates' Court. Harrow Police receive significantly less resources than their counterparts in Brent and therefore the relative financial impact on Harrow Police would be greater. At a time when all budgets are in danger of being cut, the proposals have the potential to place Harrow Police in a very difficult financial situation.

¹ Appendix Three provides detailed information concerning the courthouse's listed status.

² A more detailed analysis of costs likely to be incurred by the Council can be found under section 3.4

We are also concerned that, with police officers away from their duties for longer as they travel to and from Hendon or Brent, there could be serious repercussions for community safety in the borough. Harrow's establishment is already very low, with fewer police officers than neighbouring boroughs, such as Brent. To lose even more officers from our streets for extended periods of time would be unacceptable.

3.3.2 Witness and victim attendance:

In 2007, Harrow Magistrates' Court was closed for maintenance and work was transferred to Brent. During this period, Harrow Police noted a significant increase in the number of victims and witnesses failing to attend hearings and an increase in the number of cases collapsing. We are therefore very concerned that the permanent closure of Harrow Magistrates' Court would produce similar results but on a permanent rather than temporary basis. From our discussions with the Police and the Council's Legal Department, we understand that ensuring witness attendance is difficult at the best of times and we are therefore concerned that attendance rates will suffer if the proposals are implemented. We are particularly concerned that witness attendance rates for sensitive cases, such as domestic violence, may fall dramatically, especially if victims are in a vulnerable state and therefore unable to travel. As those sensitive cases would likely require support from friends and family, travel costs would yet again be an issue.

In addition to witness and victim attendance, there is a danger that some defendants would also not attend court, resulting in increased costs as a result of the need to issue arrest warrants.

3.3.3. Increased crime rates

Potentially, if cases fail and if convictions are more difficult to secure, the result will be higher crime levels in Harrow, with all the costs to residents, businesses, police and other services that this brings.

3.4 Impact on the Council

In order to consider the impact of HMCS' proposals on the Council, we invited representatives from two Council departments that engage with the court service on a regular basis: the Legal Department and the Collections and Housing Benefits Department. Both these service areas stand to incur significant costs should the proposals be implemented.

3.4.1 Collections and Housing Benefits Department:

At present staff attending Harrow Magistrates' Court do not incur any travel costs due to the close proximity of the courthouse to the civic centre. If staff were required to attend Brent or Hendon Magistrates' Court, it is estimated that this would cost the service, at a minimum, an additional £11,000 per year in travel costs.

In addition to travel expenses, staff time costs would increase dramatically as officers would be required to spend significantly longer attending court. It is estimated that this would cost the service just under an additional £60,000 per year. Total costs to Collections and Housing Benefits Department alone would therefore exceed £70,000 per annum. We understand that it is unlikely that the Council would be able to increase the cost of summons in order to offset these

additional costs. A breakdown of estimated costs for this service can be found in Appendix Four.

We feel that the financial implications for this service alone are unacceptable, but there are further issues which staff would have to contend with and that would ultimately impact on the efficiency of the service. In particular:

- There are security implications of staff having to take large quantities of confidential paperwork between the civic centre and Brent or Hendon Magistrates' Court;
- There are also implications for staff safety with individuals returning to Harrow late if hearings took longer than anticipated;
- Staff would be unable to 'call up' additional staff to come to court at short notice which would mean that additional officers would have to attend hearings on the off-chance that they would be needed;
- At present customers wishing to make payments have to return to Harrow Civic Centre to do so as council staff are not permitted to take payments directly. This would not be easy if work was transferred to Brent or Hendon;
- If it proves too costly to send officers to Brent or Hendon, the Council might have to reduce the number of hearings and therefore debts will not be collected as promptly. This will obviously have performance and financial implications for the Council; a fall in council tax collection rate would have the following repercussions: in-year spending cuts to balance cash flow and future service cuts and council tax rises.

3.4.2 Legal Department

In 2009, Harrow Council Legal Department dealt with 110 preliminary criminal hearings in Harrow Magistrates' Court, involving attendance at the Court on 57 separate occasions. In addition 8 trials were listed, 10 hearings for warrants of entry and 3 licensing appeals.

Adding 2 hours to travel time involves 110 hours for the preliminary hearings, 20 hours for the warrants for entry hearings, 18 hours for the licensing appeals (based on 3 officers attending to present and/or give evidence) and 48 hours for the trials (based on 3 officers attending to present and/or give evidence). Based on an hourly rate of £40 (which is the on-costed salary for junior lawyers, disregarding the on-costs of accommodation, IT and other support services) this would amount to an additional cost of £7,280. This is the *minimum* level as many cases will require more senior lawyers to attend for all or part of a hearing.

The Legal Department also share the same concerns noted by Collections and Housing Benefits Department, in particular the security of case files, safety of staff (particularly when finishing late at court), impact on disabled staff and defendants/witnesses needing to attend court, the increased likelihood of defendants (and some witnesses) failing to attend hearings, the extra pressure on staff left in the office to manage without their colleagues and the reduced time that staff attending court will have to deal with other important work.

3.4.3 Insurance for staff, equipment and documents

With more staff having to travel further to attend court, we anticipate that the cost of Insurance will rise.

3.6 Summary of Observations

In summary, our main concerns are as follows:

- The consultation document is extremely flawed and filled with numerous errors and inaccuracies, suggesting that only a cursory attempt has been made to understand the needs of Harrow residents;
- The consultation document is inadequate in that it provides insufficient financial detail, fails to consider a multitude of potential costs;
- Rather than creating real savings, HMCS is transferring costs to the Police, the Council, its partners and Harrow residents and businesses, with the total costs being transferred likely outweighing any internal savings HMCS hope to make;
- HMCS appears to be working in isolation to the rest of the public sector and the wider Harrow community: whereas the rest of the public sector is striving to save public money through increased partnership working, HMCS has given no real consideration to the costs likely to be transferred to other organisations, local businesses and residents;
- HMCS has not considered the social cost of closing Harrow Magistrates' Court and how the proposals have the potential to impact on witness attendance, victim attendance and effective local justice – which will, ultimately, result in rising crime levels in the borough of Harrow;
- HMCS is weakening and diluting the fundamental tenet of British law, of local justice for local people to the detriment of Harrow residents.

4. Recommendations

We would like to make the following recommendations to HMCS:

1. That local justice should be retained for local residents by keeping open Harrow Magistrates' Court;
2. A full analysis be undertaken to properly consider the financial impact of the proposals on the Council, relevant partners, voluntary organisations and residents;
3. A full cost analysis be carried out, taking into account any costs that would transfer to Brent and Hendon should Harrow Magistrates' Court be closed. The analysis should also consider the costs of maintaining the courthouse if closed and any maintenance work required at Brent Magistrates' Court;
4. Full consideration be given the potential impact on victim, witness and defendant attendance rates;
5. Consideration to be given to alternative proposals, such as co-locating Harrow Magistrates' Court at Harrow Crown Court and, in the medium-longer term, whether Harrow Magistrates' Court might become part of a larger co-location of public services (police, council and courts) on the Kodak site.

We would like to make the following recommendations to Cabinet and all other councillor colleagues:

1. The Challenge Panel's report form part of the Council's corporate response to the consultation;
2. This report be presented at Cabinet on 14th September 2010 prior to submission to Her Majesty's Court Service as another way to raise public awareness of the proposed closure of Harrow Magistrates' Court and specifically to formally demonstrate to Her Majesty's Court Service the Council's clear determination and commitment to retain local justice for local people.

5. CONCLUSION

After hearing from a number of key witnesses from HMCS, Harrow Magistrates Court, Harrow Police, council officers and from both the Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Conservative Group, we believe that the proposal to close Harrow Magistrates' Court is flawed on a number of levels.

Firstly, the consultation from Her Majesty's Courts' Service contains numerous factual errors and inaccuracies.

Secondly, whilst saving money forms the core of the proposals – something that the Challenge Panel supports in principle – the Challenge Panel was disappointed at the lack of exemplification of costs and savings involved, with little or no attention paid to an increase in partners' and the public's costs. The Challenge Panel heard evidence to suggest that the proposals to close Harrow Magistrates' Court would shunt significant costs on to the Council, the police, other partners, businesses and Harrow residents – a cost-shunt potentially far outweighing the internal savings to be made by HMCS.

Thirdly, the proposals do not properly address the matter of Harrow Magistrates' Court being a listed building inside and out.

Fourthly, it became clear that alternative options had not been explored, such as co-location at the Crown Court or on a civic services campus at the Kodak site.

Fifthly, and more importantly, the Challenge Panel felt that even exempting the disputed issue of costs, the flaws in the consultation document, and the lack of attention paid to its listed status, the proposals to close Harrow Magistrates' Court should be rejected. The Challenge Panel believes that closure of the court would poorly serve the people of Harrow by depriving them of a long-held and fundamental tenet of British law, namely, local justice for local people.

For all these reasons, the Challenge Panel recommends that Harrow Council should seek to champion Harrow Magistrates' Court being retained as a functioning court, to work with partners and to communicate with the borough's residents to reject closure plans.

APPENDIX 1: HARROW MAGISTRATES' COURT CHALLENGE PANEL - SCOPE

1	SUBJECT	Harrow Magistrates' Court Challenge Panel
2	COMMITTEE	Overview and Scrutiny
3	REVIEW GROUP	Cllr Anderson Cllr Bednell Cllr Macleod-Cullinane Cllr Mithani Cllr Sachin Shah Cllr Steve Wright
4	AIMS/ OBJECTIVES/ OUTCOMES	To provide comment on HMCS proposals to close Harrow Magistrates' Court and to transfer work to courthouses within the new North West London LJA, namely Hendon and Brent. It is intended that the findings of the Challenge Panel will feed into the Council's response to the public consultation which is due to end on 15 September 2010.
5	MEASURES OF SUCCESS OF REVIEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project completed on time; • Officers welcome contribution of the Challenge Panel; • Add value by offering informed cross party scrutiny analysis of the proposals.
6	SCOPE	To consider the merit and impact of HMCS proposals on Harrow, namely the closure of Harrow Magistrates' Court.
7	SERVICE PRIORITIES (Corporate/Dept)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve support for vulnerable people by considering the impact of the magistrates' court closure on court users, many of which are victims of crime. • Building stronger communities by considering the impact of the court closure on Local Justice.
8	REVIEW SPONSOR	Andrew Trehern, Corporate Director of Place Shaping
9	ACCOUNTABLE MANAGER	Lynne Margetts, Service Manager Scrutiny
10	SUPPORT OFFICER	Damian Markland, Acting Senior Democratic Services Officer
11	ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	N/A
12	EXTERNAL / INTERNAL INPUT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Her Majesties Court Service • Harrow Police • Harrow Magistrates' Court • Harrow's Legal Department • Harrow's Collections and Housing Benefits Department • Bill Stephenson, Leader of the Council • Susan Hall, Leader of the Conservative Group

13	METHODOLOGY	Challenge panel - Consideration of proposals outlined in the consultation paper.
14	EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS	As the HMCS proposals recommend the closure of Harrow Magistrates' Court, with work being transferred to Brent and Hendon, there are access considerations that need to be taken into account, particularly the needs of those with limited mobility.
15	ASSUMPTIONS/ CONSTRAINTS	The Challenge Panel is a time-limited process. The consultation period is due to end on 15 September 2010. The final report of the Challenge Panel needs to be submitted to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 8 September 2010 so that the report can be agreed and released.
16	SECTION 17 IMPLICATIONS	If the proposals are implemented, Harrow Police will have to send police officers out of borough to attend court hearings. This could potentially have an impact on police resources in Harrow.
17	TIMESCALE	The panel will take place in August. The final report must be available for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 8 September 2010.
18	RESOURCE COMMITMENTS	To be met within existing scrutiny resources.
19	REPORT AUTHOR	Damian Markland, Acting Senior Democratic Services Officer
20	REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS	Outline of formal reporting process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge Panel Meeting • Report Produced • Report sent to Overview and Scrutiny Committee • Final report sent to Chief Executive for inclusion with Council's response to HMCS • Final report to be presented to September Cabinet as part of the Council's efforts to save the court.
21	FOLLOW UP ARRANGEMENTS (proposals)	Safer and Stronger Community Leads to monitor outcome of consultation.

Contact: Damian Markland, Scrutiny team, Harrow Council

Background Papers:

Proposal on the provision of magistrates' and country court services in London
<http://www.justice.gov.uk/consultations/docs/proposal-on-the-provision-of-magistrates-and-county-court-services-london-final.pdf>

(Ministry of Justice: Published 23 June 2010)

Planning for the future of the Magistrates' Court service in London

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/docs/discussion-paper-london-magistrates-courts.pdf>

(Ministry of Justice: Published 13 October 2009)