

**SUBMISSION BY USERS OF THE ACTON FAMILY PROCEEDINGS COURT
("ACTON FPC") CONSULTATION PAPER "HMCS LONDON REGION
PROPOSALS FOR A NETWORK OF FAMILY COURTS CENTRES".**

1. This document has been written by Edward Lock, a member of the Law Society's Children Panel, who practices in the Acton FPC, following a meeting comprising the Chairman of the Family Panel, Court Legal Advisers, Local Authority solicitors and solicitors in private practice.
2. We support the concept of a unified family service. We accept that if the business of the Acton FPC could be transferred to a reasonably accessible and properly serviced centre where there was available the services of magistrates a DJ (magistrates) and a Circuit Judge, then the closure of the Acton FPC could be justified.
3. However, the present proposal seems to be that the business of the Acton FPC should be transferred to a court centre at Uxbridge. It seems to us that this is wholly unsatisfactory for the following reasons:
 - (a) The Acton FPC already deals with a large number of cases. Indeed, it deals with nearly as many as does the Richmond FPC, notwithstanding that the latter now deals with the cases issued by both the London Boroughs of Hounslow and Richmond. By contrast, as the Consultation Paper itself states, at Uxbridge the "overall workload is very low" Therefore, the closure of the Acton FPC would impose upon the Local Authority, families and solicitors a significant amount of extra travel, which, in terms of both time and travel expenses, will place an additional burden on the public purse, which the Consultation Paper has ignored.
 - (b) Moreover, even after the difficulty of travelling to Uxbridge, users will not obtain the advantage of a "unified family service". There is no Circuit Judge at Uxbridge, nor any plan to have one - merely, in the Consultation paper, a statement that the matter "might require review if workload rose significantly". At present, cases transferred up from Acton FPC go to the PRFD, where all the DJs have the status of Circuit Judges.
4. It is therefore our view that the Acton FPC should remain. Furthermore, we say that it should remain in the South West Area and be linked to the Brentford County Court. Acton FPC is much closer to Brentford County Court than is Richmond FPC, the other court linked to Brentford. Acton FPC is also much closer to Brentford than it is to Uxbridge. Brentford would also have the advantage, for Acton FPC users, of providing a true unified family service,

equipped with a Circuit Judge, as well as DJs. It simply does not make sense for users of the Acton FPC to have to travel over 9 miles to Uxbridge, instead of less than 3 miles to Brentford, especially as the latter provides a wider range of judges.

5. We also believe that consideration be given to creating a FPC at the West London County Court. We acknowledge that this Court does not currently do Care, or even Family, work. However, the following points need to be borne in mind:
 - (a) This is a brand new court, in which the County Court and the Magistrates are already accommodated in the same building. The Court already has magistrates, Djs and Circuit Judges.
 - (b) So far as the users of the Acton FPC are concerned, West London County would be far more convenient than Uxbridge, being less than 3 miles away and readily accessible from all parts of the Borough of Ealing by underground (Piccadilly and District) and also by bus. Both the underground and bus stations are about 100 yards from the Court.
 - (c) The West London site could accommodate more work than that done at Acton. In the first place, it could certainly handle the cases issued by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. Not only would that be much more convenient for that Authority, the families and solicitors, but it would also remove the pressure on the Inner London Family Proceedings Court, where the space is fully used, but the waiting time for hearings is quite inconsistent with the provision of a reasonable service.

24th October 2006