



Ministry  
of Justice

**Dominic Raab MP**  
Minister of State for Justice

Bridget Phillipson MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

16 OCT 2017

Julie Elliot MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

21 October 2017

Dear Bridget and Julie,

### **COURT ESTATE IN SUNDERLAND**

At our meeting on 10 October I agreed to provide further information on HM Courts & Tribunals Service (HMCTS) interactions with Siglion Developments, and what is being considered to address the concerns raised about the Sunderland estate.

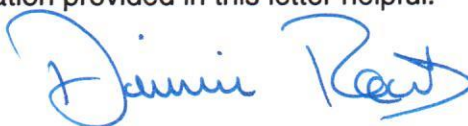
HMCTS officials met Sunderland City Council and Siglion on three occasions this year to discuss options for incorporating HMCTS requirements in Sunderland into the Keele Square development, either as part of or separate from the proposed Public Sector Hub. Siglion's work to date has examined the feasibility of a scheme for HMCTS, and is on an exploratory basis without any obligation on either side. Any further development of the proposal by Sunderland City Council will need to be carefully considered as part of a wider national estates strategy, in the context of a significant £1bn HMCTS modernisation programme.

I have asked local officials to keep you regularly updated on Siglion's exploratory work. I appreciate you are keen to understand whether and when any scheme would take effect. At the meeting it was noted that if this scheme were to be agreed it would be some years before coming to fruition. There is therefore a need for more immediate solutions in the existing estate, where it is agreed that these are required.

HMCTS remains committed to providing access to court and tribunal hearings in Sunderland but I accept that the condition of the existing court buildings is below what would be expected. Work is already underway at Sunderland Magistrates' Court to accommodate tribunal work as well as family and magistrates' criminal work. This involves refurbishing the ground floor, improving the side entrance to the building to ameliorate access to hearing rooms, and addressing the poor décor and facilities.

A condition survey was conducted at Sunderland Magistrates' Court on 18 October, to identify the key issues and to prioritise funding to those issues that affect security, safety and accessibility. I have passed on your concerns with the Magistrates' building to those conducting the surveys to ensure that they are captured in this process. Work has already been commissioned to address the damp within the building.

I hope that you will find the information provided in this letter helpful.

*You sincerely,* 

**DOMINIC RAAB MP**