Justice Committee

Scottish Court Service recommendations for a future court structure in Scotland

Written submission from Alison Marshall

Closure of Duns and Peebles Sheriff Courts

I am writing to advise of my opposition to the plans to close Duns and Peebles Sheriff Courts. There are a number of reasons for this. These are:-

1. This would mean the end of centuries old provision of justice in Berwickshire and Peeblesshire.

2. Business would be transferred from Duns to Jedburgh and Edinburgh and from Peebles to Selkirk and Edinburgh for certain criminal cases.

3. The closures would end local decision making using local knowledge in each and every case. It would end the local administration of justice in Berwickshire and Peeblesshire.

4. Duns Sheriff Court costs a minimal amount of money to run each year as does Peebles Sheriff Court. I also understand that Peebles Sheriff Court, when the current building was converted had the rental payments made a significant number of years in advance.

5. In respect of Duns Sheriff Court there is little prospect of the property being sold and therefore any potential savings to be made would be significantly reduced by ongoing maintenance and insurance costs and no capital return from sale.

6. Increased costs will be passed on to other court users and other agencies e.g. the Scottish Legal Aid Board, police, social work departments and Procurator Fiscal Service. Witness expenses will be increased as will travelling costs for other agencies.

7. The public transport in the Scottish Borders in general is very poor. It will be difficult, if not impossible, for people living in certain parts of Berwickshire, e.g. Eyemouth, to attend Jedburgh Sheriff Court for 10.00 am by public transport and return on the same day. It also has to be borne in mind that, for example in actions involving children, parents have the responsibility to care for their children and child care will be necessitated adding to the cost implications.

8. The same public transport will require to be used by the accused, witnesses, complainers, pursuers and defenders. This is likely to result in increased failures to attend at court as victims will not wish to be travelling on the same bus for a significant period of time as the perpetrator of any offence against them.

9. Duns Court is a model for how to deliver a justice system to rural areas. For years, the court has been administered from Jedburgh. The court (Sheriff, Sheriff
Clerk and Court Officer) goes to the community. Purpose built fixed premises are not required to deliver justice in rural areas. Suitable premises can be rented as required. Modern technology allows justice to go to the community.

10. Peebles Sheriff Court, when the current complex was opened, was billed as a one-stop justice centre. The police station is within the same building. The building is rented from the local authority.

11. It would appear that no consideration has been given to alternate ways of delivering justice locally.

Alison Marshall
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