Justice Committee

Scottish Court Service recommendations for a future court structure in Scotland

Written submission from Laura-Jane Legg

I would like to make my objections known regarding the closure of Cupar Sheriff Court. They are as follows:-

- If the court is moved to Dundee, it will involve more time and expenses for people to attend Court and for employers to give employees time off to attend Court

- Local access to justice will be lost

- More taxpayers' money will have to be spent by the Police and Social Services attending Court in Dundee than the projected £38,000 per year saving to the Scottish Court Service by closing Cupar Sheriff Court

- People living on the coast in Elie, Pittenweem, etc, may have bus journeys of up to 2 hours to arrive in Court on time - and that's assuming that the Tay Bridge has not been closed due to winds..!

- The Court sat the equivalent of 257 days last year which merits it remaining open

- Relative savings from closure (net of dilapidations which is only a paper accounting entry) leaves only £38,000 per year out of hoped for savings of £1.43m per year. Such a tiny saving does not justify dismantling local justice in Cupar - compare the one-off transfer to Dundee costs of £91,000. On the other hand Cupar Court generates fees of around £200,000 per year which must off-set its running costs

- Cupar is/will be a fully integrated service like Livingston comprising Court, Police and Social Services all under one roof

- Cupar has three “cafeteria” facilities paid for by Fife Council, a vulnerable witness suite and up-to-date technology

- There will be an economic impact on Cupar town as many wage and salaries dependant on the Court will be spent elsewhere

- One Sheriff sitting in a country Sheriff Court like Cupar provides continuity of approach and benefits from local knowledge and deals with cases at every stage as espoused by retired Sheriff George Evans

- The backlog maintenance claim of £470,000 for Cupar is not credible when compared with an average of £12,000 per year over the last five years
(£51,000 of which was spent on the one-off refurbishment of the Sheriff Clerk’s office)

Laura-Jane Legg
21 May 2013