Justice Committee

Scottish Court Service recommendations for a future court structure in Scotland

Written submission from Jacqueline Bell

I remain opposed to the closure of Haddington Sheriff and JP Courts and the transfer of business to Edinburgh. I understand that Peebles Court is also under threat and the 2 closures will have implications both to local people in East Lothian and to the service currently given by Edinburgh Sheriff Court

The closure will have an effect on both criminal and civil cases e.g:

**Criminal**

There will be increased transport costs to defendants in attending Edinburgh Sheriff Court. Transport from the East of the county to Edinburgh is limited (some places only hourly buses or none at all) and expensive.

There will be increased costs to witnesses in attending Edinburgh Sheriff Court. Instead of a morning off work a full day may be needed to get to Edinburgh and back.

There will be increased costs for defendants in legal fees as costs for lawyers e.g. their transport and time will be greater. This could increase the legal aid budget.

There will be increased costs in police time as officers attend court. There will also be need to fund cover for officers as they attend court.

**Civil**

There will be longer periods for cases for Adoption and Adults with Incapacity Guardianship coming to Court. Currently Guardianship at Edinburgh can wait as long as 6 months to be heard. This means that a person waiting on Welfare Guardianship may be blocking a hospital bed if they have not agreed to move to a care home. Even if they have agreed to go to a care home many homes will not accept a resident until Financial Guardianship is agreed. If a home does agree to accept a resident it can be months before the fees can be paid leading to large debts for the individual.

We have already seen decisions on Diversion from Prosecution transferred from local Procurators Fiscal to a central office in Stirling leading to lengthy delays and anxiety for those affected.

Please reconsider the closure.

Jacqueline Bell
11 May 2013