Justice Committee

Scottish Court Service recommendations for a future court structure in Scotland

Written submission from Allan Sutherland

Threatened Closure of Stonehaven Court

I am writing to you to voice concerns on the proposed Scottish Court Reforms, especially Stonehaven Sheriff and JP Court

I understand you are taking evidence on all the recommendations presented in the report “Shaping Scotland’s Court Services, April 2013”.

I also understand that parliamentary orders will shortly be laid. I urge Committee members to move for annulment so that the entire set of proposals may be returned to the Parliament for further debate and consideration.

Why don’t you believe the experts?

I was at a public meeting last Monday night about the decision to close Stonehaven Court. It was a reassuring demonstration of the best in Scottish life; despite the early 6pm start almost 100 concerned citizens were there to hear informed senior politicians putting aside party allegiance in support of a just cause, backed up by compelling evidence by people who in former times would be regarded as unimpeachable sources - and seekers - of the truth, ie 2 former sheriffs, a court lawyer and a court administrator.

I say "in former times" because it seems that these days when 150 members of the Sheriffs’ Association get together to point out the flaws in the proposals to cut the number of courts, followed up on a local level by Kincardine and Deeside Faculty of Procurators these pillars of society are ignored at best and seen as fantasists and Luddites at worst.

Please do your homework this time

More worryingly is the seeming inability of the Justice Committee to do its own digging into the detail, as was pointed out to one of your colleagues, Alison Mclinnes. Apart from the sheer impracticality of the changes, it also seems clear that the financial case does not stack up. In Haddington, for example, a town of roughly the same size and proximity to a major centre as Stonehaven, the true financial impact of closing the court is not a paltry £50k per annum saving but a whacking £800k+ cost.

Our local MSP, Nigel Don, who has said he wants our court to stay open, has urged us to get the financial facts together. Aberdeenshire Council, unlike East Lothian, has not enlisted a forensic accountant to provide a similar analysis, but I urge you to consider Stonehaven, and its cost impact, as similar to Haddington,
I think whoever is determined to close these courts is making a mockery of you, the democratic process and the people of Scotland - PLEASE FIGHT BACK FOR THE GOOD OF SCOTTISH LIFE AND JUSTICE!!

Allan Sutherland
19 May 2013