Justice Committee  

Scottish Court Service recommendations for a future court structure in Scotland  

Written submission from Ronnie Murphy

I am a court user in my capacity as a solicitor. Closure of Cupar Sheriff Court will have a serious adverse effect on businesses and individuals in East Fife. I am highlighting this personally as many of the businesses and individuals will not appreciate this until the time comes for them to have dealings with the court. They will spend more time (in my case more than double the time) travelling to and from court and have to pay the increased costs for themselves, their witnesses and legal agents of travelling to Dundee.

Access to justice should be local. Cupar is a country court which operates well. Dundee is a very busy city court already. Transfer of Cupar business to Dundee will adversely affect both the existing Cupar and Dundee Court users through increased pressure on court time and increased time waiting to be heard.

In addition, I refer you to my submission to the earlier consultation, copy of which is attached, regarding the financial effects of closing Cupar Sheriff Court. Closure simply shifts the savings of £35,000 per year from the Scottish Court Service to the Social Work Department and police whose increased costs of attending court in Dundee will be more than £35,000 per annum.

There is no economic reason to close Cupar Sheriff Court and deprive people and businesses in East Fife of access to local justice.

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Response Form

- 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

• All those attending Court will face longer and more costly journeys

• Police, expert witnesses and social workers will have to take more time away from work to attend Court if Cupar is closed

• 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)

(b) As a single “summary” Sheriff Court possibly subsuming the JP Court and extending the Court boundary to include parts of Glenrothes to transfer some work from overstretched Kirkcaldy Sheriff Court