Justice Committee

Scottish Court Service recommendations for a future court structure in Scotland

Written submission from McKinnon Forbes

We wish to express our concern at the Scottish Court Services failure to recognise the significant level of public opposition to the plans to close Haddington Sheriff and JP Courts and the damage it will cause. We are a firm of solicitors based in East Lothian and the closure of the court will have a devastating effect on our clients particularly the most vulnerable in our society and local businesses.

It was made quite clear from the analysis of the consultation responses that people in East Lothian made by far the largest number of responses against the proposals. Yet the SCS has completely ignored the strength of feeling and evidence produced and pressed ahead with its closure plan.

There would appear to be no regard for people involved and in particular very few costs saved, particularly as much of the analysis and the figures produced to support the closures are erroneous and totally inaccurate. This has been confirmed by forensic accountant and understand that this has been submitted to you.

Notwithstanding the cost of enforcing attendance to a court almost 20 miles way.

Our clients mostly attend for family actions and rely on benefit and no transport. To travel to Edinburgh is extremely costly throughout the lifetime of their case. So much so that many will be denied access to justice. It is quite intolerable that the poorest most vulnerable and most needy in our society should be denied access to court.

In addition at Haddington there is one residence sheriff who deals with all family law cases and has local knowledge which is of great benefit to family matters.

There has been a Court in Haddington for some 800 years. It is integral to the principal of justice being dispensed with locally that we retain the Courts. It is also crucially important to the local economy and to the delivery of other key public services in the County especially for the most vulnerable. At a time when we should be ensuring growth within our communities and we are seeing some positive signs of growth in the East Lothian area this should then be taken away with no consideration to the people this court serves.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our position and hope that you will listen and act now to save Haddington Sheriff and JP Courts.

McKinnon Forbes
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