Proposed court closures and service reductions at Peebles, Annan and Lanark Courts

I am writing to you in my capacity as a local MP to express my concern and disappointment following the Scottish Court Service’s decision to recommend the closure and down grading of a number of important local courts which serve my constituents. This disappointment was furthered when the Scottish Government chose to accept these proposals and I am grateful to your committee for taking the time to further scrutinise the proposals.

I wish to highlight the view expressed by a number of my constituents who feel that the consultation ignored their views and did not take the true cost of these measures for local communities and justice itself into account. I fully agree with them that it is important that justice is seen to be done locally and this retrograde step removes local justice. This is particularly the case in rural areas where the community is very much engaged in the process of local justice. I am worried that this link will be broken and that this may also reduce the deterrent of committing certain types of crime as breaches of the law will not be as effectively reported in the local press.

Making people travel further both as witnesses, victims, jury members, staff and appearing parties is not easy in this region as public transport is not readily available and increasing the distance people will have to travel will increase costs and undoubtedly inconvenience. This move could also lead to trials being delayed. The plans will also seriously harm access to justice, may end up costing more money and could even hit small businesses who benefit from their local sheriff or JP court.

I am also concerned that these court closures and downgrades come despite warnings that the remaining courts will not be able to cope with such an increase in cases. The SCS describe these cuts as proportionate, but it means more than 10,000 cases will now have to be allocated to those Scottish courts that remain and there is a strong perception that justice already takes too long to be done and for cases to come before the courts.

I ask you to strongly consider recommending that these proposals are rejected by MSPs. I am sure you will take these views seriously and I thank you once again for the work you are doing to make sure people across Scotland are heard.

Rt Hon David Mundell MP
16 May 2013