Justice Committee

Scottish Court Service recommendations for a future court structure in Scotland

Written submission from Ann Lowe

Haddington Sheriff Court

Local impact on access to justice -

I refer to the above and write this as a concerned resident of East Lothian and in particular, Haddington. I also write as the mother of a school pupil from Haddington who attended at the court for work experience.

I have followed the prospective closure of Haddington Sheriff Court, mainly in my local newspaper, and decided to attend the recent meeting that was organised on 7th May. I was astounded to hear that there will in fact be no saving at all to this closure and in fact a considerable amount will be payable from the public purse. Any savings to SCS will be far outweighed from other sources. It was also stated that the Chief Executive of East Lothian Council had offered to pay the savings of £47,000 per year but this was simply dismissed. Quite a few proposals were made to SCS so why is no consideration being given to looking into these proposals to provide a more efficient service? Haddington is in the unique position of having its justice partners almost on its doorstep.

Local impact on court users -

Many people from outlying districts in East Lothian will find it very difficult and time consuming to travel to Edinburgh. There are of course rail links from certain towns but Edinburgh Sheriff Court is still a long walk from the station and also the bus links most of which would end at Princess Street. I note that the court in Duns is also to close would it not be a consideration to transfer some of the business from Duns to Haddington, particularly the towns which are along the A1 route and on direct bus routes.

Haddington CAB discussions at the meeting stated that there would be no assistance at Edinburgh Sheriff Court for East Lothian cases. Haddington CAB provides a valuable service to residents, among other things, under threat of being evicted from their homes and in light of new welfare reforms this service will be lost to them.

As I stated above my daughter attended for work experience. She could not speak highly enough of the commitment of the staff to provide a first rate service. She also attended for a morning with other 6th year pupils as part of her Modern Studies and the resident Sheriff and Sheriff Clerk Depute spoke to them before and after a criminal court. I know that this can be made available in other courts but for local pupils it is so much easier for them to attend Haddington.

I also think that there will be a huge loss to local traders in Haddington. There is central government initiatives to re-generate town centres. The court brings 1000s of people a year, witnesses etc, into Haddington and no matter if they only buy a
newspaper this income will be lost. It also can give these people a flavour of what Haddington has to offer and encourage them to attend again.

I trust all of the above will be taken into account.

Ann Lowe
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