Justice Committee

Scottish Court Service recommendations for a future court structure in Scotland

Written submission from Raymond Boyle

I am writing to you re the proposal to close Rothesay Sheriff Court on the Isle of Bute.

I concur wholly with the views of those that sent previous submissions including that of Tim Saul and that of Elaine Campbell of Wm. Skelton and other residents of the island.

I read with interest that the SCS were claiming that "the accommodation at Rothesay does not meet the standards required".

I agree with Mr James S Hannay that there is no meat to the bones and no substance to this statement. As a Chairperson conducting Children's Hearings in Argyll & Bute I frequently Chair hearings in the courtroom at Eaglesham House. It is necessary on occasion to keep families apart and I know of no complaints with regards to the facility or accommodation.

The claim that 'travel time to Greenock is only 1 hour and a half ' for defendants seems to be hailed as some beacon of light by SCS. Let us remember we are not just talking about defendants and witnesses that need to make the journey but a plethora of agencies including police.

The travel time is a very real concern for the public and it only takes a weather related ferry diversion to Gourock to turn the normal 35min crossing into 2hrs of your life you'll never get back.

This concern probably falls down the pecking order when you consider the points and issues well documented by previous submissions.

Allow me to go off at a tangent for a moment....as a member of Argyll & Bute Licensing forum the 5 licensing objectives are somewhat indoctrinated within me

*preventing crime and disorder
*securing public safety
*preventing public nuisance
*protecting and improving public health
*protecting children from harm.

Whilst we are not talking about licensing I feel these would very much spring to mind as a concern if the decision was made to move trials to Greenock with the issues being

i) witnesses and defendants travelling together on the same ferry
ii)weather related delays/cancellations to ferries resulting in persons/families seeking
accommodation on the mainland
iii) weather related delays/cancellations to ferries resulting in police and other agencies being stranded on mainland
iv) lack of police resource on the island due to police attending court in Greenock

The mooted figure of £6k savings seems paltry when you consider what costs will be met elsewhere in terms of expenses paid, transport costs and additional resources.

I would ask that before a decision is made that the following be given consideration:

i) SCS staff to experience making the journey themselves both on a good day and a weather issue related day
ii) statistics to be sought from Caledonian MacBrayne on ferry cancellations and diversions to Gourock over a 2yr period including winter and summer
iii) a full root and branch costing of individuals travelling to Greenock over a year and what budgets will meet these costs eg cost of a police officer to attend court and the resource needed to cover over a year’s period.

I have a personal concern that a decision to move the court would lead to other organisations such as The Scottish Children’s Reporters Association following suit and moving hearings to Greenock where similar issues and concerns would arise.

In the current economic climate it would be folly for the Justice Committee and The Scottish Parliament not to look at the bigger picture when considering both the human costs and financial costs.

I wish you well in your decision making.

Raymond Boyle
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