Justice Committee

Scottish Court Service recommendations for a future court structure in Scotland

Written submission from David Fleming

Stonehaven Sheriff and JP Court

I wish to submit the following evidence to the Justice Committee when it is considering the Draft Order for the closure of Stonehaven Sherriff Court and Stonehaven Justice of the Peace Court.

The evidence I wish to give is based on interviews with a number of police officers in the Stonehaven Station, and confirmed by public information from Stonehaven Court officials.

Stonehaven Courts normally sits four days a week.

During an average month, some 20 Police Officers are required to give evidence. They have to wait for, on average, a whole day, and need to to be near the court for the whole of that time, therefore not doing outside police duties.

At present, whilst they are waiting to be called, at Stonehaven Court, Police Officers can be in their office in the Police Station and getting on with routine office-based work. This will apply wherever the officer is normally based, because he will have access to the secure Police IT systems, which are not available in Aberdeen Court buildings. Because the Police Station and the Court are in the same building, it only takes a few minutes for the police officer to walk from his office to the court precincts and be ready to be called. Once he has given evidence, he can walk back to his desk and/or go out on duty. There is very little unavoidable waste of police time.

In the proposed arrangements, all those police officers will have to

a) make there way to the Aberdeen Court, a journey of at least 30 minutes;
b) wait around the court building, with nothing to do, from the start time, say 9 am, until their case is called;
c) give their evidence, then
d) return to their station, with another 30 minutes minimum travelling time.

The total time for one case is unlikely to be less than 2 hours, and might even by 8 or 9 hours if the case is late on the list that day. Sometimes it is several days. So for every case where a Police office has to give evidence, there will be an extra 2 - 8 hours of police time used with absolutely no added value. I conservatively estimate this as an ANNUAL cost of

20 Police Officers per month x 8 hours per officer x 12 months x (say) £20/hour = £38,400 - three quarters of the whole stated savings from the closure.
Note: all these figures are my estimates, because no such calculation has been given in the consultation information.

The savings quoted for the proposed closure will be swallowed up by extra wasted costs in other areas.

On this ground alone, the Draft Orders ought to be annulled.

David Fleming
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