Justice Committee

Scottish Court Service recommendations for a future court structure in Scotland

Written submission from David Simpson

1. What will be the local impact of the SCS’s recommendations on access to justice?

It is also my opinion that there would be a substantial amount of “minor” crime just written off due to time restraints on the Procurator Fiscal and possible costs in actually getting witnesses and accused to court and it may viewed that it is not worth bring this to court.

I feel that there will be a substantial delay in proceedings as Edinburgh has a substantial amount of work going through the Justice System without having to add a few thousand more cases from East Lothian.

I feel that the amount of warrants issued for non-attendance at court for both accused and witnesses will increase dramatically and in turn the police will have to spend more time looking for them and picking them up. Again taking away our right to justice and to a police service. It is also of concern that the police will also have to spend a considerable amount of time in Edinburgh Sheriff Court to obtain search warrant and attend as witnesses. At the moment a 10-15 min journey from any stations within the East Lothian area would have them at Haddington Sheriff Court. The Police will also have to pay for cover of a shift whilst officers attend at court.

For many accused persons the thought of being “named and shamed” in the local newspaper is a worry. If the court closes this will not happen as I cannot see the local press travelling all the way to Edinburgh Sheriff Court to sit through a whole days court proceedings to see if there is anyone from East Lothian to report on.

2. What will the local impact be on court users of the SCS’s recommendations?

It will also have a huge financial impact on any person who has to attend court be it for criminal or civil matters. It would also mean that on occasion that witnesses in a case would often have to share a bus or train with the accused person they are to be giving evidence against. This could be intimidating and frightening to the witnesses(s). At the moment there is scope to change or catch a different bus and still make it to court on time. If the court was moved to Edinburgh there would be little or no choice in what bus you would catch. The bus services from Dunbar/Haddington are very unreliable as are the train services and very costly.

I feel that members of East Lothian will not get adequate access to justice if Haddington Sheriff Court were to be closed. It would mean that some residents in East Lothian would have a 60 mile (if not more) round trip to travel if they were to go to Edinburgh Sheriff Court. Some rural residents have the advantage as it stands at the moment of obtaining the services of a local bus whose route brings them into the centre of Haddington.
At a meeting recently it was estimated that the loss of local revenue from the local community would be around £300,000.

There will be many civil cases delays in decision making in areas in particular adoption etc at the moment it takes around 6 months to come to court if Haddington Civil business were to be moved to Edinburgh this will be increased even more.

David Simpson
17 May 2013