Justice Committee

Scottish Court Service recommendations for a future court structure in Scotland

Written submission from Kate Jordan

Cupar Sheriff Court

I write in connection with the above and beg you to reconsider the decision made.

By closing Cupar Court you are in effect signing the death warrant on the town. The Court is a huge part of the Community and brings a lot of revenue into the town. I fear that by closing the Court a lot of the towns businesses/shops will then find themselves failing and then in turn close. Cupar is already a ghost town of its former self and cannot really afford to lose anymore businesses/shops.

Not to only will the closure have the above effect but I more importantly feel it will be detrimental to the Justice System ie:-

1. If the court is moved to Dundee, it will involve more time and expenses for people to attend Court and for employers to give employees time off to attend Court

2. Local access to justice will be lost.

3. More taxpayers' money will have to be spent by the Police and Social Services attending Court in Dundee than the projected £38,000 per year saving to the Scottish Court Service by closing Cupar Sheriff Court.

4. People living on the coast in Elie, Pittenweem, etc, may have bus journeys of up to 2 hours to arrive in Court on time - and that's assuming that the Tay Bridge has not been closed due to winds...! I myself live in Kingskettle and would struggle to attend Dundee as I do not drive and have two children at school (while it would be easy to find someone to look after them for an hour before school, it would not be so easy to find someone to have them for a few hours before school or in actual fact overnight and then again to look after them after school until I got home - I am sure there are a lot of parents out there that would have the same issues). What would in average be a few hours at Cupar Sheriff Court would turn out to be a day trip to Dundee with an early morning start of 7 a.m. and not back again at the best late afternoon and at the worst 7 p.m. not only that my travelling expenses would triple in cost.

5. The Court sat the equivalent of 257 days last year which merits it remaining open.

6. Relative savings from closure (net of dilapidations which is only a paper accounting entry) leaves only £38,000 per year out of hoped for savings of £1.43m per year. Such a tiny saving does not justify dismantling local justice in Cupar - compare the one-off transfer to Dundee costs of £91,000. On the other hand Cupar Court generates fees of around £200,000 per year which must off-set its running costs.
7. Cupar is/will be a fully integrated service like Livingston comprising Court, Police and Social Services all under one roof.

8. Cupar has three “cafeteria” facilities paid for by Fife Council, a vulnerable witness suite and up-to-date technology.

9. There will be an economic impact on Cupar town as many wage and salaries dependant on the Court will be spent elsewhere.

10. One Sheriff sitting in a country Sheriff Court like Cupar provides continuity of approach and benefits from local knowledge and deals with cases at every stage as espoused by retired Sheriff George Evans.

11. The backlog maintenance claim of £470,000 for Cupar is not credible when compared with an average of £12,000 per year over the last five years (£51,000 of which was spent on the one-off refurbishment of the Sheriff Clerk’s office).

12. The Sheriff Court also deals with civil and commissary business and will affect those who have to appear as witnesses and jurors, those who wish to raise or defend debt/payment actions, those wishing to raise divorce actions and child custody cases, mental health cases and those who wish to deal with an estate themselves following to death of a loved one. I feel travelling to Dundee to deal with these issues would put added stress on all parties and be detrimental to all.

I respectfully urge you to please reconsider this motion and take into consider my points made. Cupar Sheriff Court is a lovely well respected Court and a huge huge part of our Community. The Sheriff and his staff are well respected and sadly I personally feel that would be lost should the Court close and move to Dundee.

Kate Jordan
20 May 2013