Justice Committee

Scottish Court Service recommendations for a future court structure in Scotland

Written submission from Councillor David S Berry

Haddington Sheriff Court

The Scottish Court Service put out a consultation about the provision of courts around the country. As an elected member of East Lothian Council with 14 years of service and chair of my Community and Police Partnership, I object to any decision to close Haddington Sheriff Court because it does not meet the requirements of local justice.

Local justice, as provided at Haddington, cannot be replicated in Edinburgh any more than policing appropriate for Edinburgh can be applied here. Not only are crime and criminal profiles very different but our more flexible, hands-on approach to minor infractions, using community officers, community wardens and our ASBO team has, over the last decade, been developed with support from both sheriffs and JPs who understand our need for subtlety and understanding.

When Leader of this council, I was at pains to ensure development of a strong and effective team to steer those committing misdemeanours—especially the youth element—into more reasonable behaviour. Knowing how much police time such activities takes, we funded additional local police teams, plus our own warden squad to work with them and argued for long appointments for our community constables. All this was underpinned by a sheriff court that, knowing what we were trying to achieve, acted sensitively in similar spirit. Our mode of working is yet, unknown in Edinburgh and their courts have no experience of the subtleties involved. Our sharply falling crime statistics in East Lothian will be jeopardised by the loss of the sheriff court element of our effective local justice and undermine much good work done.

I would ask the minister to reverse this ill-considered decision and propose that work done at Duns could best be transferred to Haddington because of social similarities.

Councillor David S. Berry
15 May 2013