



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Justice Committee

Lord Carloway
Lord President of the Court of Session
and Lord Justice General

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Dear Lord President,

Re-opening Scotland's courts – use of videolinks

As you will no doubt be aware, the Justice Committee has been looking at efforts to re-open Scotland's courts and tribunals, in particular for solemn criminal cases.

At yesterday's Committee meeting, Ronnie Renucci QC of the Scottish Criminal Bar Association made reference to the possibility of re-starting court circuits as a means of tackling the backlog of cases and minimising the risk of Covid-19 infection for jurors, witnesses etc. He said:

“You can also get through the backlog by doing what used to be done: putting the High Court back out in circuit, which takes it to the communities that it serves. The High Court used to sit in various places, and not only Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Livingston, as it primarily does now. Inverness, Dundee, Forfar, Perth, Stirling, Dumbarton, Hamilton, Paisley and Kilmarnock could all be utilised once we are out of the Covid-19 crisis.

In one of Mr McQueen's responses to the committee about the court estate, when he was asked whether the court had to be in a major city, such as Glasgow or Edinburgh, he said that the difficulty in using facilities outwith the major cities for High Court cases relates to the travel involved for those who are some distance from the sheriff court building in question.

That does not take account of the fact that witnesses from Inverness and throughout Scotland would have to travel to Glasgow and Edinburgh. It is for those very reasons that we say that the High Court should go out in circuit. Take the High Court to the community, and do not make the community travel all the way to Glasgow and Edinburgh to go to the High Court. In that way it would decrease travel, if that were possible.”

I should be grateful if you would provide a view on the above and whether this would, in your opinion, help tackle the backlog and be something that you might consider.

I look forward to an early response to this letter.

Best wishes,

Margaret Mitchell MSP
Convener, Justice Committee