

News Release

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Issued on behalf of the Scottish Court Service

COURT REFORMS ANNOUNCED FOR TAYSIDE, CENTRAL AND FIFE

Plans for new Justice of the Peace Courts across the Tayside, Central and Fife Sheriffdom were announced by the Scottish Court Service (SCS) today.

Under reforms to the summary justice system, District Courts currently operated by local authorities will become Justice of the Peace courts operated by the SCS.

The establishment of a unified courts administration will help ensure consistent service for court users around Scotland and introduce integrated technology to the new courts.

The arrangements, which have been developed following consultation with a range of justice and local agencies, will come into place in February 2009 are that:

- Arbroath, Forfar and Cupar Justice of the Peace courts will sit in the Sheriff Court buildings in these towns. This reflects the current arrangements for District Courts in Arbroath, Forfar and Cupar.
- Alloa Justice of the Peace court will relocate to the newly extended Alloa Sheriff Court.
- Dundee and Kirkcaldy Justice of the Peace courts will sit in the former District Court buildings in these towns.
- Perth, Dunfermline, Falkirk and Stirling Justice of the Peace Courts will relocate to the Sheriff Court buildings in these towns as soon as this can be arranged. The current plan would see the move in Falkirk take place by March 2009 and those in Stirling and Dunfermline by February 2010. Plans for the move in Perth are still being developed. In the interim Perth, Dunfermline, Stirling and Falkirk Justice of the Peace Courts will sit in the former district court until they can be accommodated in the sheriff court.

Chief Executive of the Scottish Court Service, Eleanor Emberson, said: "Prior to the consultation, other justice bodies in Tayside, Central and Fife were closely involved in the working groups which developed the unification proposals for this Sheriffdom.

"We therefore consulted on a plan which already had strong support and the few matters raised were largely about operational issues rather than location. I am content we can resolve these in our implementation discussions.

"The real benefits of co-locating Justice of the Peace courts with Sheriff Courts, when possible, include providing a single point of contact and in many cases improved facilities for all court users.

"We look forward to welcoming those district court staff who will transfer to us when unification takes place in February 2009."

Notes for News Editors

1. The Scottish Court Service currently has responsibility for the administration of the Court of Session, High Court and Sheriff Courts. Following unification, which is undertaken on a Sheriffdom by Sheriffdom basis, they will assume responsibility for all Justice of the Peace Courts. Lothian and Borders Sheriffdom unified their courts administration in March 2008, Grampian, Highland and Islands followed in June 2008. Glasgow and Strathkelvin will unify in December 2008 and the remaining Sheriffdoms by the end of 2009.

2. The enabling legislation for court unification is contained in the Criminal Proceeding etc. (Reform) (Scotland) Act 2007. This Act was passed unanimously by the Scottish Parliament and received Royal Assent on 22 February 2007.

3. On 30 June 2008 a consultation document outlining the proposals for unification in the Sheriffdom was issued to over 300 consultees. Following the end of the consultation period, a report was prepared by the Scottish Court Service for consideration by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice Kenny MacAskill and a copy of that report which contains SCS recommendations is available from the website www.scotcourts.gov.uk

Notes on Summary Justice Reform

Court Unification is one aspect of the Scottish Government's programme of summary justice reform, aimed at ensuring the justice system operates effectively in tackling low-level crime that can blight communities. Summary justice includes all non-jury criminal prosecutions, which account for over 90% of all cases that come to court each year in Scotland.

Other reforms include:

- Changes in the law relating to summary criminal proceedings which will allow cases in court to be dealt with more quickly and effectively;
- Extending the range of "direct measures" (alternatives to prosecution) such as police fixed penalty notices and fiscal fines that can be offered to an alleged offender and improving the manner in which these measures can be enforced and disclosed – ensuring they are robust and can be used in circumstances where a court appearance may not be the most effective way of dealing with cases;
- Reform of the ways in which fines and other financial penalties imposed in respect of a criminal offence can be collected and enforced – in particular the creation of the new role of fines enforcement officer with new powers to ensure where possible payment is received - ensuring that penalties are collected as efficiently and effectively as possible in future, minimising unnecessary court involvement;
- Reform of the procedures by which justices of the peace (JPs) are appointed, trained and appraised, fulfilling the commitment to retain and invest in JPs to ensure that they provide consistently high standards of justice; and
- Reforms to the framework within which courts make bail and remand decisions which will toughen the sanctions available for those who breach bail and improve the transparency and consistency of bail decisions.

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