

News Release

October 3, 2008

Issued on behalf of the Scottish Court Service

Report Recommends Single Justice of the Peace Court for Glasgow and Strathkelvin

Following consultation, the Scottish Court Service (SCS) has announced its decision on court unification proposals for the Sheriffdom of Glasgow and Strathkelvin.

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.

SCS will set up a single Justice of the Peace Court for the Sheriffdom at the existing District Court premises in Glasgow. Business from the Kirkintilloch and Rutherglen District Courts will transfer to this new court when it is established on 8 December 2008.

Chief Executive of the Scottish Court Service, Eleanor Emberson, said:

“I welcome the creation of the new Glasgow and Strathkelvin Justice of the Peace court in Glasgow which will be the largest in Scotland. I do understand that our decision not to create Justice of the Peace Courts in Rutherglen and Kirkintilloch will be a disappointment to some in those communities. In the current environment we have to look very hard at costs, and in these cases the costs involved in maintaining two courts for such a low volume of business which can be accommodated within a reasonable travelling distance.

We believe that we will be able to provide the best service to court users by focusing our resources on court accommodation in Glasgow. We recognise that the existing District court facilities which will transfer to the SCS are not ideal and we will upgrade these to ensure that the building meets minimum standards.”

SCS has met with South Lanarkshire Council, East Dunbartonshire Council and City of Glasgow Council to explain their decision and discuss operational implications. The only staff who will be affected and who will transfer to SCS are those currently working in the Glasgow District Court and SCS looks forward to welcoming those staff when they transfer in December.

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 Island followed in June 2008 and a consultation on arrangements for Tayside Central and Fife ended on 30 September 2008.

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 13 May 2008 a consultation document outlining the proposals for unification in the Sheriffdom was issued to over 150 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

1. 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 the low-level crime which can blight communities. Summary justice can be defined as all non-jury criminal prosecutions, which accounts 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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