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News Release

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Consultation on unified courts administration

13/05/2008

A three-month consultation on proposals for the unification of court administration in the Sheriffdom of Glasgow and Strathkelvin begins today.

As part of the wider reforms of Summary Criminal Justice, the administration of all the summary courts in Scotland will be undertaken in future by the Scottish Court Service (SCS). Currently District Courts are run by local authorities while SCS has responsibility for the Court of Session, High Courts and Sheriff Courts. Following unification of administration under SCS, District Courts become Justice of the Peace Courts.

The consultation proposals have been developed following extensive discussions with local authorities, justice partners and other interested parties in the Sheriffdom.

The consultation paper proposes that a Glasgow and Strathkelvin Justice of the Peace Court is established within the existing buildings currently occupied by Glasgow District Court and that business from Kirkintilloch and Rutherglen District Courts is transferred to this court in Glasgow.

The principal reasons for transferring business is the limited court sitting days - two days per month at Kirkintilloch and Rutherglen and that the current district court facilities do not meet SCS court standards. The cost of bringing these existing facilities up to standard is estimated at between £1 million and £1.7 million. With short travelling distance and good public transport links to Glasgow, the report argues that these costs would be difficult to justify.

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

"We have worked very closely with those involved with Glasgow and Strathkelvin courts to prepare these proposals. It is always difficult to consider closing local courts, but SCS believes these arrangements would deliver an improved service to the public and also represent good value for public money .

"Focussing on one location will offer opportunities for future investment to provide better, more modern and more secure court facilities. Integrating services offers a single contact point for all court users as well as greater clarity in terms of management and accountability. Our recommendations are based on our best assessment of the future demands of court business. "

Views on the **consultation proposals** [http://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/court_unification/publications/glasgow_and_strathkelvin/Master_Draft_Consultation_CS.pdf] are invited by August 12, 2008 and should be sent to:

David Lynn
Scottish Court Service
FSD Unification Team
Sheriff Court of Glasgow and Strathkelvin
1 Carlton Place
Glasgow G5 9DA

Tel 0141 418 5894

E-mail: dlynn@scotcourts.gov.uk

In the Sheriffdom of Glasgow and Strathkelvin there are two local authorities (East Dunbartonshire and South Lanarkshire Councils) from which only part of the current District Court provision will transfer on this unification. Those local authorities will continue to be responsible for administration and delivery in those parts of their local authority areas which fall outwith the Sheriffdom of Glasgow and Strathkelvin.

The changes to the administration of court services are being carried out on a Sheriffdom by Sheriffdom basis and Lothian and Borders became the first Justice of the Peace Courts under Scottish Court Service administration on March 10 this year. Grampian Highlands and Islands will follow on 2 June 2008

The timetable for the remaining Sheriffdoms is:

- Glasgow and Strathkelvin December 2008
- Tayside, Central and Fife - February 2009
- South Strathclyde, Dumfries & Galloway - June 2009

The enabling legislation for unification of court administration is contained in the Criminal Procedure etc (Reform) (Scotland) Act which was unanimously passed by the Scottish Parliament and received Royal Assent on 22 February 2007. The legislation resulted from a 2004 report to Ministers from the Summary Justice Review Committee chaired by Sheriff Principle John McInnes.

Following unification of the administration of the summary criminal SCS will be responsible for -

- Supporting the Judiciary in Sheriff and Justice of the Peace summary criminal courts
- Administering court services in all summary criminal courts, and managing and providing legal and administrative staff
- Legal support in court to Justices in the JP courts
- Providing legal and administrative support to the new Justices' Committees
- Collecting and enforcing all fines and financial penalties

Summary justice can be defined as all non-jury criminal prosecutions, which accounts for over 90 per cent of all cases that come to court each year in Scotland.