Question 18 How would the closure of any of these courts affect you?

Please give reasons for your answer and indicate to which court(s) your answer relates.

Response

Sheriff courts in proximity to each other

Pages 38, 39 and 42 to 44 of the Consultation Paper.

Proposal 6

The proposal for the sheriff courts that are in proximity to another sheriff court where there is capacity to take additional business, or that capacity will become available as a consequence of other changes, is that:

(a) sheriff courts and justice of the peace courts should cease to be held in Alloa, Cupar, Dingwall, Arbroath, Haddington and Stonehaven and the court buildings and court accommodation in those places should be closed;

(b) the business from these courts should be transferred to the neighbouring sheriff court districts and be heard at the sheriff courthouse in Stirling (solemn business in Falkirk), Dundee, Inverness, Forfar, Edinburgh and Aberdeen respectively;

(c) the changes should be phased over the two years 2013/14 and 2014/15, or as the necessary capacity becomes available.

Question 19 Do you agree with the proposals to close the sheriff courts and justice of the peace courts at Alloa, Cupar, Dingwall, Arbroath, Haddington and Stonehaven and transfer the business into the sheriff court districts of Stirling/Falkirk, Dundee, Inverness, Forfar, Edinburgh and Aberdeen respectively?

Response

I disagree with the planned closure

Question 20 If you disagree with the proposals to close these courts, please say:

(a) why you disagree, and

(b) how you would prefer the sheriff court and justice of the peace court provision for these districts structured, being as specific as you can about how your preference would operate in practice.

If you are commenting on only some of the courts affected, please indicate to which court(s) your answer relates.

Response

My comments are in connection with the planned closure of Haddington Sheriff Court.

Having read the white paper I do not see how the savings stated will necessarily be met by the closure of Haddington Sheriff Court.
Firstly, Haddington is easily accessible to East Lothian residents especially residents in the outlying smaller villages with the travel time dramatically reduced as opposed to travelling to Edinburgh and also who will require more than one bus to Edinburgh i.e. residents of Gifford/Garvald/Spott.
Due to the lenghty journey and the times which one would require to leave on a morning to reach Edinburgh the likelihood of such persons requiring to attend Court and actually doing so will be slim. This will result in warrants being granted for non-appearance in criminal matters or the granting of decree in civil matters whereby one party would fail to attend. I would imagine the enforcement of warrants is far more greater an expense on an annual basis than the saving of the Court closure would be. Friends and colleagues who are officers of Lothian & Borders Police have advised that they will spend more time dealing with warrants than actually dealing with day to day calls. This will result in Dalkeith and St Leonards being full on a constant basis.
In addition single parents who require to attend Court and have no assistance with child care will also encounter difficulties, if they require to leave on a bus at 8 am who is going to take the children to school? Are these people now going to have to explain to their young child where they are going, when at present such parents can put their children into school, attend Court and then be home for the children. Civil matrimonial matters are heard in Edinburgh at 2 pm, it is therefore completely impossible for anyone to appear in Court at 2 pm, and be back in Dunbar or out lying areas in time to collect the children from school.
What about people on benefits who have to live on limited income?
Are Lothian buses going to increase the number of buses on the usual early morning bus routes to cope with the additional persons attending Edinburgh courts in addition to commuters heading to work?
What about accused person's being on the same bus as the complainer & witnesses i.e. the accused lives in Tranent, gets on the No 26, the complainer/witnesses live in Prestonpans and get on the same bus. It is possible a further incident will take place on the bus if not by the accused but maybe his/her friends/family members.
I think all of the above require to be taken into consideration and the affect it is going to have on the residents and the community of East Lothian and more thought given to the whole closure.

Question 21 How would the closure of any of these courts affect you?

Please give reasons for your answer and indicate to which court(s) your answer relates.

Response

As stated above. The whole East Lothian community will be greatly affected. Edinburgh is not easy to get to from the small outlying villages.

I work in the profession and also have friends/family members who have required to attend Court mostly in the matrimonial areas or witnesses/jurors. The child care is a huge concern especially with single parents who have found themselves being taken to Court by the husband/ex partner, this is through no fault of their own and attendance at Court is required for Child Welfare Hearings. These Hearings are at 2 pm in Edinburgh, this is totally impossible to be back for the schools closing.

I also work with vulnerable adults who need to attend Court both in criminal and civil matters. These people rely greatly on their Care Workers to attend with them. This is easier when the Care Workers are local, this service would be withdrawn if travel to Edinburgh was required. These vulnerable people, some of whom are fearful of change and travel outside their own community will NEVER attend Court, the trauma of these people being arrested on a warrant whilst suffering from mental health issues would be enormous on them and on the police officers requiring to given added care and attention.

Haddington Sheriff Court NEEDS to stay open!