



## ESTATE STRATEGY

- *Shaping the Future of the Scottish Courts Estate*

February 2009

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## INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Court Service (SCS) was established in April 1995 and is an Executive Agency of the Scottish Government Justice and Communities Directorate.

**Purpose:**

Access to Justice – by providing the people, buildings and technology to support the operation of the Courts and the Office of the Public Guardian.

**Aim:**

SCS aims to provide services to the public, professional users and the judiciary that are:

- Consistent and reliable
- Delivered when we promise them
- Making best use of the resources available to us.

**Values:**

SCS will fulfil our purpose and pursue our aim conscious of our responsibilities to be publicly accountable, respect judicial independence and to work with others in improving the performance of the justice system.

**In particular we value:**

- Commitment and professionalism
- Providing a high quality service
- Integrity and impartiality
- Working to improve the justice system
- Using resources effectively.

## 1.0 VISION FOR THE COURT ESTATE

### 1.1 Purpose

This purpose of this document is to outline the Scottish Court Services longer term vision for the court estate in Scotland and provide a road map for how the estate should be developed over the next ten years to support ongoing changes within the Scottish justice system.

### 1.2 Current Position

The court estate has evolved gradually over the last 200 years, and the physical constraints due to the age and layout of some of those historic buildings can be a significant barrier to the delivery of a modern public service. The challenge for SCS is to be able to invest in the development and reconfiguration of that estate, over time, so that the facilities provided are gradually realigned to keep pace with the ongoing demands for change that arise through modernisation of the justice system.

Underpinning the current reform programmes (High Court, Summary Justice and Civil) is a general recognition that the legal process often results in unnecessary “churn” within the court system. The concentration of the reforms on improving the flow of business through the justice system is expected to reduce that churn and potentially free up operational capacity within the court programme. In the first instance we will look to utilise that freed up operational capacity, before committing to any investments in new physical court capacity.

The District Courts in Scotland have historically been managed by the local councils however in 2007 the Scottish Parliament confirmed its decision to transfer the operational responsibility for those courts across to SCS to achieve a “unified” courts administration. Those courts are transferring on a phased basis (by sheriffdom) and we expect to have a fully unified estate by November 2009.

### 1.3 Future Vision for the Court Estate

The vision for the courts estate is:

“To provide an estate that reflects the diversity of needs of court users, and enables the delivery of the highest quality services whilst recognising the need for cost effective utilisation of facilities”

The overriding objective is to provide a fully unified estate that is broadly fit for purpose and the strategic aims which flow from our vision are:

*Right Condition* - We aim to provide and maintain a sustainable estate in the right condition to support the effective operation of the courts, and to minimise the potential for any disruption to court processes

*Right Configuration* - We aim to provide good quality buildings, with sufficient functionality, to support the operation of the courts, and to meet the diverse needs of all court users

*Right Place* - We aim to have buildings located in the right place to support reasonable access to justice across Scotland

*Right Size* - We aim to have an estate of the right size to efficiently and effectively support the volume of business conducted in the courts

## 2.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### 2.1 Scale of the Court Estate

With a book value of £0.4 billion, and running costs of £40M per year, the existing courts estate is one of the largest within Scottish Central Government providing a portfolio of 63 properties and 174,500 m2 of space:

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
<b>Value</b>			
Land and Buildings - Book Value	£350.0M	£362.3M	£375.0M
Number of Properties in Use	61	62	63
Building Area in Use (m2)	173,500	173,500	174,500
<b>Costs</b>			
Annual Running Costs	£38.1M	£39.5M	£39.9M

(Source: SCS Asset Management Plan 2008-2011)

On completion of the unification process in November 2009 we expect that the number of properties in use will have increased to around 80 to provide a fully unified estate.

### 2.2 Capacity Available

Including temporary courtrooms, the pre-unification estate provides 178 courtrooms (as at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008) delivering a potential capacity of 44,750 sitting days to support operational requirements.

Courthouse	Courtrooms		
	Permanent Courtrooms	Temporary Courtrooms	POTENTIAL DAYS AVAILABLE
<b>COURT OF SESSION (1)</b>	14		3,500
<b>HIGH COURTS (3)</b>	12	0	3,000
<b>LARGE COURTS (19)</b>	113	12	31,500
<b>SMALL COURTS (30)</b>	36	5	10,250
	<b>161</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>44,750</b>

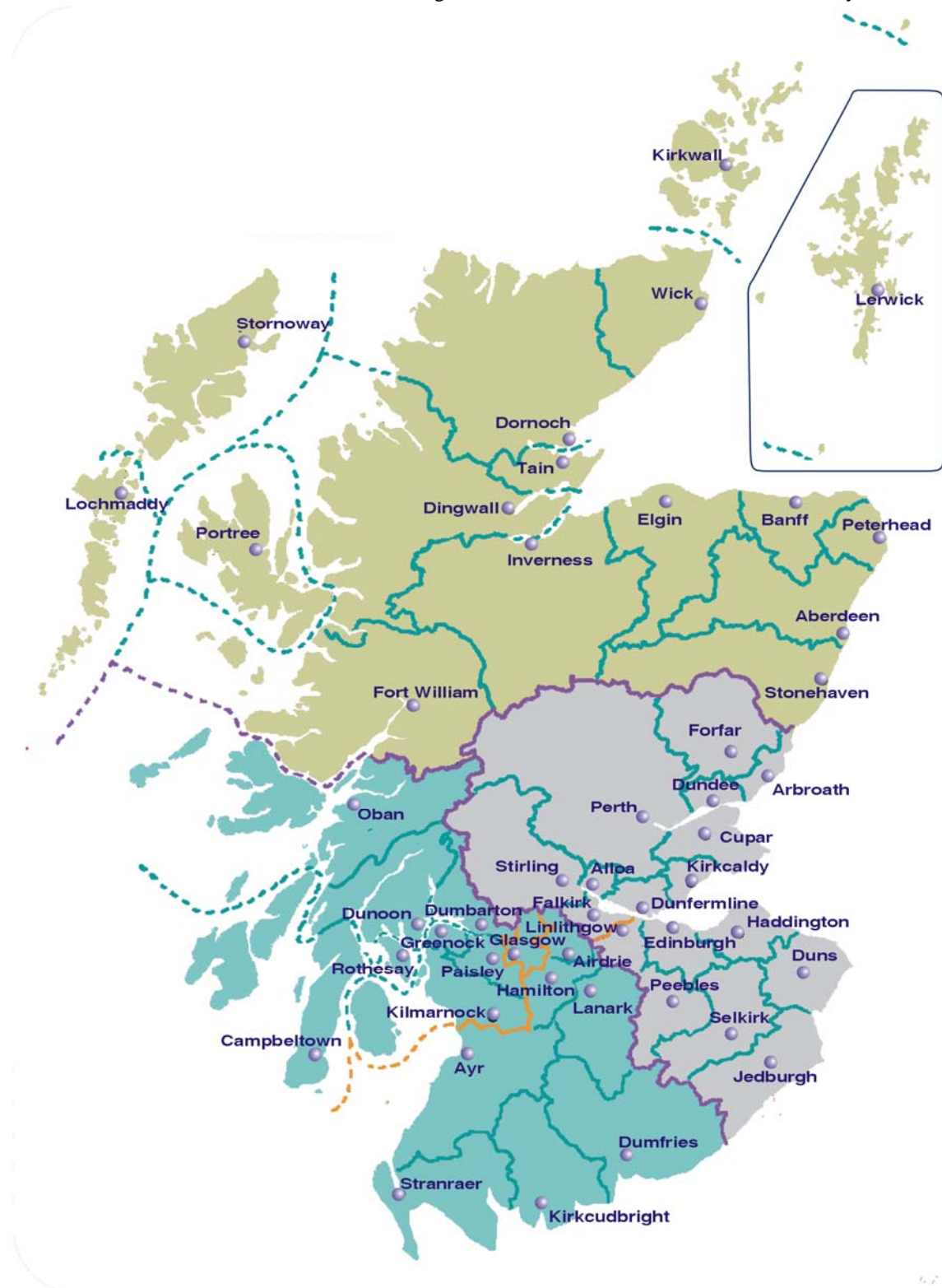
Over the latest financial year we have used 75% of that potential capacity:

Courthouse	Sitting Days - 2007/08						Courtrooms			% Utilised
	J.P Ct	Sheriff Ct	High Ct	Ct of Crim Appeal	Ct of Session	COMBINED TOTAL	Permanent Courtrooms	Temporary Courtrooms	POTENTIAL DAYS AVAILABLE	
<b>COURT OF SESSION (1)</b>	0	0	0	0	1881	1,881	14		3,500	54%
<b>HIGH COURTS (3)</b>	0	0	2011	325	0	2,336	12	0	3,000	78%
<b>LARGE COURTS (19)</b>	13	24,726	768	0	0	25,507	113	12	31,500	81%
<b>SMALL COURTS (30)</b>	440	5,395	0	0	0	5,835	36	5	10,250	57%
	<b>453</b>	<b>30,121</b>	<b>2779</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>33,678</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>44,750</b>	<b>75%</b>

At a macro level that 75% utilisation indicates that there is a reasonable balance between the overall capacity provided and the level of current demand on the courts, but the 81% figure highlighted is signalling the need for additional capacity to be considered across the 19 large sheriff courts. To alleviate that volume pressure the estate has been responding by adding additional courtrooms within existing buildings (where practicable) as well as out-housing some business (e.g. Hamilton Civil Annex).

### 2.3 Court Locations

The High Court has dedicated facilities at Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen, and the Court of Session operates from Parliament House in Edinburgh. Based on the consultation papers issued to date (for court unification) then as at February 2009 there will be Sheriff and JP courts offered in the following 49 locations. This number will increase following the consultations in South and North Strathclyde



## 3.0 RIGHT CONDITION

“We aim to maintain the estate in the right condition to support the effective operation of the courts, and to minimise the potential for any disruption to court processes”

The majority of our courthouses have been subject to a major upgrade or refurbishment at some point over the last 30 years and on balance the estate is in a reasonable, but deteriorating, condition. We are now entering the next cycle of planned asset replacements across the estate, particularly mechanical and electrical, and future funding will be required at a level that can both support that renewal activity and make inroads into our substantial backlog maintenance levels.

### 3.1 *Backlog Maintenance*

We currently estimate the level of backlog maintenance at £92.6M which is of increasing concern. A key strategic target is to actively reduce that backlog over time and the major works already committed at Parliament House and Dumbarton will help contribute towards that.

A commitment has been made under our asset management plan to review our systems for recording and monitoring these backlogs, and we will be using this to improve the information base that we use to prioritise our future investments and to facilitate closer monitoring of the risks inherent in running with a backlog of this magnitude.

### 3.2 *Heritage Buildings*

The number of older listed buildings within the estate represents a considerable heritage value held on behalf of the nation. We undertake additional quadrennial surveys and work closely with Historic Scotland to help ensure those buildings are preserved at a suitable level, and where works are undertaken we ensure that it is sympathetic to those heritage values.

### 3.3 *Sustainable Buildings*

We aim to make a significant contribution towards the Scottish Government's “greener” Scotland agenda and we are committed to the sustainable development of our estate. Priority will be given to those investment initiatives which actively help reduce our carbon footprint.

### 3.4 *Premium Payable to Avoid Disruption*

Given the nature of our estate we are predominantly investing in the existing building stock in existing locations rather than new build courts on green field sites. Construction works invariably involve noise, dust etc which will cause disruption to the “operation of the courts”. Our commitment to avoiding that type of disruption and keep courts operational is the basis behind the following policy positions:

- All construction works will be undertaken at evenings and weekends if they are liable to interfere with the operation of the courts.
- Court operations will be out-housed for the duration of a construction project if it is impractical to work around the operations of the court.

In terms of cost effectiveness this policy adds a significant increased cost burden to our estate, but we deem this an acceptable price to pay in order to keep the courts operational.

## 4.0 RIGHT CONFIGURATION

“We aim to provide good quality buildings, that are configured with sufficient functionality to support the operation of the courts, and to meet the diverse needs of all court users”

Our expectations in terms of the building functionality required in a new building are clearly set out in the SCS design guides. Those same aspirations apply to the existing portfolio of buildings although there will inevitably be constraints on how much of our desired design objectives can be achieved within the physical constraints of any existing building. We regularly monitor the profile of our estate and we look to address any known shortcomings when redeveloping specific sites.

Based on the consultation processes undertaken the following areas are currently seen as warranting priority when investing in the estate:

### 4.1 *Safety and Security*

We are committed to delivering facilities that are safe and secure for all court users and support this with a significant programme of compliance works and funding for specific improvement initiatives.

### 4.2 *Disabled Access*

The buildings provided by SCS are generally compliant in terms of the Disability Discrimination Act. We will continue to invest in a rolling programme of further improvements to ensure that we meet the following minimum objectives for accessibility by the general public:

- The ability to gain entry to our buildings
- The ability to gain access to at least one courtroom
- The ability of wheelchair users to interact with our public counters
- The ability to access disabled toilet facilities
- Assistance for those with hearing aids in at least one courtroom
- Sound enhancement in at least one courtroom, for those without hearing aids

### 4.3 *General Office Accommodation*

The standard of general office accommodation is coming under increasing pressure through growth in staff numbers. Where practicable we will improve the standard of fit out in our general offices and create additional office space to provide greater flexibility for operational managers e.g. for redistribution of back office functions.

### 4.4 *Public Interview Rooms*

There is increasing demand from defence counsel, in-court social workers, in-court mediators and fines enforcement officers for greater access to rooms suitable for private interviews with their respective clients in order to speed up the legal process. Where practicable, we will be looking to increase the availability of general purpose interview rooms that are immediately accessible off public areas and available to the widest possible range of professional court users.

### 4.5 *Custodial Interview Rooms*

In those buildings where SCS provides the custody unit we have a goal of ensuring access to at least one “custodial interview room” in order to mitigate the potential for any breach in the right to a confidential interview. The rollout programme to achieve that goal has made significant progress and we will continue to monitor it through to completion.

#### *4.6 Custody Units*

Lifting the standard of the custody units provided is an ongoing process, particularly for those facilities transferring to SCS under court unification. In addition we continue to address issues arising from the “HM Inspector of Prisons” thematic inspection of custody facilities across the justice system.

#### *4.7 Multi- Accused Docks*

The capability of handling trials with multiple numbers of accused is limited to those courtrooms in the estate that have a large dock, and sufficient room in the well of the court to accommodate the respective legal counsel. Where practicable, we will look to increase dock sizes in our larger courtrooms to increase the flexibility across the estate to respond to such trials.

#### *4.8 Vulnerable Witnesses*

We have a significant rollout programme underway to ensure far greater coverage of evidence giving rooms, both within courts and at remote sites, and increased availability of evidence presentation equipment in courtrooms.

## 5.0 RIGHT PLACE

“We aim to have buildings located in the right place to support reasonable access to justice across Scotland and its island Communities”

The majority of the investment in the court network is located in, or in close proximity to the high density areas of population across Scotland and consists of Parliament House, three dedicated High Courts and 19 large courthouses. A further 30 small courthouses (one or two courtrooms) are distributed across the less densely populated areas in order to provide outreach services to the more rural areas of Scotland.

In determining the locations in which court services are offered we will continue to strike a reasonable balance between the desire for justice to be accessible at a local level and the economics of achieving that degree of access.

### *5.1 Demographic Change*

One of the most significant population changes over recent decades has been the creation of the “new towns” in Scotland at Cumbernauld, East Kilbride, Glenrothes, and Livingston. Within West Lothian those changes are deemed significant enough to warrant a realignment of the estate and the Linlithgow court will be moved to Livingston during 2009. We do not consider that any other relocations are warranted at this stage, but we will continue to regularly monitor population impacts across Scotland.

### *5.2 Jurisdiction Boundaries*

The Sheriffdom and Sheriff Court Districts help to define the legal jurisdictions in Scotland in order to convey to the public at large where a particular case should be brought to court (Justice of the Peace courts are being mapped onto the Sheriff Court districts).

Any desire by SCS to expand, or consolidate, the number of physical courthouses to improve economic efficiency always needs to be balanced against the competing priority of providing stability and continuity in those legal jurisdictions. Because of the significance of such changes the ability to alter those boundaries is reserved to the Scottish Parliament and it requires primary legislation.

We will continue to monitor the need for potential changes to Court boundaries but at this stage we consider that there is insufficient weight in any known issues to warrant a change in legislation.

### *5.3 Scottish Children’s Reporter*

Where children are involved in offences then they are dealt with through child hearings run by the Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration, which ensures that the need for a child to attend an SCS court building is kept to a bare minimum. Where an appearance is unavoidable then priority is given to minimising the level of fear entailed in a court visit e.g. through access to remote vulnerable witness sites, or in-court vulnerable witness equipment.

**5.4 Low Volume Locations**

The decision on whether or not to continue with a service in each District Court location is made by the Scottish Ministers based on the outcome of the operational planning process and subsequent public consultations being undertaken in each Sheriffdom. As the planning has progressed some court closures have been announced in lower volume locations:

<i>Sheriffdoms</i>	<i>Unification Date</i>	<i>Properties Acquired</i>	<i>Court Closures</i>
<b><u>District Courts</u></b>			
Lothian and Borders	Mar-08	0	Loanhead
Grampian, Highlands & Islands	Jun-08	1 Site - Aberdeen	Inverurie, Kingussie, Nairn
Glasgow & Strathkelvin	Dec-08	1 Site - Glasgow	Kirkintilloch, Rutherglen
Tayside Central & Fife	Feb-09	5 Sites - Dundee, Kirkcaldy, Perth, Stirling, Dunfermline	0
South Strathclyde, D&G	Jun-09	TBC	TBC
North Strathclyde	Oct-09	TBC	TBC

Where a low volume District Court location does fulfil a “genuine need” and continuation of services is confirmed by the Minister, then the court network will need to expand and appropriate estate decisions will then be made on the best long term property solution in that location i.e. hold and upgrade the council property, lease an alternate site or invest in a replacement facility.

## 6.0 RIGHT SIZE

“We aim to have an estate of the right size to efficiently and effectively support the volume of business conducted in the courts”

The court estate is reasonably balanced to operational need but volume pressures are increasingly apparent across the 19 larger courts and we need to give priority to reducing pressures at some specific locations.

### 6.1 *Desired Capacity*

There can be a significant time lag between identifying the need for additional capacity, planning and building a new court, and arranging its handover into operational use. Accordingly it is imperative that a level of spare capacity is retained within the overall court estate to absorb any peaks and troughs in business volumes and provide a sufficient cushion to anticipate future changes in capacity.

Our aim is to provide sufficient physical court capacity to keep overall courtroom utilisation within a target band of 70% to 80% (current utilisation is 75% as indicated in section 2.2)

### 6.2 *Glasgow*

There is an ongoing requirement for improved court facilities in Glasgow although any new facility would need to strike the right balance between the following drivers for change:

- Glasgow Sheriff Court was designed as a 21 court complex but due to volume pressures it currently operates 25 courts, which is facilitated through the creation of several small temporary courtrooms.
- Court unification resulted in SCS acquiring a District Court facility (St Andrews Street) in Glasgow city centre that is in a marginal condition for future service delivery.
- The civil courts review could potentially lead to demand for either a separate stand alone civil court complex or the shift of a significant volume of work outside of the court process.

Determining the scope of any facility to future proof service provision in Glasgow would require significant consultation with key stakeholders across the justice system as well as greater clarity on the outcomes from the civil courts review. For planning purposes an investment of circa £33M would be indicated if a 10-12 court complex was pursued.

### 6.3 *Lanarkshire*

Hamilton Sheriff Court has been under volume pressure for some time and has the following key drivers for change:

- All civil business is conducted from a separate civil annex, which was arranged as a temporary measure to ease volume pressures
- There has been a long standing demand from COPFS for the High Court to return to Hamilton which is their third busiest office in the country
- The concerns surrounding the existing split site operations in Hamilton will be aggravated by the addition of a third site following court unification.
- The main sheriff court complex consists of only five reasonable sized courtrooms and operates with a further two undersized temporary courtrooms

Airdrie Sheriff Court is under less pressure than Hamilton, but has sufficient land available to accommodate an extension. The drivers for change are:

- With only five courtrooms, court business is being forced into available space rather than matched to the standard of courtroom appropriate to that business
- The inefficiencies of running with duplicate buildings in Airdrie following court unification (Coatbridge court is in an out of town location and only 1.8 miles away)

One solution for Lanarkshire may consider reorganising Sheriffdom Boundaries to ease volumes at the two current locations, and then building a new court elsewhere in Lanarkshire (e.g. Motherwell or Wishaw) with an investment of circa £19M in that new site. An alternative, lower cost option, would be to extend Airdrie (£6M for 1,200m<sup>2</sup>) combined with a similar spend on building additional courts at Hamilton to increase capacity at our existing sites.

#### *6.4 Impact of the High Court Circuit*

One of the key aims which underpin the High Court circuit is to facilitate trials being heard in reasonable proximity to the location in which the crime occurred. Following the High Court reforms a competing aim of delivering “certainty” in the allocation of trial diets has been added. This revised aim, combined with the ongoing need to work within statutory time bars, means that there is now a natural tension developing between these two competing goals i.e. the preference of the parties can be for cases to be heard wherever the capacity first becomes available, rather than wait until it can be scheduled in the location closest to where the crime occurred.

From an estates perspective the High Court circuit makes economic sense providing it is utilising idle capacity within the sheriff courts. With the utilisation of the larger Sheriff Courts now approaching 81% then that idle capacity argument is weakening and we are approaching the point where an additional high court facility may be preferable to an increased use of the circuit. Any decisions on such an investment would be premature pending the outcome of Lord Gill’s civil courts review which could still potentially redistribute further caseloads from the judges to sheriffs.

#### *6.5 Court of Criminal Appeal*

We have currently reserved significant space within Parliament House for the potential return of the court of criminal appeal to Parliament House, subject to this proposal demonstrating it delivers “value for money”. Competing options to address volume pressures are:

- Development of a new dedicated high court facility within the central belt, or
- Invest across a number of Sheriff Courts to facilitate a similar increase in the capacity available to the high court circuit, but over multiple locations

Again, any decisions on such an investment would be premature pending the outcome of Lord Gill’s civil courts review.

#### *6.6 Establishment of Justice of the Peace Courts*

Where a District Court and Sheriff Court are operating in the same town then our aim is to consolidate operations into one building, if practicable we wish to avoid taking on the operational inefficiencies that can arise from running split site operations, and also minimise the need to transfer any unsuitable buildings. In support of that aim we have been actively increasing capacity at some strategic sheriff court locations in order to ease the handover on unification. More specifically, new courtrooms have or are in the process of being added at: Alloa, Dumbarton, Edinburgh, Elgin, Falkirk, Greenock, Kilmarnock, Stirling

#### *6.7 Other Replacements*

Balancing the compromises inherent in some courthouses with rising public expectations means that we will be approaching a point over the next ten years where the need to initiate replacement of some courthouses will become more pressing with the exception of the specific courts detailed in the preceding paragraphs, decisions on which locations warrant a replacement and when, will be based on our processes for benchmarking the functional suitability of each building. Some initial candidates for replacement based on custody risk and courtroom size could be:

*Haddington* – This two court complex operates from a shared municipal facility where both the council and SCS are desperately short of space. The compromises inherent in the service being offered by SCS, the long term use of temporary courtrooms, absence of secure routes and the lack of expansion space make this a longer term candidate for replacement

*Kirkcaldy* – This four court complex has significant compromises inherent in its lack of circulation routes, particularly due to the shared use of the central stairwell and the inadequate size of the temporary fourth court. Being too small to absorb the Justice of the Peace volumes adds the further difficulties of a split site operation into the mix.

*Aberdeen* – This nine court complex suffers from undersized courtrooms and an absence of secure routes. Pressures have been alleviated by the additional courtroom capacity available in the Mercatgate building however longer term a replacement courthouse may still become warranted if there is significant volume growth.

*Inverness* – This three court complex operates from two separate but adjacent buildings and suffers all the normal inefficiencies expected from a split site operation. The absence of secure circulation routes and the routine presence of the High court significantly increases the security profile of the site. Despite its shortcomings SCS considers the building is adequate for ongoing use over the medium term, but replacement may become desirable if a viable development proposal was to unlock the tourism potential of that site.

We will continue to monitor the business justification for replacement courthouses across all of the estate however any definitive action would be subject to funding availability after this ten year planning period, benchmarking of functional suitability and competing investment priorities at that point in time.

## 7.0 STRATEGIC THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES

### 7.1 *Justice Centre Model*

There is an increasing demand for collaboration across the justice system. To facilitate this, SCS looks to support co-location of services wherever practicable, and ideally the joined up services that can be achieved through collaborative working. As an active expression of that commitment we are piloting the “justice centre” model as the basis of operations in the new Livingston Civic Centre and, if that pilot is successful, we would like to determine the nature of a model that could be rolled out to other locations.

### 7.2 *Police Presence in Courts*

There is a statutory requirement on the police to provide a public order presence in criminal courtrooms. If that presence was to be withdrawn then the court estate would incur significant costs in order to respond to that change in policy (i.e. increased provision of manned guarding, provision of “secure docks”, enhanced circulation routes etc).

Our planning assumption is that the current statutory arrangements will remain in place.

### 7.3 *Consolidation of Police Cell Units*

As part of joint working within the justice sector there are 10 Sheriff Court districts where SCS relies on access to police cells in close proximity to the court, rather than providing our own custody facilities within the courthouse. The eight police forces across Scotland are at varying stages on their individual strategies for moving towards “consolidation of cell units” which provides both a threat and an opportunity to SCS. The threat arises from the potential need to invest in suitable cell units, or a replacement courthouse, where the police do decide to exit a specific site. The opportunity arises in that such investments may provide a collaborative option with the police to invest at an alternate location e.g. the justice centre model.

We will continue to consult with each police force on their estates strategy to ensure that a) we have sufficient advance notice to allow replacement custody facilities to be put in place and b) that we optimise the opportunities for joint working.

### 7.4 *Custodial Sentencing*

The Scottish Government has announced a policy of moving away from custodial sentences of less than six months which is to be achieved through an increased use of community sentencing, social workers on site in courtrooms, tagging etc. As a consequence SCS is anticipating a reduced volume of custodies going through our custody units leading to a reduced risk profile and an increase in the ability to provide segregation at peak times.

### 7.5 *Mixed Use Facilities*

There is a general perception in the community that the rights of civil court users could be better met if they were provided with dedicated facilities, rather than a mixed criminal and civil court environment. This issue is one of many being challenged within Lord Gill’s “Civil Courts Review” and the court estate would need to respond accordingly if any decision was made in favour of separation (The benefits are unlikely to justify the £61M to £108M cost of establishing a separate civil court estate).

Our current planning assumption is that the continued preference for a generalist rather than a specialist bench, the small size of the Scottish jurisdiction and the economics of providing a geographically dispersed court service is likely to mean the continuation of “mixed use” facilities across Scotland.

### *7.6 Criminal Appeals*

Currently all criminal appeals are heard in Edinburgh, with civil appeals heard either in Edinburgh at the Court of Session or in front of a Sheriff Principal in each Sheriffdom. If a policy decision was taken, to change this jurisdiction issue and redistribute criminal appeals to Sheriffs, then the estate would need to respond by altering the size and layout of the benches in selected Sheriff Courts to facilitate panels of three to five sheriffs.

### *7.7 Corporate Manslaughter*

The Corporate Manslaughter Act came into effect in Scotland in April 2008 and currently includes a time bound (potentially three to five years) exemption to exclude custody units from the application of that Act. Considerable investment has been made in our custody units over recent years to lift the standards of the current SCS facilities and our focus will now shift to lifting the standard of those custody units that do transfer over with court unification. The timeframe indicated for removal of the exemption will be more than sufficient for us to address the standard of those council facilities, and improve our associated custody management processes.

### *7.8 Prisoner Escort Contract*

The current timetable for the Prisoner Escort Contract to be put back to the open market is 2011. Given that the SCS custody facilities are provided on a walk in walk out basis then the tender will provide an opportunity to have input into the specification of that contract to clarify certain estates related issues:

- The mismatch between size of vehicles used and the van docks
- Clarify the responsibilities for fixtures and fittings, and any upgrades required

## 8.0 INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

Our focus will be on improving the overall “fitness for purpose” of our existing building stock by:

- Actively reducing the level of our backlog maintenance to ensure that we minimise the potential for building failures.
- Easing volume pressures on those larger courts that are under pressure by increasing the number of courtrooms available (if practicable within each buildings existing footprint).
- Investing in replacement courthouses or upgrades where a facility has insufficient operational flexibility to support the expected volumes of business, or if it cannot be brought up to the estates standards required for the building to be considered fit for purposes.
- Ensuring that we optimise the use of enabling technologies in order to improve the court experience for all court users e.g. digital presentation of evidence, video conferencing, digital recording, virtual courts, electronic interfaces with other justice agencies etc.

### *8.1 Major Commitments*

With regard to supporting the current estate, our main priorities are:

1. A target of reducing maintenance backlogs within the next five years to below 9% of the replacement value of our property portfolio. An investment in the order of £39.8M over and above normal maintenance spending levels will be required to achieve that target.
2. A £63M project for the redevelopment of Parliament House. This project will help reduce the backlog maintenance on this building and ensure its can continue to operate as the long term home of the judiciary. Contracts have been awarded for phase one only.
3. An £11M redevelopment of Dumbarton Sheriff Court to help avoid the inefficiencies that arose from the previous split site operations, address backlog maintenance issues, and ensure that the building is lifted to a condition that will be fit for purpose. Contracts have been awarded for the full project and the project will be completed early in 2009.

With regard to enhancing the estate, our priority is:

1. A new six court complex which is being developed within the West Lothian Councils new civic centre complex in Livingston, and will allow the Linlithgow building to be withdrawn from operational use.

Lord Gill is expected to issue his report on the Civil Courts Review in early spring 2009, and we would expect the consultation process and any subsequent formal response from government to take us through to 2010 or 2011. This estates strategy document will be updated once the governments agreed plans for reforming the civil courts are known.