

**RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION REPORT:**

**Relocation of the JP Court currently sitting at Coatbridge**

**August 2018**

1. **Introduction**
   1. During July 2018 the Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service (SCTS) ran a three week public consultation process outlining our proposal to relocate the Justice of the Peace (JP) Court that currently sits in Coatbridge to a new venue in Airdrie.
   2. The consultation was communicated publicly via a [press release](http://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/about-the-scottish-court-service/scs-news/2018/07/09/consultation-on-jp-court-relocation) on our main website and also communicated directly to the 18 consultees listed at [Appendix A](#AppendixA). The closing date set for responses was 30 July 2018.
2. **Background**
   1. In April 2013 the then Scottish Courts Service (SCS) consulted widely on the appropriate structures for all courts in Scotland and the resultant vision was published as:

*“Shaping Scotland’s Courts Services – The SCS Response to the Consultation and Recommendations for a Future Court Structure in Scotland* [*(link)*](http://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/docs/default-source/scs-consultation-court-structures/response_to_the_consultation_and_recommendationspdf.pdf)

* 1. That vision flagged our clear intention to relocate the Justice of the Peace Court sitting at Coatbridge to the Airdrie Sheriff Courthouse at some future point if capacity could be made available.
  2. Since 2013 the business levels within Airdrie Sheriff Court have remained high and that desired transfer into the main Sheriff Court building is not yet viable. However a potential property solution has been identified directly adjacent to Airdrie Sheriff Court. That property will enable the SCTS to invest in a new court venue that will be fit for purpose providing a safe, secure and accessible environment and minimise the operational inefficiencies that arise with using the current split sites.

1. **Responses to Consultation** 
   1. Six responses were received from:

* Police Scotland,
* Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service,
* Victim Support Scotland,
* Scottish Justices Association
* Two Justice of the Peace

Full response details are provided at [Appendix B](#AppendixB).

* 1. All responses were supportive and acknowledged the proposed relocation is “*positively welcomed and should lead to an improvement in the services provided*”, will have “*positive effect on the administration of justice*” and will result in “*improved Court facilities for JPs, Court officials and the general public*”.
  2. Respondents highlighted potential benefits of relocating as this will “*enhance services provided*”, “*lessen the instances of abstraction to both current locations”, “simplify and save time and expense in relation to many of the practical issues we currently experience”* and “*positively utilise our resources between the Sheriff Court and JP Court”.*
  3. Several respondents indicated a preference for a short term working group to consider transitional issues including:
* Sufficient lead in time to enable necessary changes to documentation and communicate the change of location to parties
* Accessibility to the building including disabled parking
* Consultation with victim support organisations in relation to facilities for vulnerable witnesses
* Access to Social Work and Witness Support Services
* The opportunity for radical changes to the programming and management of custodies
  1. Two responses highlighted the willingness of JP’s to be involved in any working group established.

1. **Conclusions**
   1. SCTS have carefully considered all the responses received which are fully supportive of our proposal to relocate the JP Court currently sitting in Coatbridge to Airdrie and we will now proceed with relocation.
   2. In order to progress that relocation the SCTS will now:

* Prepare a firm proposal for submission to the Scottish Government seeking an appropriate order under Section 59 of the Criminal Proceedings etc. (Reform) (Scotland) Act 2007.
  1. Providing that order is approved by the Scottish Parliament the SCTS will:
* Formalise appropriate lease arrangements, arrange the subsequent fitout of the venue, and the subsequent handover of the facility for operational use; and
* Establish a local transitional arrangements group to consider, plan and deliver a successful relocation with justice partners and stakeholders.

*Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service*

*August 2018*

**APPENDIX A – CONSULTEE LIST**

**Building Owner**

* Chief Executive – North Lanarkshire Council

**Judiciary**

* Sheriffs Principal
* Scottish Justices Association
* Sheriffs Association
* Part Time Sheriffs Association
* Summary Sheriffs Association

**Justice Delivery Organisations**

* Chief Executive - Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service
* Chief Constable – Police Scotland
* Chief Executive – Scottish Prison Service

**Others**

* The Law Society of Scotland
* Dean of the Airdrie Society of Solicitors
* Public and Commercial Services Union
* Victim Support Scotland

**APPENDIX B – RESPONSES FROM CONSULTEES**

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| **JUDICIARY RESPONSES** | |
| **The impact a relocation of the Coatbridge JP court will have on your organisation and the services you provide** | * The proposed relocation is positively welcomed and should lead to an improvement in the services provided by Justices of the Peace sitting in the Court. * Relocation will have a positive effect on the administration of justice, as there will be less wasted time for people who currently have to shuttle backwards and forwards between Airdrie and Coatbridge * This relocation will result in improved Court facilities for JPs, Court officials and the general public. The current building is quite outdated and unsuitable to meet the needs of a modern Court. |
| **The extent to which the timing of that relocation will have an impact on your organisation and the services you provide** | * The timing is not critical on the impact of the services provided. Due to the expected benefits which should accrue from the relocation, we would welcome the move at the earliest appropriate opportunity. * The sooner the move can be effected the better * No significant impact. |
| **Are there any arrangements in the programming of the court business or court facilities you feel needs to be taken account of?** | * It is important that include access to Social Work Services and Witness Support are provided for the JP Court. * Please ensure that the IT services are all working perfectly for the first sitting day. * None that I am aware of |
| **Are there any areas where you consider additional or transitional arrangements are required?** | * All practical access issues do need to be considered, including physical access for the disabled, the provision of lifts and ramps, plus parking arrangements. In addition the management of Custodies and administrative support functions need to be clearly established. * As dates are set for future diets, we need to communicate the change robustly to minimise accused and witnesses showing up at the wrong place. * None that I am aware of |
| **Are there any other matters you wish to raise?** | * There are willing volunteers amongst the JP community who serve the Coatbridge Court who would be willing to serve on any transitional team which is established to review and agree all of the requirements associated with the relocation. * I think this move is entirely positive. Facilities at the proposed site are seen to meet the needs of all stakeholders. The Coatbridge site had its best days sometime in the last century. * Will JPs be able to access car parking at the proposed new premises? Are there facilities for tea / lunch which don’t readily exist at Coatbridge, given that the Court can sit well into the afternoon? |
| **JUSTICE DELIVERY ORGANISATIONS** | |
| **The impact a relocation of the Coatbridge JP court will have on your organisation and the services you provide** | * As the proposed relocation is within the same geographic Police sub-divisional location, this does not present any issues with the services provided by Police. Having both courts located within the same buildings or nearby buildings would enhance the service provided by Police Scotland as this would lessen the instances of abstraction to both current locations where Police staff have business at both Courts. Any requests from Scottish Courts for Police assistance would be logistically more straightforward at one combined location (e.g. Police presence, productions, paperwork) * We anticipate that the proposed relocation would provide significant benefits to our organisation and the service we provide the public and court users. It will simplify and save time and expense in relation to many of the practical issues we currently experience in having the JP court some distance from our office and also from the Sheriff Court. It will also facilitate more of a “justice centre” approach as the Sheriff and JP courts and the PF Office will be more closely located which should improve communication and reduce the movement and the time taken to move productions, papers and persons in custody between the two courts, their cells, our office and the court. Despite strenuous efforts by local SCTS managers to improve the environment and facilities for all court users and justice partners within the present Coatbridge JP court building, the present building is an old and overly large one, with a less than optimal internal layout and a decaying fabric. In our view the proposed relocation provides the opportunity to considerably improve the facilities and environment for members of the public and justice partners, including our staff, within the JP court. On a purely practical front as the Procurator Fiscal’s offices and the two courts may in the future be located in very close proximity to each other, some care will require to be taken to ensure clear signposting within the buildings and the provision of separate reception areas for the mutual benefit of the public, and SCTS and COPFS reception staff. We anticipate that this ought to be readily achievable. |
| **The extent to which the timing of that relocation will have an impact on your organisation and the services you provide** | * The timing of the proposedrelocation has not been disclosed to Police Scotland therefore it is not possible to comment on this. * Our organisation will require sufficient lead in time to ensure the necessary changes to documentation to reflect the change in location, particularly to ensure that citations for accused and witnesses contain the new address. The change in address will also need to be communicated timeously to solicitors and the Law Society and members of the public to ensure defence agents (particularly ones who do not attend the court regularly) and members of the public are aware of the change in location. |
| **Are there any arrangements in the programming of the court business or court facilities you feel needs to be taken account of?** | * No * The movement of accused persons in custody between the JP court in its present location and the cells at the Sheriff court is presently problematic and presently creates inefficiencies in the effective use of court time for all court users, the public and justice partners. We anticipate the proposed relocation will improve this situation and that it also provides an opportunity to consider more radical changes in the programming and calling of such cases. |
| **Are there any areas where you consider additional or transitional arrangements are required?** | * No * The relocation itself, its timing and the planning for the relocation is we think likely to throw up a small number of transitional issues for justice partners. We would be confident that such issues could readily be planned for and managed by a short term joint working group amongst justice partners chaired by SCTS to look at, plan for and help implement the necessary transitional arrangements. We share an excellent working relationship with our SCTS colleagues and other criminal justice partners in South Strathclyde Dumfries and Galloway and have every confidence that such a group would successfully plan for and manage such transitional issues as arise. |
| **Are there any other matters you wish to raise?** | * No * Simply to re-iterate that we see the proposed relocation as a positive one with considerable benefits both for our organisation, other criminal justice partners and members of the public. |
| **OTHERS** | |
| **The impact of relocation of the Coatbridge JP court will have on your organisation and the services you provide** | * It will allow positively utilise our resources between the Sheriff Court and JP Court  |  | | --- | |  | |
| **The extent to which the timing of that relocation will have an impact on your organisation and the services you provide** | * We welcome the new facilities at the earliest time possible |
| **Are there any arrangements in the programming of the court business or court facilities you feel needs to be taken account of?** | * The introduction of the video link from the new JP court is very welcome and it particularly apt in relation The Scottish Parliament’s Justice Committee recent call for evidence on the Scottish Government’s Vulnerable Witnesses and Criminal Evidence Bill. * The intention of the Bill is to provide vulnerable witnesses and victims of crime with a less traumatic experience of the criminal justice system in Scotland. It is hoped that greater use of ore-recorded evidence will elicit more effective evidence and improve the justice system as a whole. * The changes will include wider use of pre-recorded statements and evidence for vulnerable witnesses in criminal cases with an initial focus on child witnesses in the most serious cases. * Therefore, we would particularly welcome the opportunity to be consulted on the facilities for vulnerable witnesses and their supporters especially as it will help facilitate future legislative changes. |
| **Are there any areas where you consider additional or transitional arrangements are required?** | * We would ask that our partners VIA & COPFS are fully consulted to ensure vulnerable witnesses are cited for the correct court location during the transition period |
| **Are there any other matters you wish to raise?** | N/A |