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East Lothian Council

Additional information:

This is a copy of a letter to the new Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Michael Matheson MSP, asking him to reconsider the decision to close the Haddington court.

Authorised By	Angela Leitch
Designation	Chief Executive
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Our Ref : AL/JMcN
Direct Line : 01620 827413

Angela Leitch
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

John Muir House
Haddington
East Lothian
EH41 3HA
Tel 01620 827222
Fax 01620 827410
chiefexec@eastlothian.gov.uk

4 December 2014

Mr Michael Matheson, MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Justice
Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
EDINBURGH
EH1 3DG

Dear Michael,

HADDINGTON SHERIFF AND JUSTICE OF THE PEACE COURT

Congratulations on your Cabinet post as Secretary for Justice. I am sure you will be busy getting to grips with your new portfolio, but may I draw to your attention something that is regarded as a priority here in East Lothian?

As you will know, the Scottish Ministers made Orders last year to close a number of Sheriff and Justice of the Peace courts. Amongst them was Haddington Court. You may know that East Lothian Council was very much against closure of the Court and that its position against closure had the unanimous support of its Elected Members of all parties. We made a number of representations throughout the consultation and legislative process and we did not feel our arguments (and those of the many other individuals and groups who opposed the closure) had a fair hearing.

Haddington was the only local authority area in the process which stood to lose **all** of its Court provision.

I fully understand that the Scottish Court Service, which recommended the closure, was tasked with saving a great deal of money. However, it was and is the Council's position that the Business Case to close the Court did not stack up. In brief, I would like to make the following points to you:-

1. Haddington is a busy Court; it runs full-time.
2. The Scottish Court Service will undoubtedly save running costs from the closure of the Court. However, the Council has demonstrated that these savings will be made at the expense of other public sector bodies and that the exercise was one of cost-shunting rather than cost-saving.

3. When the relatively small extent of the savings that the Scottish Court Service would make became apparent, contrasted with the extra costs falling on the Council and its partners, the Council made an offer to pay the Scottish Court Service an appropriate revenue sum in order to keep the Court open but this was not taken up.
4. We consider that the location of the Court premises has fostered good working relations between the various officers from different organisations who are involved in cases: the Court itself, Council solicitors, social welfare staff, the police, the fiscal, all are located either in the same building or within a few metres of each other. This was held up as an example of good practice in the new Civic Centre in West Lothian - but here in Haddington, where it applies just as much, our Court is to be closed.
5. You will be aware of concerns that Edinburgh Sheriff Court is unable to absorb the business being transferred to it.
6. The Scottish Government's policy is to promote town centres but loss of the Court will hit Haddington hard, removing a significant element of footfall and income stream from our town centre.

In summary, it is our belief here in East Lothian that closure of the Court contradicts other policy. There is a very short window of opportunity to reverse a move that we believe will produce greater inequality and hardship and result in damage to the town. I would, therefore, ask you earnestly to reconsider this decision.

I would be happy to discuss this with you further if you felt it to be appropriate.

Yours sincerely



Angela Leitch
Chief Executive

cc: Councillor Willie Innes, Council Leader
Christine Dora, Executive Assistant