



PE1403/B

Anne Peat
Public Petitions Committee
T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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**Scottish Court Service
Saughton House
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31 October 2011

Dear Anne

**SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE -
CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE1403**

Your letter dated 6 October 2011 sought responses from Scottish Court Service in relation to questions raised in the above petition and during the Committee's consideration of same in session on 4 October.

Petition PE1403 by Peter Morris calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to consider the need for new legislation and provision to protect, support and assist victims of crime.

The issues Mr Morris has outlined in his petition relate principally to post trial support for victims. Whilst wholeheartedly supporting the general principle of support for victims of crime, Scottish Court Service (SCS) would not propose to respond in detail to the general support issues outlined in the petition.

The official Committee report indicates that Mr Morris outlined his experiences at court and in particular his concerns surrounding the proximity of the accused to members of the victim's family, in this instance a murder case, within the confines of the court building. This point was acknowledged by Committee member John Wilson MSP, who recommended that the views of ACPOS and SCS be obtained.

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As part of the cross-justice "Making Justice Work" programme, a multi-agency group is looking at ways and means of securing, and improving, the attendance of persons at court a national level. This of course includes witnesses and victims, and the group has identified the issue surrounding potential intimidation of witnesses. Concerns such as those raised around the opportunities for intimidation will be carefully considered in the months to come. The organisations involved in this work include Scottish Government, the police, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), the Scottish Court Service and voluntary organisations. The aim is to improve the witness experience as well as the efficiency of the justice system.

Bearing in mind the courthouse is a public building, keeping witnesses and the accused person apart during the court process, in separate waiting areas, reduces the opportunity for confrontation. There remains the possibility however that paths may cross in the corridors or in the entrance hallway. Though at an early stage the potential for improved segregation and alternative access routes for witnesses and victims is being explored though, it should be appreciated certain buildings may lend themselves to such a proposal more effectively than others.

In the interim we work closely with Victim Support Scotland Witness Service and the Victim Information and Advice Service (part of COPFS) in making practical arrangements to minimise contact between witnesses and the accused in cases where there are known concerns.

We note the other matters Mr Morris has raised in his petition and the Committee's intention to consider referring the petition to the Justice Committee for consideration alongside the government's developing Victims and Witnesses Bill.

I hope the Committee finds this response helpful.

Yours sincerely

Neil Rennick
Executive Director Strategy & Infrastructure