

Lack of SNP planning sees courts and police buildings lying dormant

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11 Feb 2017



Around one in six Police Scotland buildings are not in daily use, while the Scottish Government is sitting on £1 million worth of empty courtrooms.

Information obtained by the Scottish Conservatives has revealed that, of 412 police properties across Scotland, 60 are “not currently in day-to-day use”.

And the research also revealed that sheriff courts which have shut, but not sold, total an estimated value of around £1.13 million.

The Scottish Conservatives have said it shows a lack of forward-planning by the SNP, which is prepared to oversee the closure of courts and police buildings without thinking about what to do with the buildings thereafter.

Police Scotland embarked on a programme of front counter closures in 2014, and outlined plans for even more to shut last year.

The Scottish Conservatives criticised that move, saying people still valued local police stations and they played an important role in cutting crime.

In its response to the party’s Freedom of Information request, Police Scotland said: “Out of 412 properties, 60 are not currently in day-to-day use. A number of those are still used occasionally and some are subject to ongoing engagement with stakeholders regarding future use.”

A number of court closures have also occurred on the SNP’s watch, with 17 sheriff and justice of the peace facilities closing since the decision was announced in 2013.

However, it has now emerged many of these buildings are still on the taxpayer’s books, including Arbroath, valued at £240,000; Cupar, valued at £200,000; and Stonehaven, valued at £330,000.

The Scottish Conservatives also criticised the court closures programmes, warning it would make life harder for victims and witnesses, and add an additional burden to those courts remaining.

Scottish Conservative MSP Margaret Mitchell, convener of Holyrood’s justice committee, said:

"We were critical of SNP plans to close police stations and court buildings from the outset.

"But what this shows is that those proposals went on regardless, without any thought as to what to do with the buildings.

"It means the public has far reduced access to justice, yet the taxpayer hasn't benefited as a result.

"In the face of the absolute refusal to change its mind on these closures, at the very least the money raised from their sale, now the Scottish Government has deemed them surplus to requirements, could go some way to improving justice in Scotland.

"It's yet another example of the SNP making sweeping decisions without even trying to think the whole process through."

To see a copy of the Freedom of Information response from the Scottish Courts Service, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Scottish-Courts-FOI-response.pdf>

To see a copy of the Freedom of Information response from Police Scotland, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Police-FOI-response.pdf>

The Scottish Government's programme of police station closures has been roundly criticised:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-37850332>

Similarly, the nationalists have been under fire for closing a fifth of Scotland's courts:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2015/09/sheriff-courts-less-efficient-in-wake-of-snp-closure-programme/>