



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Local Government and Regeneration Committee
Kevin Stewart MSP
Convener

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1 October 2014

Dear Jim,

Committee Evidence Session 7 January 2015

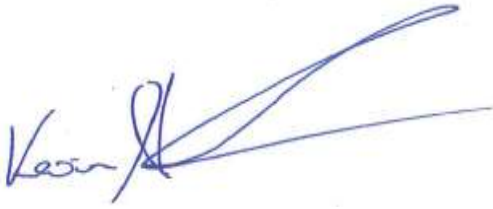
I am writing to invite you and your staff to give oral evidence to the Local Government and Regeneration Committee on your annual report on 7 January 2015. I am also able to confirm the approach that Committee wish to take in respect of the evidence session. I understand the Clerk to the Committee has been discussing our approach and the date with your staff.

The Committee wish to mirror the approach we took last year and therefore to allow this year's evidence session to again focus on being forward looking and concentrate on how scrutiny can be improved. The Committee, having perused your annual report have agreed to provide you in advance with the supplementary information we wish. I attach at annex A those questions upon which the Committee have requested brief written responses by close on 15 December 2014.

The Committee intend to continue involving the public in informing our scrutiny, and this year we have again agreed to issue a public call for input. That call, which will be similar to last year will issue later in October and I will ask the clerks to provide you with a copy once it has been finalised. As happened last year any relevant questions received, and not asked, will be forwarded to you for a written answer. The Clerks will seek to agree a timescale with you once the volume and nature of questions are known.

I look forward to receiving your response to the attached questions and our session on 7th January.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Stewart', followed by a long, sweeping horizontal line.

Kevin Stewart MSP
Convener
Local Government and Regeneration Committee

Annexe

A. Committee Questions to SPSO

Questions to SPSO on Annual Report 2013-14

Ombudsman's introduction

1. The Committee notes the implementation of complaint handling procedures (CHP's) in certain sectors have been in place for the full reporting period. They are interested to learn what impact these have had on the numbers of complaints received, by the SPSO and the organisation, and any impact they have they had on outcomes?
2. The Committee are pleased to read in the report about innovations and solutions, can you provide some examples of these and set out the benefits that accrued.

Casework Performance

3. The Committee would welcome your views and comments on whether the workload and resource implications of considering clinical judgements as opposed to maladministration in health complaints is an appropriate function to be undertaken by a lay body
4. Also whether you consider undertaking this type of investigation detracts from your original core purpose and reduces the service you are able to provide to other complainers.
5. The Committee have noted the "success" of the pilot project to triage complaints at an earlier stage. They have also noted the information about 63 cases resolved early at the detailed review stage and would welcome your comments on whether this represents a failure of the new triage procedures?
6. The Committee notes the increase in local authority complaints withdrawn and your view that this represents an underlying dissatisfaction with discretionary decision making. Can you update the Committee on your thinking underpinning this finding.
7. The Committee notes a small number of organisations continue to have high numbers of complaints and would welcome details of these organisations.
8. The SPSO performance against the target at PI-2 shows a significant failure. Can you update the Committee on the reasons for this and the actions being taken to address the position.
9. Does the absence of any judicial reviews being taken suggest that remedy is not effective and, if so, what reasons you would suggest contribute to that view. Are there any alternative remedies you consider appropriate?
10. The Committee continue to note all those dissatisfied with SPSO's service do not have the opportunity to have their complaint considered by the external Service Decision Reviewer. They consider this a surprising position for a body whose purpose is to help people dissatisfied. Your comments on this would again be welcome.

Impacts

11. The Committee have a particular interest in benchmarking which is mentioned in a couple of places in this section of your report. Please supply detail of which organisations are benchmarking and brief details of how they are doing

- this. Given the SPSO role in facilitating local authority handlers network the Committee are keen to understand how this work is improving performance.
12. The Committee notes 26% of recommendations are not implemented by organisations within **agreed** timescales and would welcome further details on this including the reasons given and details of any systemic offending organisations.
 13. The Committee are very pleased to see the SPSO is engaging by phone with the complainants prior to issuing your decisions. We are interested in what effect this has had on requests for review?
 14. The Committee have noted in the examples of recommendations those relating to financial redress. We would be interested to understand the basis on which they are made and the available mechanisms for enforcement.
 15. Please provide details of all of the systemic issues you have identified.
 16. Please advise when the next SPSO consumer survey will be undertaken along with any further details you are able about the proposed methodology.

Corporate Performance

17. When will the SPSO staff survey results be published?
18. The Committee welcome the range of feedback methods used with SPSO stakeholders and would be interested in seeing any evaluation thereof or comments received thereon.