

PE1740/A

Chairman and Secretary, Accountability Scotland, submissions of 11 September 2019

Chairman

I am a founder-member of Accountability Scotland, with whom I have volunteered in various capacities for 10 years.

Over the years people have come to us seeking support, after they experienced what they considered to be unfair and inadequate service from the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman and the public bodies under SPSO jurisdiction . The number of people contacting us with often distressing stories has unfortunately not decreased over time, and repeated patterns have emerged and continue. Complainants are at enormous disadvantages in obtaining evidence from the authorities about whom they are complaining. The fact that much of the evidence is oral and not documented, as the well as the fact that SPSO does not trust witness statements, puts the complainant at significant disadvantage. For neuro-diverse complainants these obstacles become unscalable mountains.

Despite efforts by SPSO to improve levels of satisfaction, there is a persistent dissatisfaction level approaching 50% (as has been published on SPSO's website) and a much higher level of dissatisfaction publicly voiced elsewhere. This is mirrored by the evidence we receive at Accountability Scotland.

We feel it is important to point out that when SPSO gets it wrong people are harmed and public services deteriorate rather than improve. The effect on individuals and families, who have already been traumatised, can be shattering. It is our view that important complaints, with the potential to affect positive change in Scotland and improve public services and people's lives, often don't stand a chance when authorities are determined to shield their reputations.

Recordings will help both the complainant and the authority being investigated, because it gives both parties a clear point of reference at the heart of the complaint, and it provides unchallengeable evidence for SPSO to examine.

I would like to urge the committee to bring about an urgent change to the regulatory landscape to redress the continuing injustice

Secretary

I have long been aware of maladministration by SPSO's 'bodies under jurisdiction' (BUJs) and their falsehoods and denials in self-defence. I therefore strongly support Petition 1740, the proposals of which, if implemented, should improve administrative justice and also facilitate and reduce the work of the SPSO.

The petition, because it is well-argued and logically presented, underplays an immensely important aspect of its content. When members of the public are badly treated by BUJs and then fail to get support by the SPSO, they get a double dose of frustration and stress that can have devastating effects on the lives and well-being of themselves and of their families.