



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Finance and Public Administration Committee

Leslie Evans
Former Permanent Secretary
Scottish Government

By email

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Dear Ms Evans

The Finance and Public Administration Committee this week considered a response of 7 March to our invite to you to give evidence on your reflections and insights of your time as Permanent Secretary.

As you know, our formal invite of 27 January followed informal discussions between the Committee's clerks and officials from the Office of the Permanent Secretary from October 2021 onwards, about an appropriate time for you to give evidence to the Committee on these matters. At that time you were still in post as Permanent Secretary.

Reassurances have repeatedly been given that the evidence session was not intended to revisit events previously considered by the Committee on the Scottish Government's Handling of Harassment Complaints. Indeed, as we indicated in our invitation, this session was due to focus on broad issues within the Committee's newly added public administration remit, such as how government functions, the capacity and capability of the civil service, culture, and how policies are developed and implemented.

We are therefore extremely disappointed at the discourtesy shown to the Parliament by your failure to engage directly with the Committee at any stage regarding our invitation, despite our best efforts. When we finally received a response, it was not

from you, but from the Office of the Permanent Secretary, stating that, as you are now on a period of leave (dating from 31 December 2021 until you retire from the UK Civil Service on 31 March 2022), you are not able to speak on behalf, or represent the views, of Scottish Ministers. At no point have we asked you to do so. We have been absolutely clear at all times that our interest lay in your own reflections, not those of Ministers, to support the Committee in developing a clearer understanding of the workings of government in our new public administration role. Very few people have the opportunity to gain your level of experience in government, which we considered would have been beneficial in informing our future scrutiny.

We are firmly of the view that it is in the public interest for the Committee to hear from civil servants as part of our public administration remit. You remain in the employment of the Scottish Government and we do not accept that your period of leave exempts you from giving evidence to a parliamentary committee, in the way suggested in the response we received.

We would also wish to repeat our assurances that the Committee had no intention of revisiting the SGHHC Committee's investigation with you, though we are separately considering the wider lessons to be learned as part of our scrutiny of the Scottish Government's new procedure for complaints brought against Ministers and former Ministers by civil servants, and the implementation plan of actions arising from that and other inquiries into the matter.

It is unfortunate that we did not have the opportunity to hear about some of your achievements and accomplishments from your time at the Scottish Government. Given the time that has elapsed since our original approach to you and the response of 7 March, we do not however intend to waste any more of our time pursuing this matter.

The Committee will now, as previously agreed, write separately to the new Permanent Secretary, John-Paul Marks, to invite him to give evidence, on his aims and vision for the Scottish Government and its workings, at a future meeting.

Both the response from the Office of the Permanent Secretary and this letter will, in line with the Committee's approach to handling correspondence, be published on the Committee's web pages.

Yours sincerely

Kenneth Gibson MSP
Convener
Finance and Public Administration Committee