Dear Lord Advocate

Petition 1370 from Justice for Megrahi

I am writing in relation to the above petition, considered at the Committee's meeting on 23 February. As you will be aware, the petition was last considered on 5 January, when the Committee agreed to write to you requesting further information as to what procedures the COPFS has in place to ensure impartiality in instances where there have been complaints about the mishandling of cases by the COPFS itself. A short letter to this effect was sent to you on 12 January, with a suggested deadline for response of 5 February. Owing to my absence at the time, the letter was issued by the Deputy Convener but I should make clear that I consider the proposed deadline to have been eminently reasonable and in line with standard practice.

It is a matter of concern that, despite numerous reminders, your response to the Deputy Convener's letter did not arrive until Tuesday morning, around ten minutes before the meeting at which Petition 1370 was due to be considered. I further note that no explanation for the late arrival of the letter was offered. Such tardiness is not only a discourtesy to the Committee – and indeed to the petitioners, some of whom had travelled to watch committee proceedings at the meeting that morning: more importantly, it also serves to inhibit the Committee from carrying out one of its core tasks; the timeous and effective consideration of public petitions.
Unless there is good reason for the delay, a Parliamentary committee should not have to postpone consideration of petitions because of the late arrival of a response from a Minister or Law Officer. Yet this was effectively the position the Justice Committee was placed in at the 23 February meeting, when the decision was taken to hold over consideration of Petition 1370 to a future meeting, which is particularly regrettable, given that dissolution is now less than a month away.

I would be grateful if you would have regard to these comments in relation to any future correspondence arising from the core work of the Justice Committee.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Christine Grahame MSP
Convener, Justice Committee