Dear Mr Yousaf,

Evidence session with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

At its meeting on 23 January 2019, the Local Government and Communities Committee took evidence on the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman’s (SPSO) Annual Report and Accounts 2017-18.

During the evidence session, the Ombudsman, restated the same request for two additional powers she made to the Committee last year\(^1\). The first would allow her to carry out what she called ‘Public Value’ investigations at her own initiative, i.e., without requiring an external complaint. The second would allow her to take complaints in any format, rather than just in writing without “exceptional circumstances” having to apply, as per current arrangements. The Ombudsman’s view was that these changes would—

“…ensure that Scotland has a modern Ombudsman service, with powers fit for purpose, both in terms of current duties and extension to powers”\(^2\).

The Ombudsman told us that she has had ongoing discussions with the Scottish Government in relation to these requests, but is concerned about a lack of progress. During the evidence session, the Ombudsman indicated that this was due to a change of officials within the relevant Scottish Government department, meaning she was having to restart her discussions with new officials, leading to a delay in any progress being made\(^3\).

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\(^1\) **Official Report**: SPSO Annual Report 2016/17 - Evidence session, 31 January 2018

\(^2\) **Papers for meeting**, 23 January 2019 (see Written Submission from the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman of 16 January 2019)

The Committee agreed after the evidence session to write to the Scottish Government to seek an update on what consideration it has given to the Ombudsman’s request for additional legislative powers, including whether it is supportive in principle of the Ombudsman’s requests and if so, whether there is a timetable for resolving these matters satisfactorily.

We look forward to receiving your reply in due course.

Yours sincerely

James Dornan MSP
Convener of the Local Government and Communities Committee