

Public Petition Committee
Thursday 10 September 2026
2nd Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

PE1979: Establish an independent inquiry and an independent national whistleblowing officer to investigate concerns about the alleged mishandling of child safeguarding enquiries by public bodies

Introduction

Petitioner Neil McLennan, Christine Scott, Alison Dickie, and Bill Cook

Petition Summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to launch an independent inquiry to examine: concerns that allegations about child protection, child abuse, safeguarding, and children's rights have been mishandled by public bodies, including local authorities and the General Teaching Council Scotland (GTCS); gaps in the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry; and establish an independent national whistleblowing officer for Education and Children's Services in Scotland to handle these enquiries in the future.

Website <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1979>

1. This is a continued petition that was published on 3 November 2022.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**. Details of action taken by the previous committee are set out on the website highlighted above.
3. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 2,114 signatures have been received on this petition. Clerks understand that Meghan Gallacher plans to attend for this item of business.
4. The Committee sought the views of the Scottish Government on all petitions carried over from Session 6 to inform its consideration. This response is included alongside a written submission from the City of Edinburgh Council, and a response from the Petitioner, at **Annexe B**.
5. The Legacy Report of the Session 6 Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee stated:

“The Committee considered this petition on a number of occasions between February 2023 and February 2025, including an evidence session on 4 October 2023. On 25 February 2026, the Committee agreed to keep the petition open as it considered that a number of issues underpinning the

petition remain current and have not been fully addressed by the Scottish Government.”¹

6. The Legacy Report also recommended that this Committee pursue the issue further, noting that this could include consideration of whether referring the petition could be appropriate if other committees are undertaking relevant work which would allow substantive scrutiny of the issues.
7. In its response, the Scottish Government refers to the following work being done in relation to the issues raised in the petition:
 - A commitment in the SNP manifesto to legislate to make reporting of harm to children, including child sexual abuse, mandatory by adults tasked with safeguarding young people;
 - Phase 11 of the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, which will (a) consider the extent to which failures by state or non-state institutions to protect children in care in Scotland from abuse has been addressed by changes to practice, policy, or legislation; and (b) consider whether any further changes in practice, policy, or legislation are necessary in order to protect children in care in Scotland from abuse in future;
 - The Scottish Government’s intention to establish a targeted independent Inquiry and establish a Scottish Truth Project;
 - The Scottish Government’s support for the UK Public Office (Accountability) Bill.
8. Responding to the Scottish Government’s submission, the Petitioners state that they are “frustrated” with the submission, and that the key focus of the petition “continues to be on securing independent investigation of allegations relating to the mishandling of child abuse concerns by public bodies through an independent national whistleblowing office (INWO) for education and children’s services”.
9. It is the Petitioners’ view that this will “address the power imbalances involved, amplify the voice of survivors and whistleblowers, and limit the conflicts of interest and marking of one’s own homework that thrives at public body, multi-agency and national strategic group levels – including those referenced in the Scottish Government’s submission”.
10. The Petitioners welcomed the support of the City of Edinburgh Council in its submission. However, in their submission, the Petitioners cautioned against reference to “past” treatment of whistleblowers, as, stating that “it’s alleged this culture continues”.

¹ [Legacy Report of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee, Session 6](#)

11. Finally, the Petitioners' submission cites comments by Professor Alexis Jay OBE, the Chair of the public inquiry into group-based child sexual abuse, about the petition and state that they would welcome a meeting with Professor Jay.

Action

12. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
September 2026

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE1979: Establish an independent inquiry and an independent national whistleblowing officer to investigate concerns about the alleged mishandling of child safeguarding enquiries by public bodies

Petitioner

Neil McLennan, Christine Scott, Alison Dickie, and Bill Cook

Date Published

3 November 2022

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to launch an independent inquiry to examine: concerns that allegations about child protection, child abuse, safeguarding, and children's rights have been mishandled by public bodies, including local authorities and the General Teaching Council Scotland (GTCS); gaps in the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry; and establish an independent national whistleblowing officer for Education and Children's Services in Scotland to handle these enquiries in the future.

Previous action

Have written to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills in July 2021 and received a response in August 2021. We are also aware that Oliver Mundell MSP and other MSPs have corresponded with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills on this issue.

We support the [#Unfeartie campaign](#), which was set up by the Children's Parliament in 2017.

Background information

The #Unfeartie pledge is to have courageous conversations regarding children's issues and speak up and stand alongside children. We take these principles very seriously, and have supported whistleblowers in raising historic and current allegations about child protection, child abuse, safeguarding and children's rights matters.

The alleged mishandling of child safeguarding concerns in many public bodies (Edinburgh, Borders, Aberdeenshire, East Lothian and the GTCS) have been well publicised, with whistleblowers calling for a public inquiry, open to existing or new whistleblowers and the public to raise recent or historic concerns.

A number of written and oral parliamentary questions highlighting these concerns have been lodged by MSPs. These include questions to the First Minister from Christine Grahame, Willie Rennie, Meghan Gallacher and Douglas Lumsden.

The Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry focuses on historic abuse and is specific to children in care. A wider inquiry into safeguarding concerns and enquiries from parents, guardians, carers, professionals and the public, which have been mishandled, is needed. This should consider gaps in the existing inquiry; mainstream and specialised settings; and regulated children's activities.

Annexe B: Written Submissions

City of Edinburgh Council written submission, 22 June 2026

PE1979/OO: Establish an independent inquiry and an independent national whistleblowing officer to investigate concerns about the alleged mishandling of child safeguarding enquiries by public bodies

The City of Edinburgh Council acknowledges its past treatment of whistleblowers has not met the standards expected and supports Petition 1979 - to establish an independent inquiry and an independent national whistleblowing officer to investigate concerns about the alleged mishandling of child safeguarding enquiries by public bodies.

The Council recognises the persistent efforts of the petitioners of PE1979 to the Scottish Parliament, including former councillors, Alison Dickie and Bill Cook, and former whistleblower, Christine Scott, in attempting to establish a National Whistleblowing Officer.

It was encouraging to note the agreement of the all-party Scottish Parliament's Petitions Committee to continue the Petition following the next Scottish Parliament election and we look forward to engaging with the new Convener and members.

As Council Leader and Chief Executive, we formally offer the full support of Council in establishing this much needed role and in offering any supporting evidence to any parliamentary investigation in respect of assessing any positive, or negative, aspects of whistleblowing experiences.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Jane Meagher (Leader of the City of Edinburgh Council)
Paul Lawrence (Chief Executive of the City of Edinburgh Council)

Scottish Government written submission, 19 August 2026

PE1979/PP: Establish an independent inquiry and an independent national whistleblowing officer to investigate concerns about the alleged mishandling of child safeguarding enquiries by public bodies

Thank you for your email dated 29 June 2026 asking for an update regarding Petition PE1979.

I would like to begin by underlining Scottish Government's ongoing commitment to ensuring children and young people in Scotland are protected from all forms of harm and are supported to reach their full potential.

Since I last wrote to the Committee in November 2025, the Child Protection Unit within Scottish Government has continued to engage with relevant stakeholders in this space. Colleagues from the unit took a discussion to the National Public Protection Leadership Group (NPPLG) in January focussed on complaints and whistleblowing culture and processes.

Throughout the Spring, colleagues worked collaboratively with members of COSLA and ADES to consider next steps on the back of these discussions. Owing to the pre-election period, this work was paused but is planned to restart following Summer recess; taking into account how the election and other relevant work may have an impact on our approach.

As you will be aware, a lot has happened in recent months in relation to child protection in Scotland. Many of these changes and announcements will have an impact on the issues raised by Petition PE1979. For example, the following key activities will have an impact on the processes relating to complaints and whistleblowing within public organisations:

SNP Manifesto Commitment:

In this year's manifesto, the SNP stated:

“we will legislate to make reporting of harm to children, including child sexual abuse, mandatory by adults tasked with safeguarding young people. We will strengthen current guidance to make it a legal requirement for key professionals to report concerns about a child's welfare - in order to secure greater protection for children and young people, and ensure that the statutory responsibilities of public bodies are adhered to at all times”.

In Scotland all healthcare and education professionals have a duty to report child abuse. However, Ministers are supportive of introducing a more broadly applicable mandatory reporting requirement for individuals working with children or young people, which is based in statute. A Mandatory Reporting Task and Finish Group, chaired by Dr Ariane Critchley from the University of Stirling and made up of a range of other experts, was set up in early 2026 to consider mandatory reporting and develop options for a Scottish model.

This group will continue to take forward its work throughout this year and report its recommendations into the Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation National Strategic Group.

We are engaging closely with all key stakeholders, including the Cross-Party Group on Adult Survivors of Childhood Abuse, as well as Police Scotland, Social Work Scotland and Child Protection Committees Scotland and others on this issue in order to develop the best approach for Scotland.

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry Phase 11

It was announced in June 2026 that phase 11 of the Inquiry relates to ‘Protecting children in care in Scotland from abuse: present and future’. It will begin in the latter part of this year and will focus in particular on paragraphs 6 and 7 of SCAI's [Terms of Reference](#). The Inquiry's investigations will:

- consider the extent to which failures by state or non-state institutions to protect children in care in Scotland from abuse has been addressed by changes to practice, policy, or legislation;

- consider whether any further changes in practice, policy, or legislation are necessary in order to protect children in care in Scotland from abuse in future.

The Inquiry is independent of Scottish Government, and we therefore cannot pre-empt its final recommendations. However, SCAL's final recommendations may have relevance to the concerns set out in PE1979.

Statutory Public Inquiry into Group-based Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (CSAE):

In a statement to Parliament in February 2026, Education Secretary Jenny Gilruth confirmed the Scottish Government's intention to establish a targeted independent Inquiry and establish a Scottish Truth Project.

Drawing on survivors' experiences and the findings of the Inspectorate-led National Review into group-based CSAE, the inquiry will examine responses to group-based CSAE, investigate systemic failings, and assess the extent of abuse within relevant institutions across Scotland. It will consider failures to safeguard children, examine the prevalence and enabling factors of such abuse, and make recommendations to prevent similar failings in the future. While this inquiry will be focused on group-based CSAE, there will be some crossover with some concerns raised in the past by PE1979, such as the potential mishandling of child protection cases by public bodies.

The Education Secretary also announced that the Government intends to establish a Truth Project in Scotland, to enable victims and survivors of CSAE to share their experiences to help inform change and access support.

Introduction of the Public Office (Accountability) Bill:

The Bill was first introduced by the UK Government in the House of Commons on 16 September 2025. On 27 April 2026, the House of Commons passed a carry-over motion for the Bill and, accordingly, it was re-introduced in the House of Commons on 14 May 2026.

The Scottish Government lodged a Legislative Consent Memorandum (LCM) on 31 October 2025, which covered the provisions regarding a duty of candour and assistance and standards of ethical conduct. A supplementary Legislative Consent Memorandum was lodged on 4 February 2026 which considered amendments to the Bill which were tabled on 12 January 2026. This supplementary LCM considers the additional amendments which were tabled by the UK Government on 13 July 2026.

The Bill makes provision for a variety of measures relating to public authorities and public officials across the UK, with the aim of rebuilding public trust and ensuring past injustices experienced by bereaved families in the aftermath of the Hillsborough disaster are not repeated. Part 1 and Chapters 1 and 2 of Part 2 of the Bill introduce a duty of candour and assistance, alongside minimum standards for ethical conduct.

These provisions are intended to strengthen accountability across public authorities in Scotland, promoting greater transparency, candour and fairness. We are determined to learn from past mistakes and are committed to ensuring the Bill's implementation in Scotland.

I hope the information set out above provides reassurance that Scottish Government is taking forward a range of work in relation to the concerns and recommendations set out in Petition PE1979.

Due to the evolving nature of this work, I would like to commit to updating the committee in early 2027 to provide assurance on progress.

Yours Sincerely,

Brian Taylor
Deputy Director, Children's Rights, Protection and Justice

Petitioner written submission, 2 September 2026

PE1979/QQ: Establish an independent inquiry and an independent national whistleblowing office to investigate concerns about the alleged mishandling of child safeguarding enquiries by public bodies

This submission provides background for new committee members and responds to the Scottish Government submission of 19 August 26.

Our petition's key focus continues to be on securing independent investigation of allegations relating to the mishandling of child abuse concerns by public bodies through an independent national whistleblowing office (INWO) for education and children's services.

We believe this will address the power imbalances involved, amplify the voice of survivors and whistleblowers, and limit the conflicts of interest and marking of one's own homework that thrives at public body, multi-agency and national strategic group levels – including those referenced in the Scottish Government's submission.

Ultimately, robust and independent investigation of the unresolved cases will establish the child safeguarding truth and the level of confidence we can have in our current systems and personnel – especially where alleged perpetrators are still working with children and young people. Petitioners have raised the limited investigation and legislative powers of existing bodies.

Survivors, families and carers, former and current staff and others across Scotland are amongst the voices informing the petition's work. All have experienced a negative impact on their health, careers and lives in their raising of concerns. The allegations are diverse but cover all children and young people's settings and include cases with relevance to serious and organised child abuse.

Petitioners were grateful for the previous committee's cross-party support and the actions of other MSPs. We welcomed the decision to continue PE1979 as a legacy petition to be "rigorously pursued" by the new committee.

We have also welcomed Edinburgh Council's letter of support. This followed a council motion and petitioners raising current child safeguarding concerns and an alleged mishandling with their Chief Executive.

We urge caution though on the reference to the "past" treatment of whistleblowers (and survivors) as it's alleged this culture continues. We highlight too the need to better understand how all unresolved allegations of mishandling – past and present – potentially impact the current protection of children. As mishandling by other local authorities is alleged, we hope that COSLA will now recognise the concerns and support the petition.

Petitioners are again frustrated with this latest Scottish Government submission and the failure to address the petition's calls. We're also disappointed that the new Minister has not given these serious matters her direct attention.

We note the reference, "a lot has happened in recent months in relation to child protection in Scotland" but with the perspective that the activity has been more about words and announcements than the action and progress required. Meanwhile, there is yet more news of child safeguarding failures.

Petitioners continue to welcome any child safeguarding improvements that are not simply sticking plaster solutions and we commend the dedicated work of many hard-working professionals. However, we remain focussed on investigation, justice and accountability, rather than process, yet more lessons learned and recommendations and action plans that are never fully implemented.

Whilst there are issues to consider, petitioners have already indicated their support for mandatory reporting as best protects the child. However, in response to the political SNP manifesto reference, we simply note that this has yet to be delivered.

As in previous SG submissions, it's stated that "all healthcare and educational professionals have a duty to report abuse" and in their February 25 submission, the consequences for failing to do so. This included disciplinary proceedings, claims for civil damages and being struck off for gross misconduct. We wish to know what led to the SG's changed position and how they believe it will deter mishandling.

Petitioners have highlighted that the allegations include not only a failure to report but also a mishandling and cover up of the reported concerns by rogue professionals. Hence our focus on robust and independent investigation. We also feel that senior managers should be better held to account for their oversight role, rather than placing more pressure on frontline staff.

We are aware of Phase 11 of the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry (SCAI) but as well-raised, our petition concerns a mishandling of child abuse across all children and young people's settings.

We've also highlighted the existing gaps and in the course of the petition's journey, survivors and whistleblowers have raised concerns with petitioners about the Inquiry. This includes the failure to include and support all voices, limited truth about the abuse, and what feels to be a lack of convictions or the level of justice and accountability they want to see.

Whilst we remain focussed on investigation of the mishandled child abuse cases through the ongoing and empowering space of an INWO that's shaped by lived experience, we are acutely conscious of how difficult it has been for CSE survivors to be heard in Scotland.

Despite also the submission's reference to The Truth Project and it being cited as "well-advanced" in recent media coverage, we are aware of survivors who still await any contact from them. Instead, related emails have been received from SG civil servants and, as in the case of SCAI, petitioners would raise this conflict of interest.

We welcome Professor Jay as the Inquiry's independent chair and, at February's Education Committee, her initial response to the suggestion of an INWO - "I can't think it would be anything more than helpful to have that but I do not have the detail about the petition." Petitioners would value a meeting with Professor Jay.

Petitioners wholeheartedly support greater accountability across public bodies. This lies at the root of the petition. However, as public bodies already have a duty of candour, with the failure to do so being gross misconduct, petitioners query what difference the Public Office (Accountability) Bill will make, especially as relates to child safeguarding.

Instead, petitioners highlight how amplifying the voice of survivors and whistleblowers through the robust and independent investigation of an INWO will best determine the level of justice and accountability required.

We call on the committee to use its powers to ensure speedier realisation of our petition's calls. We'd also welcome an opportunity to speak to the committee.