

# **Whistleblowers begin petition for public inquiry**

**Edinburgh whistle blowers who were instrumental in exposing wrongdoing in the city council have called on MSPs to launch a public inquiry into the mishandling of complaints about child protection.**

A petition to The Scottish Parliament asks for a national, wide-ranging investigation into allegations that public bodies across Scotland including The City of Edinburgh Council repeatedly failed to address concerns about the safeguarding of children, child abuse and children's rights.

The move comes after former council staff in the capital who have come forward with allegations said earlier this year a probe into support for whistle blowers in the organisation had been a "whitewash", and called for a public inquiry to be held.

Petitioner Christine Scott, a former community programme manager at Castlebrae Community High School, told councillors in February the 'Tanner Inquiry' was "narrow and restrictive in allowing the truth to surface".

The review into 'whistle blowing and organisational culture' was commissioned by the council on the back of findings of a previous investigation by Susanne Tanner, KC, into former city social worker Sean Bell, who was uncovered as a serious abuser and who died when facing charges in 2020.

Speaking at the meeting where councillors discussed the next steps following the two investigations, Ms Scott, who blew the whistle on a head teacher who allegedly had sex with an under-age pupil in 2014, said she had “serious concerns” after some whistle blowers disclosed to her “heart-wrenching stories about child protection issues”.

She added: “That’s why we’re calling for a public inquiry, because we don’t feel this has touched the surface or even gone below the surface of what’s been happening.”

If MSPs agree to hold an inquiry, allegations from not only Edinburgh, but other public bodies including East Lothian, Borders and Aberdeenshire councils and the General Teaching Council Scotland would also be investigated.

The petition, which has so far gathered 560 signatures, calls for an independent national whistleblowing officer to be appointed to conduct the investigation.

It states: “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.”



Alison Dickie formerly Vice-Convener of Education, Children and Families

Former Edinburgh councillor Alison Dickie, who assisted over 25 council staff in making complaints about wrongdoing during her time on the council, also helped to draw up the petition.

Ms Dickie said if it goes ahead, the inquiry “should be open to past and present cases of mishandling, allegations of mishandling, existing or new whistle blowers or people who want to share those concerns”.

She said setting up the petition felt like the “natural next step” for whistle blowers and their supporters after calls for a more thorough investigation in February were met with silence.

“There’s growing voices across Scotland on this whole issue and when it was suggested about a national independent inquiry I put my name to it,” she added.

“What could be wrong with greater national scrutiny and more courageous conversations for our children?

“We need to look at this and no one – and I was clear about that in council – should feel intimidated for wanting to feel

sure about children's rights issues and safeguarding issues, and I could not be stronger on that point.

"Concerns continue to be raised, there's people sharing these concerns, there's people who don't feel their cases have been resolved and there should be no room for a single doubt when it comes to childrens' rights or safeguarding."

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter

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