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Mr Frank David
Assistant Clerk to the Petitions Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

7 October 2008

Dear Mr David

Consideration of Petition PE1163

Thank you for the opportunity to assist the Committee by responding to the issues raised in petition PE1163. I do not consider that it would not be appropriate for me to undertake an examination of the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) at this stage.

As Auditor General I have responsibility for securing the audit of most public bodies in Scotland, including the Scottish Government, its executive agencies, non-departmental public bodies and further education colleges. I may also initiate examinations into the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which bodies and office-holders have used their resources in discharging their functions. I have no responsibility for operational decisions taken by individual public bodies and, as such, cannot comment on the way bodies such as the SPSO handle any specific case.

I deliver examinations of economy, efficiency and effectiveness through a forward work programme. The programme is produced after a risk assessment of the issues affecting public bodies. One important consideration is the added value any proposed examinations might have in relation to work being undertaken by other bodies such as the Scottish Government in the same timeframe.

I have no immediate plans to undertake an examination of the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the SPSO. I am aware of the ongoing work following the Scottish Government's response to the Crerar review of the Scrutiny of Public Bodies. Action groups have been established to consider a range of recommendations made by Lord Crerar. These include groups looking at the extent to which current complaint handling systems in Scotland are fit for purpose and at governance and accountability for bodies involved in scrutiny such as SPSO. The groups are in the course of reporting their findings to Ministers and there is provision in the current Parliamentary legislative programme for a bill to take forward any action Ministers may consider necessary. I consider that it would be inappropriate for me to undertake an examination at SPSO at this time.

I hope this information is of use to you.

Yours sincerely

Robert W Black
Auditor General for Scotland