

# Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery submission of 20 January 2023

## PE1905/G: Public Inquiry into the response of religious organisations to allegations of child sexual abuse since 1950

Thank you for your letter following up on the above petition dated 14 December 2022.

I note your recommendation that the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry's (SCAI) terms of reference be extended to include religious organisations or that a separate inquiry is established to look into the issues raised by the petitioner.

As stated in my previous letter of 21 June 2022, I previously considered whether to widen SCAI's remit to include abuse in different settings and concluded that this was not practicable as it would mean that SCAI would therefore take many more years to reach its completion. In turn, this would therefore mean the Government would fail to meet its commitment to survivors of in-care abuse.

Despite the important issues raised in this petition, I stand by this decision. Indeed, widening the scope of the inquiry at all would mean that various settings – not just religious organisations – would need to be considered, thereby potentially making such an inquiry unmanageable in scope.

It is important to note that the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse has already considered similar issues to those raised by the petitioner, albeit in England and Wales. As you point out in your letter, many relevant recommendations have been put forward by that Inquiry, and I can assure you that the Scottish Government will consider these. In addition, it is likely that SCAI will result in many learnings and recommendations that are also relevant for other settings, such as religious organisations, which will also be considered and taken forward as appropriate.

It is clear that there already are, and will continue to be, many lessons and recommendations for us to consider in this area. Rather than devoting several years to a separate inquiry, it is therefore imperative that we dedicate resources and attention to ongoing work to ensure that public bodies and all local areas across Scotland implement our National Guidance for Child Protection. We are providing a support and challenge function to ensure that safeguarding and child protection is robust and central to the culture and practice of all relevant bodies and that we accompany bodies on the constant improvement journey that implementation of the GIRFEC approach, child protection, and children's rights necessitates.

I hope that the Committee and petitioner find the information above helpful.