



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Finance and Public Administration Committee

Kate Forbes MSP
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic
Scottish Government

22 April 2025

Dear Deputy First Minister

Cost-effectiveness of Scottish public inquiries

On 4 April 2025, the Committee launched a short, focussed inquiry into the [cost-effectiveness of Scottish public inquiries](#). The Committee requests further information and data to inform this inquiry as set out below.

Remit

This is the first time that a Scottish Parliament Committee has examined this matter in depth and, as such, the inquiry aims to foster greater understanding of the current position with public inquiries in Scotland, including their number, timescales, extensions to terms of reference, costs, categories of spend and outstanding recommendations.

The remit of the inquiry includes:

- to enhance clarity around the purpose, framework and decision-making process for establishing public inquiries and their terms of reference, and whether any improvements are required
- to establish if public inquiries in Scotland deliver value for money, the extent to which spending controls are necessary, and how they might be implemented while maintaining the independence and effectiveness of inquiries
- to identify examples of good practice (in Scotland or elsewhere) which ensure cost-effectiveness
- to identify alternatives to the Scottish inquiry model, including how such alternatives may work, deliver outcomes and value for money.

The Committee does not, as part of this inquiry, intend to make recommendations on the merits or otherwise of individual Scottish Government decisions on whether to hold a specific public inquiry, or to make comment on specific recommendations that have been made by any individual public inquiry.

Contact: Finance and Public Administration Committee, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP.

Email FPA.committee@parliament.scot. We welcome calls through Relay UK and in BSL through Contact Scotland BSL.

Information requested

Focusing on the Scottish Government's decision-making process, the Committee is interested to learn more about the factors it takes into account when deciding whether to establish a statutory public inquiry under Clause 1 of the [Inquiries Act 2005](#) (the 2005 Act). We understand that one of the attributes of the statutory inquiry process is that the Chair can require a person to give evidence or provide documentation (Clause 21) and that this might be relevant in deciding whether to take a statutory or non-statutory inquiry route. **The Committee requests details of this and any other factors the Government gives early consideration to when deciding whether to establish a statutory inquiry into particular events that have, or could cause, public concern.**

Clause 5 of the 2005 Act makes provision for Ministers to specify the 'setting-up date' of an inquiry and before that date to set out the terms of reference for a public inquiry. We also note that evidence taking cannot begin before the 'setting-up date'. **The Committee seeks details of the type of information the Scottish Government would take into account in specifying a 'setting-up date' and what aspects it would ordinarily include in an inquiry terms of reference. For example, whether the Government routinely sets an expectation of when a public inquiry should report.**

A recent report on Public inquiries: Enhancing public trust published September 2024 by the House of Lords Statutory Inquiries Committee made mention of the UK Government's Cabinet Office Inquiries Unit. This Unit's remit is for the whole of the UK, including Scotland, and one of its roles is to help share best practice. **Does the Scottish Government have a specific public inquiries unit and if so, how does it work with the UK Government's Cabinet Office Inquiries Unit. Also, the Committee asks how the Scottish Government captures best practice and lessons learned from previous Scottish public inquiries.**

The Committee is aware that data relating to specific public inquiries is available through their public inquiry websites as set out in Annexe A and via several Scottish Government responses to FOI requests listed at Annexe B. However, there appear to be gaps in this information that it would be useful to address. The Scottish Covid Inquiry website provides a comprehensive breakdown of costs, and an explanation of the costs as noted below. **Therefore, the Committee asks for the same breakdown of costs for all public inquiries that have reported. These include the Campbell Inquiry, the Penrose Inquiry, the "Stockline" ICL Inquiry, the Vale of Leven Inquiry and the Edinburgh Tram Inquiry, as follows:**

- **staff costs**
These include staff responsible and accountable for the overall administration and management of the Inquiry.
- **operational costs**
These include items and services required by the Inquiry to conduct its work effectively.
- **expenses, including witness expenses**
These are costs incurred by witnesses to attend hearings, and by staff when travelling on Inquiry business.

- **inquiry legal services**
These costs encompass external legal advice provided to the Inquiry, including counsel.
- **engagement**
These costs refer to public participation events or costs such as translating documents and guides to make them more widely accessible, maintaining the Inquiry website, distributing Inquiry news updates and producing explanatory videos.
- **research and consultancy**
This includes academic research commissioned by the Inquiry to assist its investigations and preparations for public hearings. It also covers external services, for example, bereavement and listening support for people engaging with the Inquiry.
- **core participant fees**
These are fees paid to core participants' legal representatives.

The Committee also intends to write to current individual public inquiries to seek the information requested as set out above.

In relation to the inquiries listed in Annexe A, the Committee asks how many Scottish Government staff have been seconded to inquiry teams since 19 January 2008, when the Inquiries (Scotland) Rules 2007 commenced. The Committee also asks what general guidance the Scottish Government provides to inquiry chairs in terms of ensuring cost-effectiveness and whether there is a protocol in place for public inquiries to share detailed cost information with the Scottish Government during the inquiry.

In addition, the Committee notes that the public inquiries listed in Annexe A have made a total of 186 recommendations, 11 interim recommendations and one action plan. **The Committee seeks information on how many of these recommendations have been implemented for each of the public inquiries listed. We further request details of the Scottish Government's role in monitoring and ensuring the implementation of recommendations that fall within its ambit and those of Scottish public bodies.**

The Committee expects to start taking evidence in late May and so a response by 23 May 2025 would be appreciated.

Please contact the Committee Clerks should you require any further information.

Yours sincerely,

Kenneth Gibson MSP
Convener

List of relevant public inquiries and available data

A list of public inquiries established by the Scottish Government since 2007 has been as follows:

- [The Campbell Inquiry \(Fingerprints\)](#)
 - announced March 2008
 - public hearings from June 2009 to November 2009
 - reported December 2011 (approx. 3 yrs)
 - 86 recommendations
 - no breakdown of costs
 - Total Cost: £3.4 million
- [The Penrose Inquiry \(Contaminated blood\)](#)
 - announced April 2008
 - public hearings from March 2011 to March 2012, procedural hearing Oct 2012
 - reported March 2015 (approx. 7 yrs)
 - 1 recommendation
 - legal costs £5.1million; inquiry team £3.3 million; expert input £730k; professional services £977k; oral hearings £808k; and accommodation and administration £1.1million
 - [Total cost](#): £12.1million
- [The “Stockline” ICL Inquiry \(Gas explosion\)](#) (joint SG/UK inquiry)
 - announced December 2007
 - public hearings from July 2008 to November 2008
 - reported July 2009 (approx. 1 yr)
 - Four phase action plan
 - no breakdown of costs
 - total cost £1.9 million
- [The Vale of Leven Inquiry \(Hospital-acquired infection\)](#)
 - announced in April 2009
 - public hearings from June 2010 to June 2012
 - reported November 2014 (approx. 5 yrs)
 - 75 recommendations
 - legal costs £5.3million; inquiry team £3.1million; expert input £677k; professional services £380k; oral hearings £651k; and accommodation and administration £578k
 - total cost £10.7million
- [Edinburgh Tram Inquiry](#)
 - announced June 2014
 - public hearings from October 2015 to May 2018
 - reported September 2023 (approx. 9 yrs)
 - 24 recommendations

- staff costs £4.2million, accommodation £1.2 million, professional fee £2.3 million, Transport Scotland legal fees £105k, IT £998k, Miscellaneous £767k¹
- [total cost](#) £13.7 million
- [Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry](#)
 - established October 2015
 - timeline of hearings not clear from the website
 - [originally to report by 2019 but changed to as soon as reasonably practicable](#) (approx. 9 years - ongoing)
 - no recommendations have been made as yet
 - no breakdown of costs
 - total cost as of March 2025 £91.9million
- [Scottish Hospitals Inquiry](#) (Queen Elizabeth University Hospital in Glasgow / Royal Hospital for Children and Young People and Department of Clinical Neurosciences in Edinburgh)
 - announced September 2019, established August 2020
 - public hearings September 2021 to November 2024, next hearing scheduled for April 2025
 - interim report published March 2025 (approx. 6 yrs - ongoing)
 - 11 interim recommendations
 - inquiry staffing ([66 staff as at February 2024](#)), including Chair £12.4 million; inquiry counsel and specialists/experts £3.4 million; core participant and witness costs £2.7million; and running costs, including accommodation and IT £5million
 - total cost as of December 2024 £23.6million
- [Sheku Bayoh Inquiry](#)
 - announced November 2019
 - public hearings from May 2022 to October 2024
 - as of November 2024, the Deputy First Minister is considering whether to extend the terms of reference of the Inquiry (approx. 5yrs - ongoing)
 - no recommendations have been made as yet
 - no breakdown of costs ([44 inquiry staff as at February 2024](#))
 - total cost as of December 2024 £23.7 million
- [Scottish Covid-19 Inquiry](#)
 - announced December 2021 (approx. 3 yrs – ongoing)
 - public hearings from August 2023 to the most recent February 2025 ongoing
 - no recommendations have been made as yet
 - for the financial year to date (2024-25) staff costs ([148 inquiry staff as at February 2024](#)) £7.3million; operational costs £2.4million; expenses including witness expenses £26k; engagement £35k; inquiry legal services £1.1million; research and consultancy £289k and core participants fees £468k.

¹ [Edinburgh Tram Public Inquiry: associated costs: FOI release - gov.scot](#)

- total cost as of December 2024 £34million
- [Professor Eljamel](#)
 - announced September 2023, established April 2025
 - hearings expected to begin later in 2025
 - (approx. 1 yr – ongoing)
- [Emma Caldwell Case](#)
 - announced March 2024
 - (approx. 1 yr – ongoing)

List of Scottish Government responses to Freedom of Information requests in chronological order

Edinburgh Trams Public Inquiry

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-18-03089/>

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202000088217/>

Public Inquiries since 2007

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202200304156/>

Scottish Hospitals and Edinburgh Trams Public Inquiries

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202200331961/>

Public Inquiries since 2020

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202400397043/>

Scottish Child Abuse Public Inquiry

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202400423401/>

Emma Caldwell Public Inquiry

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202400423444/>

Sheku Bayoh Public Inquiry

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202400424589/>

Scottish Hospitals Public Inquiry

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202400424593/>

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202400426438/>

Scottish Covid inquiry

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202400438720/>