



## Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

**Petition Number:** [PE01488](#)

**Main Petitioner:** Pete Gregson on behalf of Kids not Suits

**Subject:** Whistleblowing in local government

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to support the introduction of staff whistle-blower hotlines to report mismanagement in Scottish local authorities, with reports overseen by councillors from each party.

### Background

The petition states that it—

“is being promoted under the auspices of “Kids not Suits”, a campaign group of parents and citizens seeking better use of public funding by those whom we elect. Its core concerns:

- Money wasted in unnecessary bureaucracy and mismanagement could be better spent on averting school closures and reducing class sizes.
- Funding aimed at tackling children’s deprivation can get siphoned off elsewhere.
- Cash which should be spent on the front line gets lost in the back office- and our kids are the biggest losers.”

The petition states that in around 40% of UK local authorities have a hotline; up to 10% have a "helpline". However, the petitioner is aware of only one Scottish public organisation with whistleblowing measures in place: the NHS, who have a helpline. The key difference between a hotline and a helpline, according to the petition, is that a hotline “passes reports back to a designated person; a helpline offers advice on whether and how employees can raise a whistleblowing concern.”

The petition calls for every Scottish local authority to provide staff with a hotline, as defined in the British Standards Whistleblowing Arrangements Code of Practice. The petition explains in detail why the petitioners see this action as being necessary.

## Scottish Government/Local Government Action

The Scottish Government's "[Local Government in Scotland Act: Best Value Guidance](#)" states that a local authority which "secures best value" will be able to demonstrate, among other things—

"10. That effective procedures are in place to help ensure that members and employees comply with relevant codes of conduct and policies. This includes ensuring that appropriate policies on fraud prevention, investigation and 'whistleblowing' are established."

Although the Government has guidance for its own staff with regard to whistleblowing, this does not apply to local authorities, and it is for each individual council to come to its own arrangements and to ensure that their staff are aware of the policies in place to encourage and protect whistleblowers. The Government has, however, issued a [Code of Conduct for Councillors](#).

In terms of guidance for local authority staff, Audit Scotland has published [Whistleblowing: An employee's guide to what to do if you suspect fraud or corruption](#), which covers local government employees.

[Responding to press coverage of the petition](#), David O'Neill, President of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), set out its view that—

"As good employers with a real pride in our duty of care to the workforce all of Scotland's councils have schemes in place whereby issues of concern can be raised in the appropriate manner. These schemes have the appropriate checks and balances in place that include both senior officers and councillors. There would need to be real evidence of any benefit to the current system before we would be convinced of any need for change."

## Scottish Parliament Action

The Parliament does not appear to have dealt with whistleblowing in local government specifically, although parliamentary committees (and questions to the Scottish Government) have considered whistleblowing in the NHS regularly.

**Allan Campbell**  
**Senior Research Specialist**  
2 September 2013

SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at [spice@scottish.parliament.uk](mailto:spice@scottish.parliament.uk) Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.