

Accountability Scotland

www.accountabilityscotland.org

Accountability Scotland aims to improve democracy and administrative justice by campaigning for transparent public accountability in Scottish governance.

The Democratic Deficit. In Scotland today, elected representatives are often ruled by unaccountable officials (civil servants and others) who are secure in their jobs. (Generally MSPs and Councillors do not have time to research things themselves.) Also public consultations are frequently seen as a nuisance by officials and a waste of time by the public. This Scottish democracy deficit was recognised by Andrew Carnegie in the late 19th Century who stated: “The great error of your country is that things are just upside down. You look to your officials to govern you instead of you governing them”. He was appalled, since his American Constitution and democratic procedures were based on the great Scottish political philosophers, and officials in the USA are accountable public servants. This situation has not changed.

Accountability Scotland is a non-political organization of concerned individuals, best understood in terms of how it came about it. It was constituted initially by a group of people who had suffered injustice from public service bodies, such as local councils, health trusts and the education sector, or else were indignant on behalf of their communities. Resolution had not been possible through their local ‘public servants’ or elected representatives. They had then complained to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) who has the power to investigate such complaints. Their cases were dismissed for reasons that seemed irrational, arbitrary or even ludicrous. (A recent survey of people whose cases were investigated by the SPSO found that 40% were dissatisfied with the SPSO’s case handling.) To take their cases further would have involved an exorbitantly expensive judicial review. A primary aim of what would become Accountability Scotland was therefore the reform of the SPSO. More specifically, it was to campaign for external monitoring of the SPSO as regards the quality, effectiveness and justice of its rulings. Such external monitoring has never yet happened. Being so crucial to our system of administrative justice as regards the public in general, the SPSO remains a primary concern.

More broadly, we wish to improve governance at all levels in public services to achieve effective, open and fair systems of public information provision, consultation, appraisal and decision-making, with full accountability to the people of Scotland,. This would vastly reduce the complaints sent to the SPSO.

To these ends, we need to encourage, inform and make use of our local councillors and MSPs. Given their wide roles, these elected representatives can only keep abreast of all the relevant information with the help of civil servants and other officials. However, the critical point is that our public bureaucracies must be made accountable to the people of Scotland to ensure integrity.

If you wish to support Accountability Scotland please contact the Membership Secretary by e-mailing: treasurer@accountabilityscotland.co.uk