From the Chair, Pete Wishart MP

Victoria Atkins
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability
Home Office

Friday 21 June 2019

Dear Victoria

Appearance before the Scottish Affairs Committee

I am writing to express my disappointment at your refusal to give evidence to my Committee’s inquiry into Problem Drug Use in Scotland.

The Committee has been holding a detailed inquiry which is exploring a number of important issues including: the drivers behind Scotland’s increasing drug-related death rate, the effectiveness of criminal justice interventions, whether the devolution of further powers is needed, and the effectiveness of harm reduction measures. These are important issues which we hoped to discuss with you at our evidence session on 9th July.

Throughout our inquiry we have heard that numerous areas of reserved policy are key factors which affect problem drug use in Scotland. The Misuse of Drugs Act – which is firmly within your ministerial remit – has been raised time and time again. So too has the Home Office’s decision to refuse to allow a safe consumption facility to open in Glasgow. Given the clear link between reserved policy and the problem we are looking at, we feel it is not unreasonable that you should appear before us.

We have collected a substantial body of evidence, the vast majority of which contradicts the UK Government’s policy position, and therefore feel it is particularly important the Government has the opportunity to defend its position. Given the willingness of Home Office ministers to discuss their views on these issues in the media, I am surprised and dismayed at your refusal to participate in this debate, to explain the UK Government’s policy.

The Committee team provided you with two months’ notice of our request for you to appear and has since made every effort to agree a date that would accommodate your availability. Your decision not to offer any dates at all for your appearance is an insult to the many people in Scotland whose lives have been profoundly affected by problematic drug use, and is a serious failure of your duty to be accountable to Parliament.

I therefore trust that you – or the Home Secretary – will make every effort to find a time before the summer recess to give evidence to my Committee.
I will be placing a copy of this correspondence on the Committee's website and will be sending a copy to the Chair of the Liaison Committee

Pete Wishart MP
Chair, Scottish Affairs Committee