

Scottish ministers led to believe child sex abuse not 'systemic failure'

A former MSP has said government ministers were led to believe the sexual abuse of children in care was not a systemic failure and therefore did not justify a public inquiry.

The Scotsman: [By Emma O'Neill](#)
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Lady Smith chairs the sexual abuse inquiry

Peter Peacock, who served as Education Minister from 2003 to 2006 and was an MSP from 1999 to 2011, gave evidence to the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry on Wednesday.

Mr Peacock said ministers on the Scottish Executive - now named the Scottish Government - were led to believe it was "rogue individuals" carrying out the abuse, in a briefing note at a meeting in September 2003.

The latest phase of the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry is exploring reasons why calls between August 2002 to December 2014 for a public inquiry to be held were resisted by ministers.

Ministers were told in a memo from senior civil servant Colin MacLean in May 2003: "The pressure for the [Scottish] Executive to act has not been intense.

"Aside from the [Daly] petition and two stories in The Sunday Mail, there has not been widespread Parliament or public interest.

"Noticeably, cross-party interest hasn't been taken up and The Sunday Mail received less than 20 responses to a request for stories."

It added: "The criminal convictions have been isolated and there is no evidence emerged of widespread abuse.

"It would therefore be feasible to do nothing.

"We do not recommend a full inquiry as allegations are not substantial enough to justify."

Mr Peacock said: "In rereading this [statement], I was asking myself this question of systemic failure and whether that referred to it being systemic in one institution so everybody in that situation was abusing, or was it a systemic failure across the entirety of care?"

"We took it as an individual institution - it was systemic in that institution.

"You could also say there was no systemic failure, but a failure in the supervision of a system which allowed abuse.

"By standards of today, I thought it was more in terms of a systemic failure of supervision."

Prosecutor James Peoples QC asked Mr Peacock: "So what appears to be said [in the 2003 memo] is that the problem of abuse was not a widespread problem?"

The former government minister replied: "It presented itself as individuals acting alone, as problems sporadically arising and not part of a pattern."