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Richard Leonard MSP
Convener
Public Audit Committee
Room T3.60
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH EH99 1SP

25 October 2024

Dear Richard

New Vessels for the Clyde and Hebrides: Arrangements to Deliver Vessels 801 and 802

Thank you for your letter dated 27 September to the Permanent Secretary detailing matters of transparency in relation to the above entitled report. I have addressed the specific points raised by the Committee.

The Committee seeks an update on the progress of this transparency review, including when you expect the findings to be published.

A review of our approach to transparency regarding the Scottish Government's portfolio of commercial assets managed by the Strategic Commercial Assets Division (SCAD) is underway but has yet to report its findings to myself and the Permanent Secretary.

The review is centred on the two public bodies sponsored by SCAD: Ferguson Marine Port Glasgow Ltd. and Glasgow Prestwick Airport Ltd. These assets are unique and have specific considerations regarding commercial confidentiality that may not be applicable more broadly.

The review is examining ways to sustain an initiative-taking publication scheme that strikes the appropriate balance between facilitating our duties on access to information, promoting openness and scrutiny, and protecting commercial interests and contractual rights and privileges.

Regarding timescales for the review, it is not yet possible to be specific beyond noting a progress report is scheduled for discussion at the next meeting of the Strategic Assets Review Group, which I chair and the Permanent Secretary attends, on 8 November.

The Committee also asks whether the review will provide much needed clarity as to the Scottish Government's position on whether it will publish details of all Shareholder Authorisations in the future.

Transparency of shareholder authorisations as far as they relate to the two public bodies mentioned above – Ferguson Marine and Glasgow Prestwick Airport – is within the scope of the SCAD review but I cannot prejudge the review's findings or Ministers' position.

The First Minister made a commitment to consider the questions put to him during the Conveners Group meeting. The Committee asks what discussion you have had with the First Minister on these matters, recognising the Public Audit Committee's firm view that there is scope to improve the transparency of Shareholder Authorisation.

Both the Permanent Secretary and myself, speak regularly with the First Minister about matters of transparency and opportunities to advance Ministers' commitment to open government. The First Minister is aware of the transparency review taking place in DG Economy and looks forward to receiving its findings and recommendations.

Best wishes,

GREGOR IRWIN

Director-General Economy
Scottish Government