

Michael Matheson,
Cabinet Secretary for Justice
T3.05
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

15th February 2017

By Email

Dear Mr Matheson,

It is with regret that I write to inform you that I am resigning from the Scottish Police Authority Board with immediate effect.

My reason is that I believe that there is a move against genuine openness, transparency and accountability. My experience is that where Board Members do provide constructive challenge in public, it is met with a punitive response from the Chair. As a result, I now feel constrained in my ability to carry out my duties and responsibilities as a Board Member.

In particular, the Chair objects to reasonable, temperately expressed public dissent. At the December 2016 public Board meeting, I raised concerns about aspects of the new governance framework. Similar concerns were subsequently publicly expressed by key stakeholders such as the Auditor General and HMICS (and privately by internal audit) – and backed by the First Minister.

The Chair regards the stance I took as a resigning matter and wrote to me to that effect. Additionally he informed me of his view that I should not be allowed to hold committee membership. Thus I can no longer fulfill the duties for which you appointed me.

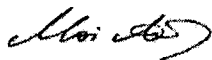
'Collective' responsibility is not the same as 'cabinet' responsibility, in which Cabinet members must publicly support all government decisions made in Cabinet, even if they do not privately agree with them. Scottish Government's guidance on good governance in public boards, 'On Board,' allows for constructive challenge in public, and disagreement to be recorded in the minutes – so long as once a decision is taken, members either accept and support it, or resign. I accepted collective responsibility for the subsequent decision to approve the governance framework in its entirety and have not spoken out against it.

As the only minority ethnic woman on the Board, I sometimes provide an alternative viewpoint in discussions. Now, only majority opinions will be heard in public. Diversity of opinion leads to better decisions. I was one of a minority of Board Members to publicly question how Stop and Search was being used, the validity of consensual Stop and Search, and its impact on children and young people. I went on to be a member of the SPA scrutiny review group and then the independent advisory group on Stop and Search, which culminated recently in the new Code of Practice. I could have voiced my concerns about this privately, and kept quiet at the public Board. However, good governance requires visibility of the process that leads to eventual decisions – including the airing of minority views.

Private, confidential discussion has its place, but public debate – including the voicing of contrary viewpoints – is also essential. If a united front is always presented, there will be a perception that public “decisions” are a rubber-stamping of private discussions. Trust and confidence is eroded if stakeholders see only sterile, inauthentic, stage-managed meetings. Such an approach runs counter to Scottish Government’s commitment to Open Government, which is underpinned by openness and transparent governance leading to greater citizen trust and understanding.

After almost two decades’ experience on public boards, including as Vice President of one of the world’s largest regulatory bodies, I have made a positive contribution to public life across the UK, including in my role on the SPA Board over the last four-plus years. I have been a committed and conscientious Board member at SPA and I hope that I will be able to continue making a difference, although I am saddened that policing is an area in which I will no longer play a part.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Moi Ali', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ms Moi Ali