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# **Public Petitions Committee Comataidh nan Athchuingean Poblach**

## **Annual Report**



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# Public Petitions Committee

The remit of the Public Petitions Committee is to consider and report on - whether a public petition is admissible; and what action is to be taken upon the petition.



<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/petitions-committee.aspx>



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# Committee Membership



**Convener**  
**Johann Lamont**  
Scottish Labour



**Deputy Convener**  
**Angus MacDonald**  
Scottish National Party



**Maurice Corry**  
Scottish Conservative  
and Unionist Party



**Rona Mackay**  
Scottish National Party



**Brian Whittle**  
Scottish Conservative  
and Unionist Party

# Introduction

1. This report covers the work of the Public Petitions Committee during the Parliamentary reporting year 12 May 2016 to 11 May 2017.

# Meetings

2. The Committee has met formally on 18 occasions during the reporting year. None of these meetings were held wholly in private. On 9 occasions the Committee met partly in private.
3. The Committee also agreed to meet informally with three petitioners in order to understand the issues raised in petitions to aid its consideration to their petitions.

# Petitions

4. The principal role of the Committee is to consider all admissible petitions and what action should be taken on them.
5. Although public petitions to the Scottish Parliament only need to be signed by one person to be considered by the Committee, a number of petitioners take the opportunity to collect signatures and comments on their petition. All admissible petitions go on to be considered by the Committee, regardless of whether they have collected signatures, or of the number of signatures they receive. However, the Committee can see from the number of signatures received how much support there is for a particular petition and comments may be used to suggest stakeholders from whom the Committee may wish to seek written or oral evidence. During the reporting year, a total of 26,005 signatures and 2,845 comments have been collected on the 34 petitions for which this option was taken.
6. Once a petition is lodged (this happens after signatures have been collected), it will be considered by the Committee. The Committee may invite the petitioner to provide oral evidence at this point. Once the Committee has discussed the issues raised in a petition it will decide what action it wishes to take. Almost invariably, this will involve asking the Scottish Government to respond. However, the Committee also seeks views from a range of relevant stakeholders to make sure that they can build up as full a picture as possible of the issues raised by the petition. Once responses are received, the petitioner will usually be invited to comment before the Committee considers the petition again. The petitioner's voice is key to the Committee's work on each petition.



## Consideration of petitions

7. In this year, the Committee has considered a total of 70 petitions. These include 32 petitions carried over from Session 4 and 38 petitions lodged in the current Session.
8. Of the 42 petitions lodged in the current session, 4 are currently awaiting initial consideration by the Committee. A further 7 petitions are currently collecting signatures.
9. All petitions are assigned a subject category so that the Committee, and the public, can see the areas that come up most often. The petitions lodged this Session fall into the following categories—
  - Health
  - Environment
  - Communities
  - Transport
  - Justice.

## Oral evidence

10. In this year, the Committee has taken evidence from over 70 witnesses.
11. As explained above, the Committee sometimes invites petitioners to provide oral evidence on their petition. In this year, the Committee agreed to take oral evidence from 20 petitioners on the first occasion their petition was considered by the Committee. Often the evidence that petitioners provide is based on some incredibly challenging personal experiences. The Committee is grateful for the courage individuals show in bringing their experiences into the Parliament's work.
12. In common with other committees, the Committee also takes oral evidence from other stakeholders so that it can explore the reasons for particular policy decisions or better understand the issues raised in a petition. For example, this year the Committee has taken evidence from—
  - the Chief Executive of NHS Scotland in relation to PE1605 on whistleblowing in the NHS - a safer way to report mismanagement and bullying;
  - the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, representatives of PFA Scotland, SFA and SPFL on PE1319 on improving youth football in Scotland;
  - the British Association for Shooting and Conservation, the Scottish Moorland Group and RSPB Scotland on PE1615 on state regulated licensing system for gamebird hunting in Scotland.
13. The Committee also considers it important that the petitions process plays its part in holding the Scottish Government to account and has taken evidence from Scottish

Ministers on seven petitions. Details of these evidence sessions are set out in table 1 of the annexe to this report.

14. As with all committees, non-Committee MSPs are able to attend Public Petitions Committee meetings. A number of petitioners have received support from MSPs. In the reporting year, 15 MSPs have attended in support of 12 petitions, either through their role as a constituency or regional member, or because they have a particular interest in the subject matter of a petition. These are set out in table 2 of the annexe to this report.

## Written evidence

15. The bulk of the evidence that the Committee gathers is written evidence and this is important. As well as specifically inviting evidence from stakeholders, the Committee also welcomes written submissions at any time from anyone who is interested in a petition. This year the Committee has received a total of 406 written submissions.

## Referred petitions

16. Petitions cover a diverse range of issues, with some being especially relevant to a specific piece of work that a subject committee may be taking forward. In such instances, it can be more appropriate (and potentially deliver positive outcomes within a wider piece of work) for the Committee to refer a petition to another committee.
17. During the reporting year, the Committee has referred nine petitions to other committees for consideration. Specific examples include—
  - PE1605 on whistleblowing in the NHS – a safer way to report mismanagement and bullying, which was referred to the Health and Sport Committee for consideration as part of its inquiry into Corporate Governance within the NHS in Scotland
  - PE1615 on a state regulated licensing system for gamebird hunting in Scotland, referred to the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee for consideration as part of its scrutiny of the annual report on wildlife crime.
  - PE1628 on consultation on service delivery for the elderly or vulnerable, referred to the Health and Sport Committee for consideration as part of its inquiry into integration authorities' consultation with stakeholders.
18. Details of all the petitions that have been referred to subject committees this year are set out in table 3 of the annexe to this report.

## Closed petitions

19. Fourteen petitions have been closed during the reporting year: one from Session 3; five from Session 4, and eight from this session. These are set out in table 4 of the annexe to this report.

### The parliamentary year in numbers



**70** Petitions  
considered



Signatures  
received



Written evidence  
received



**70**  
Number of people  
who gave evidence

## Petition outcomes

20. The Committee gives equal consideration to all petitions, and positive outcomes can be achieved irrespective of whether or not they have collected a large volume of signatures or supporting comments. For example, PE1581 on Save Scotland's School Libraries, which recently secured a commitment from the Deputy First Minister to establish a national strategy for school libraries. PE1600 on speed awareness course (which was not opened to collect signatures) has resulted in the Lord Advocate asking Police Scotland to carry out a scoping exercise to establish the merits of such courses. Other notable outcomes arising from petitions include—
- School bus safety (PE1223) – Gillian Martin MSP's Seat Belts on School Transport (Scotland) Bill has been introduced and considered at Stage 1.
  - Inquests for all deaths by suicide in Scotland (PE1604) – the Scottish Government has agreed to extend the remit of section 37 of the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 2015 to include the deaths of patients who were receiving care in the community under compulsory treatment orders, as called for by the petition.
  - Moratorium on shared space schemes (PE1595) – the Scottish Government agreed to convene a seminar to bring together a range of interested stakeholders to discuss the issue of shared space road schemes and the impact these schemes can have on different users.

# Engagement

21. The Committee continues to use Twitter to promote its work and to encourage engagement with the Parliament. The Committee has also agreed to conduct a fact-finding visit to Dumfries and Galloway later in the year in relation to PE1619 on access to continuous glucose monitoring and PE1610 on upgrade the A75. This will enable the Committee to hear directly from individuals and communities affected by these issues and will also promote the opportunity for members of the public to petition the Parliament.

## Equal opportunities

22. The Committee continues to mainstream equality consideration into its work, particularly about protected characteristics, and to consider ways in which the petitions process can be made more accessible to the widest range of people. In this regard, it has developed new guidance on how to make a written submission on a petition to encourage people to share their views with the Committee.
23. The Committee is taking forward a proposal made in the Session 4 Public Petitions Committee's legacy paper to capture more demographic information about petitioners by way of a petitioner survey. This will enable the Committee to better understand who petitions the Parliament and to take steps to address any gaps that might be identified, particularly with a view to protected characteristics.

# Annex A

**Table 1: Oral evidence from Scottish Ministers**

Petition number	Petition title	Evidence taken from
PE1480	Alzheimer's and dementia awareness	Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport
PE1533	Abolition of non-residential social care charges for older and disabled people	Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport
PE1548	National Guidance on Restraint and Seclusion in Schools	Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
PE1577	Adult Cerebral Palsy Services	Minster for Public Health and Sport
PE1581	Save Scotland's School Libraries	Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
PE1595	Moratorium on shared space schemes	Minster for Transport and the Islands
PE1603	Ensuring greater scrutiny, guidance and consultation on armed forces visits to schools in Scotland	Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

**Table 2: Petitions supported by non-Committee MSPs**

Petition number	Petition title	Member(s)
PE1223	School bus safety	Stewart Stevenson
PE1319	Improving youth football in Scotland	James Dornan; Richard Leonard
PE1408	Updating of Pernicious Anaemia-Vitamin B12 Deficiency understanding and treatment	Elaine Smith
PE1463	Effective thyroid and adrenal testing, diagnosis and treatment	Elaine Smith
PE1568	Funding access and promotion of the NHS Centre for Integrative Care	Elaine Smith
PE1577	Adult Cerebral Palsy Service	Murdo Fraser
PE1591	Major redesign of healthcare services in Skye, Lochalsh and South West Ross	Kate Forbes; Rhoda Grant
PE1610	Upgrade the A75	Finlay Carson
PE1615	State regulated licensing system for gamebird hunting in Scotland	Alison Johnstone; Mark Ruskell
PE1628	Consultation on service delivery for the elderly or vulnerable	Michael Russell
PE1637	Ship-to-ship oil transfers and trust port accountability	John Finnie; Kate Forbes
PE1639	Enterprise Agency Boards	Rhoda Grant; Liam McArthur; Edward Mountain; Douglas Ross

**Table 3: Referred petitions**

Petition number	Petition title	Petition referred to
PE1477	Gender neutral Human Papillomavirus vaccination	Health and Sport Committee
PE1568	Funding, access and promotion of the NHS Centre for Integrative Care	Health and Sport Committee
PE1571	Food Bank Funding	Social Security Committee
PE1598	Protecting wild salmonids from sea lice from Scottish salmon farms	Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee
PE1601	European Beavers in Scotland	Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee
PE1605	Whistleblowing in the NHS - a safer way to report mismanagement and bullying	Health and Sport Committee
PE1611	Mental Health Services in Scotland	Health and Sport Committee
PE1615	State regulated system for gamebird hunting in Scotland	Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee
PE1628	Consultation on service delivery for the elderly or vulnerable	Health and Sport Committee

**Table 4: Closed petitions**

Petition number	Petition title
PE1223	School bus safety
PE1563	Sewage sludge spreading
PE1586	Statutory control measures for Invasive Non-Native Species
PE1606	Forcing Scottish councils to collaborate regionally on schools and roads
PE1608	Wholly Owned National Private Pharmaceuticals
PE1609	NHS Scotland Treatments
PE1613	Taking account of sound sensitivity in regulating antisocial behaviour and environmental health
PE1614	Adult Consensual Incest (ACI)
PE1617	Proposed Health Study - Vaccinated vs Non-Vaccinated
PE1618	Combatting Motorcycle Theft
PE1620	Museum of Fire
PE1622	Make failure to recycle a criminal offence
PE1624	Definition of adultery
PE1641	Future Independence Referendum



