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Public Petitions Committee
Comataidh nan Athchuingean Poblach

**Public Petitions Committee Annual
Report 2020-21**



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Public Petitions Committee

Remit: To consider public petitions addressed to the Parliament in accordance with these Rules (and any additional matter added under Rule 6.1.5A) and, in particular, to—

- (a) decide in a case of dispute whether a petition is admissible;
- (b) decide what action should be taken upon an admissible public petition; and
- (c) keep under review the operation of the petitions system.



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Committee Membership



Convener
Johann Lamont
Scottish Labour



Deputy Convener
Gail Ross
Scottish National Party



Maurice Corry
Scottish Conservative
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Tom Mason
Scottish Conservative
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David Torrance
Scottish National Party

Introduction

1. This annual report covers the period of 12 May 2020 to 24 March 2021, after which the Scottish Parliament will go into the campaign recess period from 25 March to 4 May 2021. The Scottish Parliament agreed on 3 March 2021 to vary Standing Orders so that committees could not meet during the pre-election campaign period (with the exception of the COVID-19 Committee, which may be convened in an emergency). This decision was taken in response to the Scottish General Election (Coronavirus) Act 2021 which provides that the Scottish Parliament will not be dissolved until 5 May 2021 to permit the Parliament to meet to legislate for a new polling date if required.
2. In this short Parliamentary year, the Committee has continued its principal function to consider public petitions addressed to the Scottish Parliament, while adapting to the challenges presented by Covid-19.
3. This includes meeting virtually for the whole of the Parliamentary year to undertake a wide range of actions in response to the issues raised by petitions it has considered.
4. On 28 May 2020, the Committee also agreed its Vision Statement. The statement set out what issues Members agreed to focus their efforts on during the Parliamentary year as follows—
 - Considering matters which otherwise may not receive attention. This includes issues which may affect a small number of people but have a significant impact on the quality of their lives.
 - That are not being considered elsewhere in the Scottish Parliament.
 - Where the Committee believes its involvement can make the most difference.
5. There were no changes to the Committee's membership during 2020-21.

The work of the Public Petitions Committee



119* Petitions considered
*which includes **42** new petitions



24
Committee meetings



519
Written evidence received

Source: Scottish Parliament

6. Over the course of the Parliamentary year, the Public Petitions Committee met virtually on 24 occasions and considered a total of 119 petitions on a wide range of issues. 42 new petitions were published and considered by the Committee during the Parliamentary year.
7. A further 15 petitions were published during the Parliamentary year and will be scheduled for consideration by the new Public Petitions Committee, once it has been established, at the start of the new Parliamentary session.
8. The Public Petitions Committee receives petitions from individuals and also on behalf of groups or organisations. This parliamentary year, 41 petitions have been published that were submitted by individual petitioners and 16 that were submitted by groups or organisations consisting of two or more petitioners.
9. The majority of Public Petitions Committee work is considered in public. During the Parliamentary year, four meetings were held entirely in private to discuss draft reports and the Committee's vision statement (see Annex) for the period 2020-21. On six occasions, the Committee held part of its meeting in private to consider

items of business such as reviews of the public petitions system and the Committee's work programme.

10. In response to the challenges presented by Covid-19, the Committee agreed in June 2020 to seek advanced views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions. This allowed the Committee to make informed decisions on new petitions at their first consideration. This approach has worked well, and the Committee is grateful to the Scottish Government for engaging positively with these requests for information.
11. The majority of the information gathered by the Committee is through written submissions from—
 - the Scottish Government
 - petitioners
 - members of the public
 - relevant organisations with an interest in the petition.
12. The Committee received 519 written submissions during the Parliamentary year.
13. The Committee also takes oral evidence on petitions. During the Parliamentary year, all evidence sessions were conducted virtually. This approach enabled the Committee to hear from a wide range of people from Scotland and beyond. For example, the Committee took evidence from Dr Dionysios Veronikis, Director Female Pelvic Medicine & Reconstructive Surgery, Center for Vaginal Surgery and Urogynecology, St Louis, Missouri in relation to PE1517: Polypropylene Mesh Medical Devices.
14. The Committee also conducted a round table evidence session on PE1707: Public Access Defibrillators with representatives from the Scottish Ambulance Service, the British Heart Foundation Scotland and the University of Edinburgh.

PE1707: Public Access Defibrillators - virtual round table evidence session



Source: Scottish Parliament

15. The Committee also took evidence virtually from three petitioners and the following Scottish Government ministers—

Minister	Petition(s)
Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PE1637: Ship-to-ship oil transfers and trust port accountability PE1722: Parking charges at island lifeline ferry ports
Minister for Children and Young People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PE1683: Support for families with multiple births
Minister for Public Health and Sport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PE1662: Improve Treatment for Patients with Lyme Disease and Associated Tick-borne Diseases
Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PE1804: Halt Highlands & Islands Airports Ltd's Air Traffic Management Strategy

16. A number of non-Committee MSPs attended Public Petitions Committee meetings this year to support various petitions on the Committee's work programme. A total of 14 non-Committee MSPs participated in the consideration of 23 petitions, with some members making contributions on multiple petitions they had an interest in.
17. In its consideration of petitions, the Committee can decide to send ("refer") the petition to another committee to look at it further, particularly if it links to work currently under consideration by that committee. During the Parliamentary year, the Committee referred seven petitions to another committee. Examples include—

- **PE1762: End the killing of wildlife on grouse moors and elsewhere in Scotland .**

This petition was referred to the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee in relation to its ongoing work on wildlife crime, animal welfare and land management.

- **PE1817: End Conversion Therapy.**

The Committee referred this petition to the Equalities and Human Rights Committee, recognising that measures to ban conversion therapy in Scotland

would be most effectively considered as part of the Committee's work programme.

Report on PE1319: Improving Youth Football in Scotland

18. PE1319: Improving Youth Football in Scotland was first submitted to the Scottish Parliament in 2010, with the issues raised being pursued by the Session 5 Committee and its predecessors in Sessions 3 and 4.
19. The Committee published its [report](#) on the petition on 22 June 2020.
20. Taking into account the significant amount of evidence gathered during the lifetime of the petition, the Committee concluded that more needs to be done to protect young people involved in youth football. The Committee recommended that this should include—
 - extending the one-year registration period that applies to players in the 10-14 year age group to 15 year-old players on the basis that players under the age of 16 should not be required to sign up to a system that ties them in to a multi-year registration; and
 - changing the system for reimbursement of training costs so that compensation is only required to be paid when a player signs their first professional contract.
21. The Committee also held a Chamber [debate](#) on the conclusions and recommendations of the report on 19 November 2020.

Deputy Convener, Gail Ross MSP, opening the debate on behalf of the Committee via video link



Source: Scottish Parliament

22. On 29 January 2021, the Committee agreed to close the petition, recognising the significant amount of work that has been undertaken on the petition as well as the fact that the majority of actions in the petition have been considered and concluded in earlier sessions of the Parliament.
23. Further reasons for closure included the Scottish Government's commitment to liaise directly with the petitioners as well as the Scottish FA and the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland on the outstanding issues and the Scottish FA has confirmed that a working party has been established to review the registration rules in relation to 15, 16 and 17-year olds.
24. To ensure Parliament is kept informed of this work, the Committee has asked that the Minister for Public Health and Sport and the Scottish FA update the committee responsible for sport on the work it is progressing by the end of 2021.

Inquiry into mental health support for young people in Scotland

25. Following a series of external engagement events held in 2019-20 to inform its inquiry into mental health support for young people in Scotland, the Committee published its final [report](#) on 24 July 2020.
26. In its report, the Committee made various recommendations designed to improve young peoples' access to mental health support. These included recommendations to—
 - improve the availability and accessibility of information about local mental health services so that young people, and those supporting them, can find such information, and provision easily;
 - raise awareness of young people of the possible impact of the COVID-19 public health emergency on their mental health and signpost them to sources of support;
 - raise awareness of how employers in Scotland can support young people in the workforce with their mental health; and
 - to ensure professionals who regularly engage with young people are equipped to identify when help may be required, and to provide guidance.
27. The Committee also held a Chamber [debate](#) on the conclusions and recommendations of the report on 1 December 2020.

Convener, Johann Lamont MSP, speaking during the debate on the Public Petitions Committee report on its inquiry into mental health support for young people in Scotland



Source: Scottish Parliament

What petitions have achieved

28. The Committee values the role that petitions play in raising awareness of issues that may not otherwise reach the attention of the Scottish Parliament.
29. As well as raising awareness of an issue, petitions can also help deliver positive change to the way things work in Scotland. Some examples of petitions that could be considered to have achieved this during the Parliamentary year include—

- **PE1731 on Permit audio recording of local government public meetings**

On 17 September 2020, the Committee agreed to close the petition as the Scottish Government has agreed to make the necessary amendments to the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, as requested in the petition.

- **PE1806: Improving survival from pancreatic cancer**

On 24 September 2020, the Committee agreed to close the petition on the basis that the Scottish Government is investing in strategic pancreatic cancer research, has set out actions in its Cancer Strategy to improve outcomes of pancreatic cancer patients, has updated referral guidelines and is engaging directly with the petitioner through their role in the Less Survivable Cancers Taskforce.

- **PE1819: NHS bursary for Scottish paramedic students**

On 16 December 2020, the Committee agreed to close the petition as the Scottish Government has committed to consider the issue of financial support for BSc Paramedic Science students as part of its review of the education provided to Allied Health Professionals; and that the Scottish Government is engaging directly with the petitioner.

Equalities

30. The Committee continues to mainstream equality consideration into its work to ensure that the petition process is made accessible to the widest range of people.
31. The Committee published its vision statement (see Annexe) in May 2020, which includes the overriding aim "to make the petitions process open and accessible to all." To achieve this, the Committee seeks to:
 - Remove any barriers that may prevent people creating a petition.
 - Regularly review who is, and who is not, petitioning the Scottish Parliament and explore the potential reasons why.
32. The Committee receives petitions on a diverse range of issues concerning equality within society and ensures they are given a platform to be considered. Examples from the past year include-
 - PE1837: Provide clear direction and investment for autism support
 - PE1813: Reform the national curriculum to include all African Scottish history
 - PE1796: Equality, Inclusion and the Gaelic language
33. The Committee also strives to ensure there is diversity in the witnesses called to give oral evidence. In total, the Committee took evidence from 24 witnesses during the Parliamentary year . There were four female witnesses 17% and 20 male witnesses 83%.

Operation of the petitions system

34. The Public Petitions Committee has a remit to "keep under review the operation of the petitions system".
35. A new petitions system is currently in development, which seeks to improve the accessibility and efficiency of the petitions process. In doing so it will ensure that website content is user centred, easily located, consistent and accessible.

Feedback from petitioners

36. The Committee regularly seeks feedback from petitioners as part of its remit to keep

the petitions system under review.

37. Examples of positive feedback received during the Parliamentary year include—

"I think the way the petitions are handled and progressed by the process is impressive. I had not expected my petition to get far because its implementation would cost money, and has political implications, but the Committee kept the ball rolling and brought it to the attention of different bodies for comment. I was happy to see that the petitions process is respected, and taken seriously."

"It gave me a public platform to say what the problem was safely, without worrying about negative comments and any harassment. I was very well supported throughout the process with mentors who helped me."

"We were pleased with the discussion around the petition within the meeting and felt the written response gave a helpful baseline so that we can judge progress over the next year more clearly."

38. Petitioners have also suggested areas where the current petitions system could be improved. For example,

"It may be worth considering having people available to help out the petitions committee with specialist knowledge on a given subject that the committee may not have."

"The Committee should take more evidence from individuals/organisations with first hand knowledge of the matter under discussion."

39. The Committee will continue to use the feedback it receives to inform its regular review of the petitions system.

Annexe: Vision Statement

Vision Statement

The Scottish Parliament's public petitions process provides an opportunity for members of the public to raise awareness of an issue or try to change something about the way things work in Scotland.

The overriding aim of the Public Petitions Committee is to make the petitions process open and accessible to all.

The Committee will focus its efforts on issues:

- Considering matters which otherwise may not receive attention. This includes issues which may affect a small number of people but have a significant impact on the quality of their lives.
- That are not being considered elsewhere in the Scottish Parliament.
- Where the Committee believes its involvement can make the most difference.

The Committee will:

- Consider every petition which meets the Committee's guidelines, regardless of whether a petitioner has chosen to collect signatures.
- Seek feedback from petitioners about their experiences of petitioning the Scottish Parliament.
- Continue to seek ways to improve the way in which the public petitions system works.

In doing so, the Committee will seek to:

- Remove any barriers that may prevent people creating a petition.
- Regularly review who is, and who is not, petitioning the Scottish Parliament and explore the potential reasons why.

This vision statement covers the period 2020-21.

