



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE Newsletter

April 2015

Issue 5

Parliament Day

The Public Petitions Committee was involved in a very successful Parliament Day in Dumfries in February 2015.

The Committee was keen to promote the Public Petitions system in the local area prior to Parliament Day. In late 2014, it ran two workshops on Public Petitions, one in Stranraer and another in Dumfries.

John Wilson MSP undertook further outreach work in

Dumfries, including supporting the Parliament's Community Conference.

The Committee held a formal meeting at Easterbrook Hall in Dumfries on Monday 23 February (below).

The Committee took evidence on three petitions from residents in Dumfries and Galloway.

The meeting was very well attended and the work of the Committee was widely covered in the local media.



Since the last newsletter in November 2014, there have been a number of changes to the membership of the Public Petitions Committee. John Pentland MSP (above) was selected as Convener on 13 January 2015.

The Committee continues to consider petitions covering a wide range of issues. This newsletter will give a flavour of some of the Committee's work.





The petition seeking a ban on the use of Polypropylene Mesh Medical Devices ([PE1517](#)) is one of the highest profile petitions the Committee is currently considering. In February 2015, and watched by a full gallery (below), the Committee robustly questioned representatives from the Medicines & Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency and also heard evidence via videoconference from a litigator from the USA with experience of claims of patients who have experienced problems with mesh devices. The

Committee remains committed to keeping prioritising his issue and will be taking further evidence before the summer recess.

[PE1523](#) is by Jess Smith and calls for the preservation of the "Tinkers' Heart" in Argyll, a site of importance to Scotland's travelling community. The Committee took evidence from Fiona Hyslop, Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Europe and External Affairs and Historic Scotland (left) at its meeting on 17 February 2015. As a result of the work of the Committee, Historic Scotland agreed to revisit its decision not to list the site as a historic monument.

[PE1524](#) was a petition by James Macfarlane calling for free wi-fi in public buildings. The Committee raised the issue with the Scottish Government over the summer of 2014 and received a positive response. The Scottish Government's programme for government 2014-15 included a commitment to increasing wi-fi provision in public buildings and identified £1.5m funding to support the programme. The

Committee therefore completed its work on the petition in February 2015.

[PE1554](#) was brought forward by Leonard Cheshire Disability on provision of disabled-friendly housing. The Committee heard powerful evidence from Jacq Kelly of Leonard Cheshire Disability and Stephan Thomson, a Leonard Cheshire Disability service user, at its meeting on 31 March 2015. The Committee was impressed by the arguments presented for a requirement for more homes to be designed with the needs of wheelchair users in mind. The Committee sought views from a number of stakeholders and plans to consider the petition again before the summer recess.

[PE1556](#) is by John Mayhew on behalf of Scottish Campaign for National Parks and the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland. The petition calls for the Scottish Government to prepare and implement a strategy to designate more National Parks in Scotland, including at least one Coastal and Marine National Park. This petition will be considered for the first time at the Committee's meeting on 28 April 2015. The Committee will hear from the petitioners.

[PE1565](#) is by James Dougall and calls for whole life sentences to be available to the judiciary under certain circumstances. The petition has not yet been lodged and is collecting signatures.



FAQs

The Public Petitions Committee's (PPC) new Convener, John Pentland MSP, answers your questions on Petitions.

Q: What does the PPC do?

John: The PPC probably has the most straightforward remit – to consider public petitions. Petitions are an ideal opportunity for anyone, particularly members of the public, to get a national policy issue on the agenda of a Parliamentary Committee. The PPC will consider and ask for views on what petitions are asking for and, in doing so, we hold the Scottish Government and others to account. We can't guarantee that this will lead to a change in policy but we can guarantee that petitioners' proposals will be seriously considered.

Q: Who can petition?

John: With the exception of sitting MSPs, anyone.

Q: How many signatures does a petition need?

John: Just one, but often petitioners want to show wider support for their petition by collecting more signatures.

Q: What action should be taken before petitioning the Scottish Parliament?

John: We ask that every petitioner attempts to resolve or progress

their suggestion on their own or through their elected representatives before raising a petition.

Q: What sorts of issues does the Committee consider?

John: Matters of national policy or practice. Petitions can't ask the Parliament to do anything it has no power to do and the PPC won't generally consider operational decisions of independent bodies such as local authorities or health boards. However, we understand that experience of these bodies can generate petitioners' ideas for improving national policy or guidance. The clerks are always happy to help and advise on the criteria for public petitions.

Q: What are the options, other than a public petition, for a local issue to be raised in the Parliament?

John: There are several other ways to raise local issues in the Parliament, for example lodging a motion or a PQ.

Q: How do people petition?

John: It's easy – register an account on our online system and draft the proposal there. The clerks will provide feedback and, once completed, it will be considered by the Committee at a formal meeting.



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