Public Petitions Committee – a template for public petitions

Should you wish to submit a public petition for consideration by the Public Petitions Committee please complete the template below. Please refer to the Guidance on submission of public petitions for advice on issues of admissibility before completing the template. You may also seek advice from the Clerk to the Committee whose contact details can be found at the end of this form.

Details of principal petitioner:
Please enter the name of person and organisation raising the petition, including a contact address where correspondence should be sent to, email address and phone number if available.

Caroline Paterson, on behalf of "Stirling Before Pylons."

Text of petition:
The petition should clearly state what action the petitioner wishes the Parliament to take in no more than 5 lines of text, e.g.

The petitioner requests that the Scottish Parliament considers and debates the implications of the proposed Agenda for Change legislation for Speech and Language Therapy Services and service users within the NHS.

The petitioner requests that the Scottish Parliament......

Petition by Caroline Paterson, on behalf of "Stirling Before Pylons", calling for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to acknowledge the potential health hazards associated with long-term exposure to high voltage transmission lines and to introduce a matter of urgency, effective planning regulations to protect public health.

Additional Information:
Any additional information in relation to your petition, including reasons why the action requested is necessary, should not be included here. However, it may be appended to the petition and will be made available to the Public Petitions Committee prior to its consideration of your petition.
Please note that you should limit the amount of any additional information which you may wish to provide in support of your petition to no more than 4 sides of A4.
Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition:

Before submitting a petition to the Parliament, petitioners are expected to have made an attempt to resolve their issues of concern by, for example, making representations to the Scottish Executive or seeking the assistance of locally elected representatives, such as councillors, MSPs and MPs. Please enter details of those approached below and append copies of relevant correspondence, which will be made available to the Public Petitions Committee prior to its consideration of your petition.

Filed or correspondence submitted Dec. 2004.

Request to speak:

All petitioners are given the opportunity to present their petition before the Public Petitions Committee. The Convener will then make a decision based on a number of factors including the content of the petition and the written information provided by the petitioner as to whether a brief statement from the petitioner would be useful in facilitating the Committee's consideration of a petition.

Please indicate below whether you wish to request to make a brief statement before the Committee when it comes to consider your petition.

Yes / No *

*Delete as appropriate

Signature of principal petitioner:

When satisfied that your petition meets all the criteria outlined in the Guidance on submission of public petitions, the principal petitioner should sign and date the form in the box below. Other signatures gathered should be appended to this form.

Signature

Date 24th January 2005 (original submission Dec. 2004)

Please note that any additional information, copies of relevant correspondence and additional signatures should be appended to this form and submitted to:

The Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee,
The Scottish Parliament,
Edinburgh
EH9 1SP
Tel: 0131 348 5186 Fax: 0131 348 5088
e-mail: petitions@scottish.parliament.uk
Dear Michael

PE 812 : ELECTROMAGNETIC FREQUENCY FROM HIGH VOLTAGE TRANSMISSION LINES

Thank you for your letter of 22nd September requesting further input in relation to Petition 812. You asked specifically for comment on three issues (a) an update on the work of the stakeholders advisory group on extremely low frequency electromagnetic radiation (SAGE), (b) the 'Draper Report' and (c) the letter to the Committee from Prof D Henshaw.

Dealing firstly with issue (a), the stakeholders advisory group on extremely low frequency electromagnetic radiation (SAGE) met first in March 2004. Its agreed aim is: “To bring together the range of stakeholders to identify and explore the implications for a precautionary approach to ELF EMF (electric and magnetic fields) and make practical recommendations for precautionary measures”. Approximately 40 stakeholders are represented on the group.

Two SAGE working groups have been established. These are

i) The ‘Electrical Equipment and Installations Working Group’ which is looking at all Magnetic and Electric Fields which originate from wiring and equipment within the home, and which will go on to see if any lessons learned can also be applied to schools, hospitals, care homes etc. Its intended outputs will include; advice to householders, guidance to electricians, recommendations for British Standards and Wiring Regulations, ways to influence appliance manufacturers and identification of opportunities for innovation and research.
ii) The ‘Power Lines and Property Working Group’ which is considering issues related to new and existing homes near to new and existing power lines. This group’s main output will be to propose draft planning guidance covering all of these situations.

Both of these groups have met regularly since early in 2005. The subject matter is complex and their deliberations are therefore expected to extend into 2006. These working groups will then make recommendations for consideration by the main SAGE group, which will then make policy recommendations to Government. It is proposed that two new working groups will be established early in 2006, dealing respectively with (i) issues related to elements of the power distribution system operating below 11 kilovolts and (b) railways and other issues. These new groups will adopt similar reporting provisions.

I will turn now to the ‘Draper Report’, ‘Childhood cancer in relation to distance from high-voltage power lines in England and Wales: a case-control study’ which was published in the British Medical Journal in June 2005. This large epidemiological study (which did not extend to Scotland) found that compared with those who lived more than 600 metres from high-voltage power at birth, children who lived within 200 metres had a relative risk of leukaemia that was 70% higher and those born between 200 and 600 metres had a relative risk that was 23% higher. No excess risk in relation to proximity to high-voltage power lines was found for other childhood cancers. About 4% of children in England and Wales live within 600 m of high voltage lines at birth. The authors comment that ‘There is no accepted biological mechanism to explain the epidemiological results; indeed, the relation may be due to chance or confounding’. They also note that ‘If the association is causal, about 1% of childhood leukaemia in England and Wales would be attributable to these lines, though this estimate has considerable statistical uncertainty.’

While the Draper study clearly contributes to concerns in this area, it is important to reiterate that the authors of the study do not regard these findings as establishing a definite causal association between childhood leukaemia and exposures to electromagnetic fields from power lines. Therefore, the UK Health Departments consider the ‘SAGE’ process described above to be an appropriate and proportional approach to the evaluation of this and other related evidence in the development of future policies on public exposures to ELF radiation.

In relation to issue (c), the letter to the Petitions Committee from Prof D. Henshaw, it must be accepted that possible public health risks that cannot readily be clarified because of the related scientific uncertainty will inevitably attract a spectrum of views on aspects such as mechanisms of disease and the weight that should be placed on the various inputs. For matters related to radiation, the principal source of independent expert advice in the UK is the Radiation Protection Division (RPD) of the Health Protection Agency (formerly the National Radiological Protection Board). Included in the RPD’s approach to developing their advice is the establishment of expert committees, among which is the Advisory Group on Non-ionising Radiation (AGNIR). In formulating its advice and recommendations to the RPD, AGNIR demonstrably considers the totality of the available scientific evidence, including that cited in Prof Henshaw’s letter in support of his own views on this issue. For example, in relation to Prof Henshaw’s argument on the importance of corona ion emission, AGNIR has concluded that ‘it seems unlikely that corona ions would have more than a small effect on the long-term health risks associated with particulate air pollutants, even in the individuals who are most affected. In public health terms, the proportionate impact will be even lower because only a small fraction of the general population live or work close to sources of corona ions’.
In his penultimate paragraph, Prof Henshaws urges the Scottish Parliament "to consider immediate strict precaution against the siting of powerlines near houses or the converse". Whereas responsible scientific input is always welcome, given that Prof Henshaw is a member of both the main SAGE group and its Power Lines and Property Working Group, such an entreaty might well be considered pre-emptive of the collaborative approach inherent to the SAGE process.

The SEHD, along with the other relevant UK Departments, remains committed to the SAGE consultation process and, pending the recommendations that emerge from this process, will continue to base its policies on the advice provided by the Radiation Protection Division of the Health Protection Agency.

I hope that the Committee finds this information helpful.

Yours Sincerely

LEWIS MACDONALD
PE865 Petition by Edward Fowler calling for the Scottish Parliament to investigate the sequestration recall process and consider amending the law to allow the right of appeal for those made bankrupt by mistake and that all such appeals should be heard by a Sheriff.
Public Petitions Committee – a template for public petitions

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Details of principal petitioner:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Please enter the name of person and organisation raising the petition, including a contact address where correspondence should be sent to, email address and phone number if available</td>
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<td>Edward M Fowler</td>
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<th>Text of petition:</th>
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<td>The petition should clearly state what action the petitioner wishes the Parliament to take in no more than 5 lines of text, e.g.</td>
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<td>The petitioner requests that the Scottish Parliament considers and debates sequestration law</td>
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<td>Investigate the sequestration recall process and consider amending the law to allow the right of appeal for those made bankrupt by mistake. Recall has specific requirements and is not an appeal process. It is an expensive process for someone who has been sequestrated and the person who made the mistake can stop the recall taking place. Cases should be heard by a Sheriff.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additional information:
Any additional information in relation to your petition, including reasons why the action requested is necessary, should not be included here. However, it may be appended to the petition and will be made available to the Public Petitions Committee prior to its consideration of your petition. Please note that you should limit the amount of any additional information which you may wish to provide in support of your petition to no more than 4 sides of A4.

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition:
Before submitting a petition to the Parliament, petitioners are expected to have made an attempt to resolve their issues of concern by, for example, making representations to the Scottish Executive or seeking the assistance of locally elected representatives, such as councillors, MSPs and MPs. Please enter details of those approached below and append copies of relevant correspondence, which will be made available to the Public Petitions Committee prior to its consideration of your petition.

Contacted the following:
- Citizen Advice
- Solicitors
- Accountancy and Bankruptcy
- Insolvency Practitioner
- HM Customs & Excise
- Scottish Enterprise
- Federation Small Business
- Legal Aid Board
- Chamber of Commerce
- Anne Begg MP
- Parliamentary Ombudsman

Request to speak:
All petitioners are given the opportunity to present their petition before the Public Petitions Committee. The Convener will then make a decision based on a number of factors including the content of the petition and the written information provided by the petitioner as to whether a brief statement from the petitioner would be useful in facilitating the Committee's consideration of a petition.

Please indicate below whether you wish to request to make a brief statement before the Committee when it comes to consider your petition:

Yes
*Delete as appropriate

Signature of principal petitioner:
When satisfied that your petition meets all the criteria outlined in the Guidance on submission of public petitions, the principal petitioner should sign and date the form in the box below. Other signatures gathered should be appended to this form.
Signature

Date ...18/5/2005

Please note that any additional information, copies of relevant correspondence and additional signatures should be appended to this form and submitted to:

The Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee,
The Scottish Parliament,
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP
Tel: 0131 348 5186 Fax: 0131 348 5088
e-mail:
Dear Dr Johnston

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE: CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE865

Thank you for your letter of 16 September 2005 requesting comments on Mr Edward Fowler’s petition asking that the sequestration recall process is taken out of the Court of Session and moved to the sheriff court, as well as requesting the introduction of an appeal against an award of sequestration.

The Bankruptcy and Diligence (Scotland) Bill will be introduced to the Scottish Parliament shortly. The purpose of the Bill is to reform and modernise the laws of bankruptcy in Scotland. The Bill is due to be considered by the Enterprise and Culture Committee and references below to provisions in the Bill are of course subject to consideration in due course by the Parliament.

The Court of Session and the sheriff courts have jurisdiction to deal with debtor and creditor petitions for sequestration. The Court of Session alone can deal with applications for recall or reduction of sequestrations. The Scottish Executive has reviewed these arrangements with a view to ensuring that sequestration procedures are dealt with in the most appropriate way.

It is intended that in future debtor petitions for sequestration will be administered by the Accountant in Bankruptcy. Creditor petitions will continue to be dealt with by the courts, but it is intended that they will be heard in the sheriff courts only.

Awards of sequestration are not appealed in the same way as other orders of the courts. Currently the petitioner, either the debtor or creditor, can appeal against a sheriff’s refusal to award sequestration. This will not change in future. The Bill will introduce a right to appeal to the sheriff against a refusal to award sequestration by the Accountant in Bankruptcy on a debtor application.

There is no appeal as such against sequestration being awarded. When a creditor petitions for the sequestration of a debtor, a hearing date is set to allow the debtor to attend court and show why sequestration should not be awarded. If the debtor is unsuccessful in opposing the sequestration the only appropriate challenge is a petition for recall or an action of reduction.
At present this is done by an application to the Court of Session. It is intended that applications for recall will move from the Court of Session to the sheriff courts. The Court of Session will retain jurisdiction to deal with actions of reduction, which are however very rare.

The Bankruptcy and Diligence Bill is not making any direct changes to the way that legal aid is applied for or granted. The Scottish Executive consultation, Advice for All: Publicly Funded Legal Assistance in Scotland has recently closed. The review considered issues around the planning and co-ordination of legal advice services, ensuring the future provision of advisors and improving the fairness of eligibility for assistance. The responses to the consultation are now being analysed.

I hope the above information is helpful to the committee.

Yours sincerely

Andy Crawley
PE735 Petition by Vivien Dance, calling for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to require NHS Argyll and Clyde and NHS Greater Glasgow to agree a special agreement on transferring responsibility for the design and provision of health services in the North Clyde area and, when appropriate, to amend existing legislation so that the boundaries of the two health boards are adjusted to achieve the transfer of authority for the North Clyde area from the former to the latter.
Petition by Jackie Baillie MSP, calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to ensure that any proposed clinical strategy emerging from NHS Boards, such as NHS Argyll and Clyde, must clearly demonstrate cross boundary working in the interests of patient care.

Signed .

Date ................................................................. 23.9.04
Michael McMahon MSP  
Convenor of the Public Petitions Committee  
Room T9.01  
The Scottish Parliament  
EDINBURGH  
EH99 1SP

7 November 2005

Dear Michael,

I am writing to the Committee in order to provide an update on the status of the issues relevant to petitions PE735 and PE772. Petition PE735, in the name of Vivien Dance, called for the Scottish Executive to require NHS Argyll and Clyde and NHS Greater Glasgow to agree a special arrangement for transferring responsibility for the design and provision of health services in the North Clyde area, legislating where appropriate, from the former NHS Board to the latter. The Committee has received written comments on PE735 from myself, from the Chief Executives of both NHS Boards and from Trevor Jones, former Head of the Scottish Executive Health Department and Chief Executive of the NHS in Scotland.

As members of the Committee will be aware, on 19 May this year I announced to Parliament the Scottish Executive's intention: change the administrative boundaries of NHS Greater Glasgow and NHS Highland to allow them to take over responsibility for managing the delivery of health services in relevant parts of the Argyll and Clyde area; to clear the accumulated financial deficit of NHS Argyll and Clyde; and to consult on what the new administrative boundaries for NHS Greater Glasgow and NHS Highland should be.

I genuinely believe that by redrawing the boundaries of Glasgow and Highland NHS Boards, there will in future be a basis for more rational planning and delivery of services; an opportunity to better reflect and respond to patient flows; the chance to reduce overheads by sharing services; and the opportunity to explore all options for sustaining services near to patients – services as local as possible, while being as specialised as necessary.

Clearly the plans I announced are a major step. I took the decision only after very careful thought, and because I believed it was the right thing to do to safeguard safe and sustainable services for patients and the public in the Argyll & Clyde area. I realise that not everyone will agree with what is proposed. The public consultation period gives everyone the opportunity to have their say.

The public consultation began on 8 August. An associated series of 16 public meetings, supported by focus groups and workshops with key local organisations and stakeholders, have been attended by several hundred members of the public. Under the options on which we are consulting, the local hospital, community and other healthcare services on which people rely will continue. The consultation was due to end on 4 November but I have agreed to extend it by 7 days until...
11 November to give those attending the final public meetings a little more time to submit their views. I will consider very carefully the responses to consultation before announcing my decision on the new administrative boundaries. A further consultation will then take place with NHS staff and their representatives on issues relating to their transfer to the successor bodies. I should also report that the Chief Executives of the three affected Boards are regularly meeting as a Dissolution and Integration Project Board. This Board is tasked with making sure that the necessary arrangements are put in place to ensure that services to patients are not adversely affected by the change in administrative boundaries, and that the transfer of responsibilities is as smooth as possible.

The Committee also sought my views on petition PE772, in the name of Jackie Baillie MSP. This urged the Executive to ensure that any proposed clinical strategy emerging from NHS Boards, such as Argyll and Clyde, must clearly demonstrate cross boundary working in the interests of patient care. My original response of 22 November 2004 clearly set out my view that I would expect any NHS Board that is considering significant service change to work closely with all its planning partners in the interest of patients, irrespective of administrative boundaries. I also cited the NHS Reform (Scotland) Act 2004 which lays on Boards a new statutory duty of regional co-operation, and empowers them to take actions for the benefit of the population of areas other than their own.

I did, however, recognise that regional planning needs to go much further and explained the importance of Professor David Kerr’s work on the National Framework for Service Change in this respect. Professor Kerr’s advisory group considered the future shape of national and regional healthcare services to achieve the most appropriate balance between accessibility and clinical quality. Professor Kerr’s report Building a Health Service Fit for the Future called for a “step change in the development of regional planning to ensure that Health Boards make regionally based decisions about the shape of hospital based health services”. Delivering for Health, the Executive’s recently published response to Professor Kerr’s Report, makes it clear that we accept his recommendations and expect NHS Boards and Regional Planning Groups to use them as the basis of their service change programmes. Delivering for Health also asks Regional Planning Groups to take forward a number of specific pieces of work in 2006 which taken together constitute a significant expansion of regional planning activity in NHS Scotland.

In terms of NHS Argyll and Clyde’s own clinical strategy I can confirm that the further local investigation and appraisal work continues. It is hoped that the decision to dissolve the Board will have a positive effect on the abilities of the successor bodies to plan and implement service change in a more effective and integrated way, consistent with Delivering for Health. Ultimately, as I mentioned in my previous response, any NHS Board proposals for significant service change or closure must come to me for prior approval. In such cases, I would carefully consider all the available information before coming to a decision. I am also happy to reiterate that, were I to judge cross-boundary working to be relevant, I would not be prepared to endorse proposals for service change unless the particular Board had met its obligations to demonstrate cross-boundary working in the interests of patient care and effective regional planning.

I hope this is helpful.

ANDY KERR
In working towards these priorities the Civic Forum has undertaken a wide range of successful activities, including:

1. Over 2500 people participating in events facilitated by the Forum over the period April 2002 to November 2004 alone.
2. The Forum’s six part-time regional co-ordinators (one day a week) enabling events to be held in 38 different locations in Scotland, providing local accessible opportunities for members of the public and people in small community based organisations to get involved: Aberdeen, Ardrossan, Aberfoyle, Ayr, Barrhead, Bellshill, Clydebank, Cromarty, Dalkeith, Dingwall, Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Falkirk, Galashiels, Glasgow, Glenrothes, Grangemouth, Glenrothes, Granton on Spey, Greenock, Hawick, Inverness, Irvine, Kilmarnock, Kirkintilloch, Lochinver, Livingston, Nairn, Newarthill, Oban, Paisley, Perth, Port Glasgow, Skye, Stirling, Stranraer, Thurso, Wilsontown.
3. In a survey, 264 new actions or learning impacts were cited as a result of Forum work: including contacting MSPs, submitting a consultation response, initiating discussion in another organisation or passing on information for others to act. The Civic Forum is generating a chain of participation activity.
4. Three Parliament Day events where civic society took over the Parliament Chamber and MSPs had the opportunity to participate in direct discussion.
5. A network of Civic Participation Hubs is currently being established. The Forum’s office in Edinburgh has resources and computers available to members of the public with staff support on how to find out about Executive and Parliament processes and activities. Meeting space is available for people to prepare before coming to give evidence to Committees, meet or visit Parliament.

The Civic Forum is cited in the Parliament’s own “Participation Handbook” as an example of an organisation useful to it in reaching the wider public (as is EACG).

The Civic Forum has not been subject to any independent evaluation of its activity, its achievements or shortcomings. If there has been dissatisfaction with the performance of the Civic Forum it has not been an open process with the opportunity to discuss conclusions drawn. For more information on this see: http://www.myedinburgh.org/?page=4432

So, why is the work of the Civic Forum no longer valued by the Scottish Executive and Parliament? And where is the SPCC’s evidence that the parliament is now carrying out the work? Two examples to the contrary:

The Scottish Islands Network Newsletter (www.scottishislands.org.uk) of February 2005 advises its members to go the Civic Forum’s website – not the Executive’s – to access a briefing paper on Voting and Boundary Changes. “For a very helpful overview of these changes and what they could mean to you.”

In a letter to the Herald on 17th May 2005, the secretary of the Dunfermline and Coast Association of Community Councils told how the Association had been refused a meeting with the Minister for Communities to put forward its views on proposed planning legislation, but that ministers had met twice with Homes for Scotland, the CBI and CoSLA about the same issue.

If the trust between politicians and voters is to be restored then politicians will have to listen to communities outside of their own political culture. In sacrificing bodies such as the Civic Forum the message to the electorate is that politicians don’t trust the people. The reciprocal process of declining trust between politicians and people can be reversed but politicians cannot solve this problem on their own. Independent and robust organisations such as the Civic Forum are necessary to reflect the maturity of a parliament that can withstand criticism of what it does or does not do. It is when it reaches this stage that the trust of the people will begin to return.

For more information about the Civic Forum and its work, see: http://www.civicforum.org.uk/
**Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting an e-petition:**

Before submitting a petition to the Parliament, petitioners are expected to have made an attempt to resolve their issues of concern, by for example, making representations to the Scottish Executive or seeking the assistance of locally elected representatives, such as councillors, MSPs and MSPs. Details of those approached should be entered.

Edinburgh’s Active Citizenship Group, and individual members of the group, wrote letters expressing our support for the Civic Forum and our concerns for its future to each member of the Scottish Parliament’s Corporate Body (SPCB) prior to its meeting on 21st June.

We received a reply from Presiding Officer George Reid. Other responses referred us to his reply. Robert Brown MSP further suggested that an evaluation of the Civic Forum as a mechanism for supporting civic participation might be a way forward.

The Presiding Officer's response, and the report of the SPCB’s meeting, suggested that the Civic Forum was to some extent duplicating work already being done by the Parliament itself. We are not aware of the evidence for this, but would argue that any confusion of roles should be investigated and clarification sought to ascertain whether work was being duplicated or was in fact complementary.

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**Comments to stimulate on-line discussion:**

Please provide at least one comment to set the scene for an on-line discussion on the petition, not exceeding 10 lines of text.

The Scottish Civic Forum was set up under the principles of the Consultative Steering Group on the Scottish Parliament. Its three aims are:

- Engaging people with the legislative process
- Promoting civic priorities
- Auditing democratic participation

The Scottish Executive is withdrawing the Civic Forum’s core funding. The Parliament’s Corporate Body has rejected a request to continue it, claiming that the Civic Forum is duplicating work done by the parliament itself, but there is mounting evidence the underlying rationale and philosophy on which the Forum was founded is no longer valued – a major change in the relationship between the Parliament and civil society requiring urgent debate.

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**Petitioners appearing before the Committee**

The Convener of the Committee may invite petitioners to appear before the Public Petitions Committee to speak in support of their petition. Such an invitation will only be made if the Convener considers this would be useful in facilitating the Committee’s consideration of the petition. It should be noted that due to the large volume of petitions it has to consider, the Committee is not able to invite all petitioners to appear before the Committee to speak in support of their petition.

Please indicate below if you do NOT wish to make a brief statement before the Committee when it comes to consider your petition.

I do NOT wish to make a brief statement before the Committee
Signature of principal petitioner:
When satisfied that your petition meets all the criteria outlined in the Guidance on submission of public petitions, the principal petitioner should sign and date the form in the box below. Other signatures gathered should be appended to this form.

Signature: Jim Crowther.

Date: 29 September 2005

For advice on the content and wording of your e-petition please contact:
The Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH9 1SP
Tel: 0131 348 5186 Fax: 0131 348 5088
E-mail: petitions@scottish.parliament.uk

Note
Completed e-petition forms should also be sent to petitions@scottish.parliament.uk
Public Petitions Committee – a template for e-petitions

Should you wish to submit an e-petition allowing signatures to be gathered online on the Public Petitions Committee e-petitioner web pages please complete the template below. Before submitting your e-petition please consult the Guidance on submission of public petitions for advice on what is and is not admissible. You may also seek advice from the Clerk to the Committee whose contact details can be found at the end of this form.

Details of principal petitioner:

Please enter the name of person and organisation raising the petition, including a contact address where correspondence should be sent to.

Dr James Crowther, (on behalf of Edinburgh’s Active Citizenship Group)

Text of petition:

The petition should clearly state what action the petitioner wishes the Parliament to take in no more than 5 lines of text, e.g.

The petitioner requests that the Scottish Parliament considers and debates the implications of the proposed Agenda for Change legislation for Speech and Language Therapy Services and service users within the NHS

The petitioner requests that the Scottish Parliament debates the implications of the recent decision by the Scottish Executive to reduce core funding and the decision by the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body not to provide core funding to the Scottish Civic Forum, a body set up on the recommendation of the Consultative Steering Group.

Period for gathering signatures:

Please enter the closing date for gathering signatures on your petition, which we would usually recommend is a period of between 4-6 weeks

Closing date: 4th November 2005
In February 2005 the Scottish Executive announced it would halve this year’s funding for the Scottish Civic Forum and would discontinue funding completely in the financial year 2006/07. This triggered a debate in the Scottish Parliament on 24th February, during which cross-party support for the Civic Forum and its activities was expressed, with requests that the Parliament’s Corporate Body (SPCB) explore the idea of the Civic Forum being funded independently of the Executive by the Parliament itself.

However, the SPCB at its meeting on 21st June, concluded that “the work of the SCF [Scottish Civic Forum] to some extent duplicated the work now being carried out by the Parliament itself” and the decision was taken not to provide core funding. This makes the future of the Civic Forum extremely precarious.

We welcome the Parliament’s and Executive’s efforts to engage the public, (our group has held seminars on the subject), for example by inviting petitions and responses to consultations, and the recent innovative Festival of Politics. However, we are not aware of any evidence that the Parliament is carrying out entirely the role which the CSG envisaged for a Civic Forum.

Section 2/20 of the Report of the Consultative Steering Group (CSG) on the Scottish Parliament published by the Scottish Office in 1998 stated that, "We endorse the proposals for a Civic Forum...", and "We recommend that the Parliament should encourage Scottish civic society through the establishment and work of a Civic Forum and through other imaginative social partnership ventures as significant means of achieving an accessible Parliament within a participative democracy."

In a debate on the CSG principles on 9th June 1999, George Reid said, "All parties, pre-election, endorsed the concept of the forum, as did the coalition agreement of 14 May... The civic forum will promote participation, facilitate debate and ensure social partnership. It will be a gateway to the Parliament and its Executive, not a gate-keeper."

Later that year, then Finance Minister Angus MacKay said, "The Civic Forum plays an important role in providing innovative ways for all relevant voices to contribute to the policy making process. I hope that the Executive’s continued commitment to the work of the Civic Forum will enable it to build on existing achievements and contribute to our objective of creating an open government for Scotland."

Since those early days of the Parliament, and with a small staff including part-time and volunteer workers, the Civic Forum has built up a membership of 700 organisations and individuals, and 5,000 contacts who regularly receive ‘reader friendly’ information bulletins, digests of policy and consultations.

The work of the Civic Forum
The Forum’s work might best be characterised as one of informal political education. Whilst it does not aim to further any one political position it does seek to encourage wider public understanding of the policy process. It has three main areas of work:

- **Engaging people with the legislative process**: by this it means developing wider knowledge and understanding of how government and parliament works so that people may engage with it more effectively.

- **Promoting civic priorities**: creating opportunities for a wider range of views and priorities to be aired and fed back into the policy making process.

- **Auditing democratic participation**: acting as an independent commentator on how the new democratic processes are working in terms of public participation and generating educational processes of participation which people value in themselves and which reflect a genuine concern to build a participatory culture for politics.
Dear Michael

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE – CONSIDERATION PE895

The Scottish Executive is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the issues raised in this petition.

It may be helpful if I begin by outlining the background to the Executive’s funding of the Scottish Civic Forum. As you know, the Consultative Steering Group (CSG) on the Scottish Parliament recommended the establishment of a civic forum to achieve an accessible Parliament. This was part of their recommendations for the Parliament to share power and to be “accessible, open, responsive and develop procedures which make possible a participative approach to the development, consideration and scrutiny of policy and legislation”. The Scottish Executive was never under any obligation to fund the Forum but, in view of the many issues which the new Parliament had to address at that early stage in its life, provided funding from October 1999 as part of its own work on implementation of the devolution settlement.

The Executive has always agreed that the Forum plays a key role in supporting the founding principles of the Parliament; that is why we have provided over £1 million pump-priming funding since its inception. From the outset, however, we have been absolutely clear that there was no open-ended commitment on the part of the Executive to provide core-funding to the Forum.

When announcing the initial grant, Jack McConnell, as Finance Minister, said “I am keen to ensure that the Civic Forum does not rely on the Government for funding. It is important that the Civic Forum should try to identify other sources of funding” and that “[SCF’s] success will be measured……by the funding it attracts to replace pump-priming support from the Executive”.

In financial year 2004-05, that initial 3 year grant to the Forum was further extended on the clear understanding that it was a transitional year while the Forum realigned its strategic priorities and developed wider sources of support for the future. In March 2005, Tavish Scott’s grant offer letter emphasised that the final grant of £100,000 should be used by the Forum to realign itself to the new
environment and enable itself to compete for specific civic participation work which the Scottish Executive, and others, may wish to commission.

We certainly do not dispute that the Forum has worked hard to develop processes and networks to support civic participation. However, the environment in which the Forum operates has seen considerable changes over the last 5 years. Over this period of time, the Executive, itself, has made significant improvements in its civic participation activities. We have devoted a great deal of effort to helping civic Scotland play its part in the development of policy, through making our consultation activity open, accessible and inclusive; by employing numerous other innovative methods of reaching people; and through many capacity building projects in communities. We remain committed to broadening the way in which we communicate and wish to develop further our links with a range of organisations.

We have always believed that it was essential for the Forum to develop as an independent body – in charge of its own business, financing, targets, etc. However, when the Parliament debated the future of the Forum on 24th February 2005, the Executive supported the motion, lodged by Linda Fabiani, that the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body should investigate the possibility of funding the Forum. The fact that the Corporate Body has declined to core-fund the Forum is solely a matter for that body and it does not follow that the Executive should once again step into the breach.

The Executive’s decision to cease core-funding the Forum was not taken lightly. The points made in the petition are all issues which have been raised before and were all taken into account in reaching that decision.

GEORGE LYON
Dear Michael

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE PE895

Thank you for your letter of 22 November seeking comments on issues raised in petition PE895 which calls for a debate in the Scottish Parliament on the implications of recent decisions by the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body regarding the provision of funding to the Scottish Civic Forum.

First of all, I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the Corporate Body's commitment to participation and engagement with all sections of Scottish society which is as strong as ever and continues to be a priority. We have worked hard in the last five years to enhance our skills and experience in this area and we are continuing to introduce innovative means of encouraging such engagement. This ranges from work on e-democracy, in which your committee is leading the way with e-petitioning, initiatives such as the Festival of Politics, Open House, the MSPs in Schools Programme and the development of our outreach activities. The Parliament has continued to introduce innovative means of encouraging engagement through a number of different routes including work with community groups, focus group events with partner libraries, online consultations, committee-sponsored participation events etc. We are working towards building partnerships with other organisations, such as the Scottish Interfaith Council and the Open University, which will enable us to use existing networks to reach a greater number of people at the grass roots level.

We are also evaluating a number of committee participation initiatives from the perspectives of the participants in order to continue to develop best practice in the Parliament.

We are undertaking reviews of our Visitor Services and Events support systems, to ensure we meet our goals of raising awareness of and encouraging engagement with the Parliament.

While the Corporate Body remains committed to encouraging participation and engagement, however, the question as to whether there is a degree of overlap with the work of the Civic Forum should not be the main focus of debate on the issue of funding the Scottish Civic Forum. I have consistently stated that in my view the Parliament does not
have a role in providing core funding to bodies such as the Civic Forum. This position was reiterated by the Corporate Body when it considered the Forum's request in June. It did agree, however, that the Forum could consider applying to undertake projects for the Scottish Parliament along with other organisations, and if successful, receive funding on a project basis.

Yours sincerely

GEORGE REID