Introduction

1. The Committee is invited to consider and agree a proposal for commissioning research from external sources on reviewing the first 1,000 petitions.

Background

2. It is anticipated that the 1,000th public petition will be lodged within the next six months. The Committee may wish to consider that this significant milestone provides an opportunity to commission an independent review to assess the operation of the petitions system. The review will consider how well the petitions process works, take into account the views of petitioners on how their petition was handled, and consider the impact of the petitions system as a means of engagement with the democratic process. The outcome of the review will help inform the way the PPC and the Parliament’s subject committees deal with public petitions.

3. The research will aim to provide a clear picture of the use made of the public petitions system and the experiences of those who have used the system since 1999.

4. It is proposed that the research will comprise four main components:

   - An overview of the development of the petitions system since 1999 including a short review of how petitions are dealt with in other parliaments;
   - Quantitative analysis of the data on open and closed petitions held on the PPC database;
   - A questionnaire survey of those who have submitted petitions to assess their motivations, expectations and experiences;
• Qualitative interviews with a sample of participants in the petitions process.

5. The expected outputs of this project would include a full research report, 4 page summary and presentation of the findings to the Committee. The results of the research would be expected by September 2006.

Options for Action

6. The Committee is invite to consider and agree to put forward this research proposal to the Conveners Group with the costs to be met from the external research budget held by SPICe.

Committee Clerk and Simon Wakefield, SPICe
March 2006