PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE

7th Meeting, 2006 (Session 2)

Wednesday 19 April 2006

Report of the Public Petitions Committee Event, Dunfermline, 30 January 2006

Background

1. Following the committee event in Dundee on 14 June 2004, the Public Petitions Committee (PPC) at its meeting on 15 September 2004 agreed a rolling programme of events aimed at raising awareness of the public petitions system among groups and individuals who are traditionally marginalised from the political process.

2. The PPC held its fourth event in its rolling programme of committee events in Dunfermline on 30 January 2006. A draft summary of the event is attached.

3. For this event the Parliament's public participation officer and a senior research specialist from SPICe conducted an evaluation exercise and a copy of their evaluation report is also attached.

Options for action

4. The Committee is invited to consider and agree the attached report and recommendations and to agree that it is published on the Committee’s web page and circulated to all attendees.

Committee Clerk
March 2006
REPORT OF THE PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE EVENT, DUNFERMLINE, 30 JANUARY 2006

Introduction

1. The Public Petitions Committee (PPC) held the fourth event in its rolling programme at Glen Pavilion, Pittencrieff Park in Dunfermline on Monday 30 January 2006. A formal Committee meeting was held in the morning and a workshop event took place in the afternoon. This report provides a brief summary of the main issues which arose during the day.

Background

2. At its meeting on 31 March 2004 the PPC agreed that effective promotion of the public petitions system would be useful in developing the work of the PPC and further agreed to hold a participation event in Dundee aimed at equality organisations, local community groups and other local organisations.

3. Following the success of the Dundee event, which took place on 14 June 2004, the PPC agreed to hold a rolling programme of events aimed at raising awareness of the Parliament’s public petitions system. On 29 November 2004, the PPC held a second event in Inverness which was attended by 60 representatives from local community and equality groups and voluntary sector organisations from throughout the Highland region.

4. The third in the series of events took place in Ayr on 6 June 2005. The primary aim of the Ayr event was to provide an overview of the petitions system, drawing upon the individual experiences of previous petitioners, and to provide practical advice and guidance on petitioning and e-petitioning the Scottish Parliament. In addition to a workshop event which was held in the afternoon, a formal meeting of the PPC was held in the morning. The PPC recognises the usefulness of holding formal Committee meetings outwith Edinburgh, especially in the context of allowing local petitioners to give evidence to the Committee without the need to travel to Edinburgh.

5. On this basis it was agreed to follow the same format for the next promotional event to be held in Dunfermline in January 2006.

Formal Meeting of the PPC

6. The PPC considered six new petitions and four current petitions. “New petitions” are those which have not been considered by the Committee previously.
“Current petitions” are on-going petitions which have been considered previously by the Committee on one or more occasion.

7. The Minutes of this meeting are attached at Annexe A. The Official Report of this meeting, a substantially verbatim written report of proceedings, is available on the Scottish Parliament website (www.scottish.parliament.uk/petitions) or in hard copy by contacting the Parliament.

8. Four of the new petitions considered by the Committee originated in Fife. They related to traffic regulation order for disabled drivers, the provision of NHS dental services, the tolls on the Forth Road Bridge and the provision of spiritual care to hospital patients. The PPC agreed to write to a number of organisations in relation to these petitions. Full details of all decisions taken by the Committee are provided in the Minute. Once they have been received from those organisations, the responses will be considered by Members of the Committee at a future meeting of the PPC and the Committee will decide what further action to take in relation to the petitions.

9. The current petitions considered by the Committee, which also originated in the Fife area, related to solvent abuse, road design standards, the impact of traffic calming measure on the elderly and disabled and the provision of affordable housing.

10. Petitioners are kept up to date with the progress of their petition throughout the petitioning process and members of the public can follow the progress of the petition either on the Parliament’s website or by contacting the Clerk to the Committee (details provided below).

11. In addition to the Members of the Committee, a local MSP (Bruce Crawford) also attended the meeting. The Committee was also pleased to hear from John MacDougall MP, Member of the UK Parliament for Glenrothes, in relation to the petition on solvent abuse.

12. The meeting was held in public and around 65 members of the public attended. A member of the Parliament’s public information staff was available to provide general information on the work of the Scottish Parliament.

The Workshops

13. The afternoon event was attended by 41 representatives of local community and equality groups. A list of attendees is attached as Annexe B.

14. Following some brief introductory remarks by the Convener of the Committee, Michael McMahon MSP, attendees were involved in four lively workshop sessions aimed at providing delegates with an introduction to the public petitions system. The workshops were facilitated by Members of the PPC who answered questions and responded to queries.
15. The following issues emerged during the workshop sessions:

- people may not know how the petitioning process works – more publicity about the process is therefore necessary, including promoting success stories;
- petitioning is actually relatively easy and simple;
- it is possible to obtain a response and follow petitions through the process;
- committee clerks can help people with their petition;
- given the number of people elected representatives (cllrs/MPs/MSPs/MEPs) why do we also need a Petitions committee?
- petitioning can be a powerful symbol of democracy with visible outcomes;
- petitioning can generate publicity and increase awareness of an issue;
- e-petitioning allows an issue to reach all of Scotland and beyond;
- petitioners do not always know the national context for their local issue and more sympathetic questioning is therefore required;
- members of the public should be able to join in the discussion on petitions at meetings;
- information regarding the remit of the Committee provided on the annual report was not clear;
- petitions can help overcome difficulties experienced in getting answers to questions and progressing issues of concern;
- although the committee is not always able to resolve issues to the satisfaction of the petitioner, the process can draw public attention to the petitioner’s concerns;
- concern was expressed about the lack of “service users” on committees.

Feedback

16. For this event the Parliament’s public participation officer and a senior research specialist from the Parliaments Information Centre conducted an evaluation exercise in which all the delegates attending the workshops were sent a questionnaire. 27 questionnaires were returned showing a good response rate of 66%. A full copy of the evaluation report is available from the Clerk.
17. The report states that: ‘Overall the feedback was positive with many participants responding that they gained a greater understanding of the process of submitting a petition and the Committee’s role in considering petitions. Significantly, 78% of respondents had never attended a parliamentary event before report and all felt that it had been worthwhile attending. Around three quarters indicated that they would be following the Committee's work.’

18. 74% of respondents stated that it was very worthwhile attending the event while 24% stated that it was worthwhile.

19. Below are listed a selection of some of the comments and suggestions which delegates made throughout the day and on their questionnaires:

- the friendliness and warmth of the different MSPs as they spoke to all who took part. It was not too presentational it was more debate and discussion and it was as the Convener said, bringing the Scottish Parliament to the People and certainly very much appreciated I am sure by all present;

- some people had a difficulty hearing proceedings meeting, although a loop system was provided; the convener should ask MSPs and witnesses to speak clearly and use their microphones, and if he checked that sound levels were suitable for people in the public gallery;

- informal session was a good idea;

- after the petitions committee I would like to have time set aside for questions from the floor;

- when discussing the petitions which are ongoing, a brief resume of what the petition was about would benefit those people who had not been at the committee when the petition was originally made;

- I think the Committee coming into the community is a very worthwhile event and hope it continues in the future;

- better practical signage;

- A positive side to the Scottish Parliament, should have more publicity, especially its successes;

- local radio should be used to publicise meetings;

- more short breaks during meetings would be a good idea, as some people find it uncomfortable to remain in the same position for long periods.
Conclusions and Recommendations

20. In keeping with the feedback from previous events one of the main themes to emerge from Dunfermline was the lack of awareness of the public petitions system. The Committee may, therefore, wish to consider re-emphasising its commitment to meeting outside of Edinburgh and to continue to identify ways of raising awareness of the public petitions system.

21. The next in its current series of events is a formal meeting of the Committee in Jedburgh on the evening of Monday 26 June at which it is hoped to hear from a number of local petitioners. This event will take place in the evening to allow a wider audience to attend.

22. In response to the feedback from the Dunfermline event background briefings on each petition will be available for members of the public and there will be opportunities for questions from the floor immediately after the meeting.

Dr Jim Johnston
Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP
petitions@scottish.parliament.uk
0131 348 5982
Present:

Jackie Baillie
Rosie Kane
John Farquhar Munro
Sandra White

Helen Eadie
Michael McMahon (Convener)
John Scott (Deputy Convener)

Apologies were received from Charlie Gordon.

Also present: Bruce Crawford MSP.

The meeting opened at 10.00 am.

1. **Consideration of new petitions:** The Committee considered and agreed action on the following new petitions:

   PE908 Petition by Connie M Syme calling for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to ensure that traffic regulation orders are applied to all disabled parking bays to ensure that they are used by registered disabled users only.

   The Committee agreed to link consideration of petition PE908 with petition PE909.

   PE909 Petition by James MacLeod, on behalf of Inverclyde Council on Disability Ltd., calling for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to review the Local Authorities’ Traffic Orders (Procedure) (Scotland) Regulations to allow for speedier provision and enforcement of dropped kerbs and disabled parking bays to prevent their abuse, ensuring greater and easier access for disabled, elderly and other users.

   The Committee heard from Connie Syme and Ian Elam and agreed to write to the Baywatch Campaign, the Disability Rights Commission, the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland, COSLA, the Association of Chief Police Officers, the AA and the Scottish Executive.
PE920 Petition by Helen Smith calling for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to commit further resources to the provision of NHS dentistry, in particular for the recruitment of NHS salaried dentists to provide emergency and comprehensive care and for the provision of dedicated NHS dentistry facilities.

The Committee agreed to link consideration of petition PE920 with petition PE922.

PE922 Petition by Peter Thomson calling on the Scottish Parliament to look at implementing a different model to the current plan to ensure that NHS dentistry is available in remote and rural areas in the medium to long term.

The Committee heard from Helen Smith and agreed to write to the British Dental Association, Fife Health Board, the Glasgow Dental School, the Dundee Dental School and the Scottish Executive.

PE921 Petition by Rev. Ross Brown calling for the Scottish parliament to urge the Scottish Executive not to increase the tolls on the Forth Road Bridge.

The Committee heard from Rev. Ross Brown and agreed to write to the Forth Estuary Transport Authority, Transform Scotland, the AA, the RAC, Friends of the Earth, the Federation of Small Businesses, VisitScotland, the Chamber of Commerce, the EU Commissioner for Transport, the North Sea Commission Transport Group, Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Executive.

The meeting was suspended from 11.32 am to 11.33 am and from 11.42 am to 11.53 am.

PE923 Petition by Ben Conway calling for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to promote pastoral and spiritual care in hospitals to ensure that the physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs of patients are properly addressed.

The Committee heard from Ben Conway and agreed to write to the Scottish Inter Faith Council, , Professor John Swinton of Aberdeen University, Rev. Chris Levinson of NHS Scotland, the Scotland Patients Association and the Scottish Executive.

2. Consideration of current petitions: The Committee considered and agreed action on the following current petitions:

PE580 Petition calling for the Scottish Parliament to recognise the serious problems with solvent abuse in Scotland and introduce preventative safety measures to help combat solvent abuse.

The Committee heard from John MacDougall MP and agreed to write to the Scottish Executive.
Annex A - Minutes

PE838 Petition by Sheila Carribine, on behalf of Low Valleyfield Community Council, calling for the Scottish Parliament, in the interests of road safety, to urge the Scottish Executive to review its policy in relation to roads design standards and encourage the publication of such standards and their proper and consistent application across Scotland.

The Committee agreed, on the basis of the responses received, to close consideration of this petition.

PE840 Petition by Judith McCrorie calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to review its policy in relation to traffic calming measures, such as road humps and road cushions, in order to ensure the impact on disabled users and the elderly is adequately addressed.

The Committee agreed to invite the views of the petitioner on the responses received.

PE877 Petition by Janet Walton calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to review its policies on the provision of affordable housing, particularly in relation to the impact on the elderly and those on low incomes.

The Committee agreed to invite the views of the petitioner on the responses received.

The meeting closed at 12.55 pm.

Dr Jim Johnston
Clerk to the Committee
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Evaluation Report
Public Petitions Committee Event
Dunfermline, 30 January 2006

Introduction

The aim of the outreach Public Petitions Committee event was to promote understanding about the work of the Parliament and the Committee by providing an educative element to the formal Committee meeting. The day was split into two parts. In the morning the Committee held its formal meeting in public. In the afternoon MSPs and parliamentary staff facilitated four workshops on the work of the Committee and the procedure for submitting petitions. The event was attended by 67 participants, MSPs and parliamentary staff. Of the 67 participants, 41 were delegates from local organisations and 26 associated with either presenting a petition or part of a supporting group. This evaluation focuses on the delegates rather than those directly involved with the petitioning process and therefore questionnaires were only sent out to the 41 delegates. Twenty seven questionnaires were returned showing a good response rate of 66%.

Overall the feedback was positive with many participants responding that they gained a greater understanding of the process of submitting a petition and the Committee’s role in considering petitions. Significantly, 78% of respondents had never attended a parliamentary event before and all felt that it had been worthwhile attending. Around three quarters indicated that they would be following the Committee’s work. In terms of changes that could be made to improve such events, a better venue and the provision of breaks/refreshments were particularly highlighted.

Results

The results are presented as a percentage of all those who responded to each individual question. The numbers of responses are indicated in brackets after each question. Appendix 1 contains more detailed results from some of the qualitative questions.

1. How did people hear about this committee event? (26)

   46% of respondents had received a direct invitation to attend, 11% had heard about it via an MSP, 4% from council staff and 4% from the meeting at Baldridgeburn Centre on 9 December 2005. The remaining 35% heard about the event through other means which included through a letter to the community council and from another individual.

2. Did people attend as an individual or representing an organisation? (27)

   93% were representing and organisation while 3% attended as an individual.
3. Other Scottish Parliament events attended? (27)

A significant figure, given the Parliament’s commitment to reaching broader constituencies of people, was the high number of respondents, 78%, who had not attended any other Parliament events.

How many other events run by the Scottish Parliament have you taken part in?

![Bar chart showing distribution of respondents by number of other events attended.]

The other events that had been attended included the cross party group on autism, the review of the regulation of care and the social justice committee.

4. Whether the information received from the Clerks gave a good idea about the purpose of the event and what to expect? (26)

85% of respondents said they felt that the information received from the Clerks gave them a good idea about the purpose of the event and what to expect. Comments suggested that information was clear and concise and “gave us a good guide and flavour of the day”.

Of the 15% of respondents who said that they did not feel that the information received from the Clerks gave them a good idea of the purpose of the event and what to expect the main reason given was that only basic information was supplied and little else. One respondent said that they missed the start of the meeting and that “carers don’t leave until 9.30.”

5. Was anything new learnt by attending the morning Committee meeting and hearing petitions being presented? (26)

96% said that they did learn something new by attending the morning Committee meeting. Further comments on what was learnt were made by 22 respondents (detailed in full in Appendix 1). There were two themes to emerge. The main theme was that by attending the meeting a greater understanding of the process and procedures involved was gained, as the following comments illustrate:
“An insight into the workings of the committee”

“How the process works and how the committee engages with the public. How petitions are presented to the committee”

“The processes is a positive experience/ witnessing genuine commitment by MSPs in addressing individual issues”

Secondly, a couple of comments were made about the positive attitude of committee members towards the meeting and the petitioners. Comments included:

“How relaxed the committee made it for the petitioners”

“People are treated reasonably by most MSPs”

6. Afternoon workshop attended? (27)

85% (23) people attended the afternoon workshops, while 15% did not.

7. Was anything new learnt by attending the afternoon workshop? (25)

84% said that they learnt something new by attending while 16% did not. Of those that said that they did learn something new 17 comments were made about what was learnt. These are listed in full in Appendix 1. The majority of comments made related to learning about the process and how to submit a petition. Many of these comments were similar to ones made in response to question 5. For example:

“How to begin the process –where to get advice and assistance and what happens after the committee meeting.”

“More about procedures/successes of system/ e-petitioning/how to set up a petition by widening application.”

“An insight to the procedure for submitting petitions and the importance of the committee as ‘gatekeepers’”.

“Useful for meeting people from other groups and getting tips on petitioning. We were able to air a few problems with the event that had arisen”

Only one further comment was made by those responding that they did not learn anything new:

“The workshop was to feedback on how the committee could be more accessible but the majority of the time was taken up by the facilitator advising how accessible it already was.”

8. How did people rate different parts of the day?

Respondents were asked to rate both the morning committee meeting (26 responses) and the afternoon workshop (23 responses) on a scale from ‘excellent’ to ‘poor.’ Overall the event was rated highly, with the morning
committee meeting being rated slightly higher than the afternoon workshop. The morning committee meeting was rated as either ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ by 84% of respondents, compared to 74% for the afternoon workshop. A ‘not so good’ or ‘poor’ rating was given by 4% of respondents for the morning meeting, compared to 17% for the afternoon workshop.

![Rating Different Parts of the Day](chart)

9. Which part of the event was found most interesting? (20)

As might be expected the figures echo the rating in the previous question. Overall slightly more people found the morning more interesting but the responses were fairly evenly divided between those who found both parts of the day interesting and those who selected the morning or afternoon sessions.

Of those who selected the morning committee meeting as most interesting, the most common reason was finding out what was being considered by the Committee.

“Hearing the petitions at the start - People were able to talk in front of the Committee about their Petitions. Finding out what was being considered in front of the Committee”

“The range of topics covered”

Of those who found the afternoon workshop the most interesting, the main reasons were because of the advice offered and the ability for everyone to be able to talk.

“You got to have your say in a one to one basis with an MSP. Also gauging what others thought”
“Mainly because it tended to focus on information and processes”

The comments of those who said both parts were equally interesting, stressed the learning from the event as a whole

“Whole experience was of interest and beneficial. Will be presenting a petition on 22 February”

“The two together were more valuable together than separate

10. Recommendations for one change to future events that would be an improvement?

A range of responses were received to this question but it was possible to identify several themes that emerged. Full results are given in Appendix 1.

Venue / Layout
Eight comments were made about the venue/layout. Three respondents commented on the need for better heating, while two respondents thought that the sound system could be improved:

“Get a decent venue which is clean and warm”

“MSPs not using microphones enough – felt they were isolated from the public”

One comment suggested resetting the room to avoid loss of vision due to pillars, one suggested the need for better signage outside while another recommended a screen for people to look at and read.

Breaks/Refreshments
Eight comments were also made about the need for breaks and refreshments. Key recommendations were for the need for tea/coffee to be served and for breaks to be taken as the meeting was considered long by some:

“More breaks during the meeting as I got very sore and stiff sitting. Also tea/coffee as you arrive”

“Refreshments available to invited guests at the same time as committee members adjourn for coffee”

"Chance to stretch legs between petitions"

Format
Six comments were made which covered a range of areas. For example, one suggested that it would be useful to have a brief resume of what the petition was about to benefit those people who had not been at the committee when the petition was originally made. Another suggested that the workshop should be in the morning, with the committee meeting in the afternoon. There was also a suggestion that the chair should also ask the officials to introduce themselves and say what they did.
11. How worthwhile was it to attend the event? (27)

Significantly all respondents indicated that they felt it was worthwhile attending the event with 74% saying it was very worthwhile to attend and 26% saying it was quite worthwhile to attend.

The most common reason given was that respondents had gained knowledge of the process of submitting a petition and how the committee works. Some respondents stated that they had found out more about what was happening in their local area.

“The event brought an insight into the Parliament that was much needed.”

“Never realised the public could participate”

“We have learnt that the process is accessible”

“Openness of all the MSPs being encouraging to petitioners – impressed with the cross party deliberations. Very helpful to all.”

12. Would people be following the Committee’s ongoing work? (26)

77% said yes, 4% said no and 19% said that they did not know if they would be following the Committee’s on-going work.

13. Other Comments

A total of 12 respondents made further comments. Five of these were of a general “thank you” nature and encouraging more events of this kind.
“I think the Committee coming into the community is a very worthwhile event and hope it continues in the future”

“My thanks to the Committee members and the Clerks for their work and assistance on the day, it was very helpful and informative”

Three comments suggested that the Parliament should generate more publicity for the petitions system and exploit any successes.

“As a benefit and good idea of the Scottish Parliament it is little exploited by them”

“A positive side to the Scottish Parliament, should have more publicity, especially its successes”

Two respondents requested further information. Two other comments were made- one that any correspondence should be in large print and one that individual petitioners should not be expected to answer questions on a national level.

“Individuals who had raised local issues were expected to answer questions “nationally”. Whilst organisations should be expected to answer on a national level individuals shouldn’t”

Jane Jones
Public Participation Officer

Kate Berry
Senior Research Specialist
SPICe

15th March 2006
Appendix 1: Full responses to qualitative questions.

4. Did the information you received from the Clerks give you a good idea about the purpose of the event and what to expect? Please say why.

Yes
- I received an agenda which identified the up and coming petitions
- Informative handouts
- It gave us good guide and flavour of the day
- Information was clear and concise
- It was helpful to know how the event would be ordered and run
- Good general explanation
- The range of issues the committee deals with

No
- I only got basic invitation and little else
- Not enough information
- I missed the start – carers don’t leave until 9.30

5. By attending the morning Committee meeting, and hearing petitions being presented, did you learn anything new?

Yes

Workings of Committee/ Procedures
- How the process works and how the committee engages with the public. How petitions are presented to the committee
- Other people trying to help the community
- The types of issues the committee hear and the procedures involved
- How the committee works
- The processes is a positive experience/ witnessing genuine commitment by MSPs in addressing individual issues
- Fully understood how system worked
- That a petition was for the whole of Scotland
- How the local community can have a voice to politicians- greater accountability of politicians to listen and where appropriate take action
- Procedure etc
- Did not realise it would take so long ie solvent sniffing 2 years
- How to monitor when we put in a petition to Scottish Parliament
- The correct procedures for making a petition to the committee
- An insight into the workings of the committee
- How to put a petition forward
- It was important to realise that through the petitions committee the voices on this occasion numbering 6 petitions was heard
- Gave a good idea of how the committee system works
- The formal operations of the committee was interesting
- Learnt how the committee works and how easy it is to access it
- Interested in hearing of other people’s problems
- The procedure for making a petition
Attitude of Committee Members

- How relaxed the committee made it for the petitioners
- People are treated reasonably by most MSPs

7. By attending the afternoon Workshops, did you learn anything new?

Yes

Workings of Committee/ Procedures

- More about how it works (or should work)
- How to begin the process –where to get advice and assistance and what happens after the committee meeting. Also possibility for e-mail petitioning – invaluable for all who cannot meet
- How to submit a petition and an insight into its purpose
- Background of committee and petitioning. MSPs willing to listen, learn and share
- More about procedures/successes of system/ e-petitioning/how to set up a petition by widening application
- That a petition can be phoned in
- How to prepare to present petition etc
- The format
- An insight to the procedure for submitting petitions and the importance of the committee as “gatekeepers”
- Who is getting money for a cause and who isn’t. How to put a petition together.
- How important the Parliament should be taken and the voice of the people will be listened to and where appropriate acted upon
- Useful for meeting people from other groups and getting tips on petitioning. We were able to air a few problems with the event that had arisen
- I needed to know the methods in which a petition could be raised. The workshop was helpful.
- How to present a petition to the Scottish Parliament

Other

- Interested in hearing of other people’s problems
- About other issues that is happening around Fife
- Other people’s problems and how they are trying to solve them

No

- The workshop was to feedback on how the committee could be more accessible but the majority of the time was taken up by the facilitator advising how accessible it already was
9. Which part of the event did you find most interesting?

Morning Committee Meeting

- Hearing the petitions at the start - People were able to talk in front of the Committee about their Petitions. Finding out what was being considered in front of the Committee
- It allowed individuals to watch the process
- The petitions that went forward - I was interested
- Hearing John McDougall MP speak to passionately about host and substance misuse – substance misuse was relevant to my work. Changes could be made to the few to save lives
- Listening to the people who was putting their petition forward
- The insight of how the committee works
- The range of topics covered

Afternoon Workshop

- It was run by a very efficient MSP
- The workshop – found it interesting
- You got to have your say in a one to one basis with an MSP. Also gauging what others thought
- Everyone could talk – only certain people could talk in the morning
- Mainly because it tended to focus on information and processes
- Practical advice from the Clerk

Both Parts

- Whole experience was of interest and beneficial. Will be presenting a petition on 22 February
- Both – each had much to teach me
- The two together were more valuable together than separate
- In the morning all the people presented their relevant case studies positively and were heard positively. Afternoon workshop was full of very good information.
- It gives us the chance to have our say

10. If you could recommend one change to future events that would be an improvement, what would that be?

Venue / Layout

- A screen for people to look at and read. I recommend that in the future the agenda needs to be issued before the actual meeting.
- Get a decent venue which is clean, warm and make available light refreshments at the start
- Venue
- In this particular venue loss of vision due to pillars, resetting room for full unobstructed view
- The committee should meet in buildings that are adequately heated.
- Better signage outside
- The sound system in the afternoon was poor
• MPs not using microphones enough – felt they were isolated from the public
• A warmer venue

Breaks/Refreshments
• More breaks during the meeting as I got very sore and stiff sitting. Also tea/coffee as you arrive
• Tea/coffee should be offered at the start of meetings. Committee should take a break if the meeting is long
• Coffee on arrival and at 11.00am.
• Having a drink on arrival and also another break as it went on 10am to 3.30
• Refreshments available to invited guests at the same time as committee members adjourn for coffee
• To have more breaks/ to be welcomed by a cup of tea
• Chance to stretch legs between petitions

Format
• The chair got all MSPs to introduce themselves but none of the officials did it. It would be better if they did and said what they did
• Workshop in the morning, committee in the afternoon
• After the petitions committee I would like to have time aside for questions from the floor
• Watching a committee meeting is very dry. Not sure if an all day event is necessary - certainly see democracy in action though
• When discussing the petitions which are ongoing, a brief resume of what the petition was about would benefit those people who had not been at the committee when the petition was originally made

Other
• Levels of questions – everyone does not know the overall national situation
• More publicity – no mention in local papers to tell public this was on

11. How worthwhile do you think it was to attend the event?

Very Worthwhile

Gaining knowledge about process and procedures
• The event brought an insight to the Parliament that was much needed
• Relieved many personal concerns and worries about the process and meeting MSPs
• Gaining knowledge of petitioning parliament which previously I knew nothing about
• I understand the intentions of the committee but feel recommendations made and information sought were relevant
• Never realised the public could participate
• Now we can let people know what the Petitions Committee do and how to get help when we go around doing our talks in the west Fife villages.
• We have learned that the process is accessible and may be useful to our ???

11
• Because it lets the public know what is happening
• Good to know procedures
• It gave me knowledge of how to submit petitions
• I knew nothing about how committee worked or how petitioning process worked. Now I feel that I have a much better idea

Gaining knowledge about what is happening around the local area

• One should know more of what is going on in the town of Dunfermline
• Being registered blind it put me in touch with events

Other
• Openess of all the MSPs being encouraging to petitioners – impressed with the cross party deliberations. Very helpful to all
• It is important to be able to see our parliament at work especially when a local opportunity arises

Quite Worthwhile

• I remain unconvinced on the basis of those petitions considered, whether it would make a difference.
• I know how committees do their job

13. Any other comments?

General thanks

• Thank you for the opportunity which will help us to enhance our support for people with cystic fibrosis in Scotland
• Thanks to all for such a wonderful experience
• My thanks to the Committee members and the Clerks for their work and assistance on the day, it was very helpful and informative
• I think the Committee coming into the community is a very worthwhile event and hope it continues in the future
• Anything that improves this for people has to be encouraged

Publicise success

• One tends to be only interested in one’s own petition. If it is used effectively it can get lots of side benefits. As a benefit and good idea of the Scottish Parliament it is little exploited by them
• A positive side to the Scottish Parliament, should have more publicity, especially its successes
• Keep up the good work on behalf of all the constituents you all serve, publish the good things done by the public petitions committee work and strive to take on board to a successful conclusion the issues raised at today’s meeting.
Further information

- Could our group have some handouts to pass on to the public when we do our talks around the west villages in Fife.
- Would like more information about the parliament in general and the other various committees

Other

- Individuals who had raised local issues were expected to answer questions “nationally”. Whist organisations should be expected to answer on a national level individuals shouldn’t
- Any correspondence be in large print
Introduction

1. The Committee is invited to consider and agree the following revised administrative procedures for the consideration of public petitions.

Background

2. The consideration of petitions by the Committee can be a lengthy process and this proposal is intended to partly alleviate this.

Current Procedure

3. Following initial consideration of a petition the Committee will generally agree to seek the views of various organisations with an interest in the issues raised by the petition. Respondents are given a deadline, usually six weeks, to respond and after all or most of the responses have been received the petition is then timetabled for further consideration by the Committee. The responses are not made public until the committee meeting at which the petition is further considered. In many cases the Committee having considered these responses will simply agree to invite the views of the petitioner.

4. However, given the number of petitions which the Committee has open at any one time there can be a considerable gap between the responses being received and the Committee having the opportunity to consider them. At present, petitions may only be considered by the Committee twice a year. Given this timescale we have recently extended the deadline for responses to 3 months rather than 6 weeks.

Revised Procedure

5. In an attempt to reduce the length of time between each substantive consideration of a petition the Committee is invited to consider that at the same time as agreeing to write to various organisations for their views on a petition, consideration is also given to agreeing that these responses should be forwarded
to the petitioners for their views before the petition is then brought back to the Committee. This would be done on a cases by case basis.

6. This will have a number of advantages. First, the Committee will have the opportunity to consider the views of the various interested organisations and the comments of the petitioners on those responses at the same meeting. Second, it will reduce the time between the responses being received and the petitioner having the opportunity to provide comments. Third, it will free up slots on the agenda for committee meetings and, therefore, hopefully reduce the length of time which it takes for petitions to progress.

7. However, it will mean that responses will become public before the Committee has had the opportunity to consider them.

Options for Action

8. The Committee is invited to consider and agree these revised procedures for the consideration of petitions.

Committee Clerk
March 2006