The Committee will consider the following new petitions—

**PE945** Petition by Susan Green calling for the Scottish Parliament to consider and debate the inadequacy of the existing legislation for parental consultation over school closures.

**PE955** Petition by Catriona Lessani, on behalf of the Parents Action Group of St Kevin’s Primary School, calling for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to review the implementation of its guidance on school closures to ensure that parents and pupils are properly consulted.

**PE947** Petition by DECIDE (Dornock Eastriggs Creca Initiative Development Enterprise) calling for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to provide community groups with the right to take ownership of land where it is currently ownerless or abandoned by its owner/s for seven years.

**PE925** Petition by George Campbell, on behalf of the National Alliance Against Tolls Scotland, calling for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive not to extend the tolling regimes on the remaining toll bridges (Erskine, Forth and Tay), but instead to take over the bridges and their approaches as part of the national road system and to remove the tolls forthwith.

**PE951** Petition by Walter Dean calling on the Scottish Parliament to ensure higher parliamentary standards by

(a) amending the Scottish Parliamentary Standards Commissioner Act 2002 to put in place an appeal mechanism for complainants whose complaints to the Commissioner have been rejected;
(b) providing adequate resources for the Standards Commissioner to carry out these functions properly; and
(c) amending the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 to ensure that the Standards Commissioner is subject to its provisions.
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.

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<tr>
<td>Susan Green – St Edmunds Primary</td>
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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
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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.

Jack McConnell, First Minister, Scottish Executive; Peter Peacock, Education
Minister, Scottish Executive; Ronnie O’Connor, Director of Education, Glasgow City
Council; Education Committee, Glasgow City Council; Johann Lamont MSP,
Glasgow Pollok; Councillor Keith Baldassara; Councillor Willie O’Rourke; Councillor
Iris Gibson; Councillor Josephine Dodds; Rosie Kane MSP; Lewis Macdonald,
Deputy Transport and Planning Minister, Scottish Parliament; Parliamentary and
Health Service Ombudsman; Councillor Steven Purcell

Petitioners appearing before the Committee
The Convener of the Committee may invite petitioners to appear before the Public Petitions
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of their petition.

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

I DO request to make a brief statement before the Committee [ ]
I DO NOT request 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 ...

Date 13/01/2006

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: petitions@scottish.parliament.uk
Public Petitions Committee – a template for public petitions

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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

Catriona Lessani

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

Petition by Catriona Lessani, on behalf of the Parents Action Group of St Kevin’s Primary School, calling for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to review the implementation of its guidance on school closures to ensure that parents and pupils are properly consulted.

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Jack McConnell, First Minister
Scottish Executive, Peter Peacock, Education Minister
Scottish Executive, Michael O'Neil, Director of Education
North Lanarkshire District Council, Elaine Smith MSP,
Alex Neil MSP, Carolyn Leckie MSP, Donald Gory MSP,
Margaret Curran MSP, Councillor Andy Burns,
Councillor Jim Smith, Councillor Tom McGuinness,
Director of Services Murdo Maciver, Ron Defour
Education Officer, Charles Gray Convenor of the Council.

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

I DO request to make a brief statement before the Committee ☒

I DO NOT request 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  ____________________________________________________________

Date  ________________________________________________________________

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The Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee,
The Scottish Parliament,
Edinburgh
EH9 1SP
Tel: 0131 348 5186       Fax: 0131 348 5088
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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

Mrs. Diane Huddleston

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

Petition by DECIDE (Dornock Eastriggs Creca Initiative Development Enterprise) calling for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to provide community groups with the right to take ownership of land where it is currently ownerless or abandoned by its owner/s for seven years.

Additional information:
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This petition arises from attempts to acquire on behalf of the community a long term vacant plot of land within the village boundaries. The unsuccessful attempt included:

- consultations with Land Registry and local council to attempt to establish current ownership (copy of search result enclosed as Appendix 1)
- consultation with local councillor (Sean Marshall)
- consultation with several MSPs during a fact finding visit (copy of the itinerary and a letter from Derek Brownlee as Appendices 2 and 3)

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

I DO request to make a brief statement before the Committee ✓

I DO NOT request 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 ......

Date 9 March 2006

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
Scottish Parliament Petitions Committee 19th April 2006

Public Petition PE947

"Petition by DECIDE (Dornock Eastriggs Creca Initiative Development Enterprise) calling for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to provide community groups with the right to take ownership of land where it is currently ownerless or abandoned by its owner/s for seven years."

The purpose of such acquisition would be to:

- provide an opportunity for the community to acquire otherwise unutilised land to be used to benefit the community as a whole
- enable derelict, unsightly and/or potentially dangerous land to be managed
- prevent private individuals or companies acquiring unclaimed land by virtue of usage for their own profit and/or for use against public interest or wishes

where the following definitions apply:

"Ownerless or abandoned land"

To qualify an area of land, regardless of size, condition or existing constructions, must meet the following conditions:

- the whole of the area identified must fall within the boundaries of the claiming community
- the land must clearly have been unused by it’s owner, if any, for a period of not less than seven years
- reasonable attempts to establish any owner have been unsuccessful.

The exception to this would be if the land had already been acquired through this process, not less than two years before, and the group had made no use of the land and could not demonstrate any plans for its use in progress. Another group may then apply to take ownership so long as they could demonstrate that they had achievable plans and had been unable to reach an agreement with the group to whom the land had previously been awarded.

"Community groups"

Any properly constituted organisation, group, charity or trust which is controlled by the residents of the area in which the land is situated and whose main purpose is to the benefit of the community as a whole, whether it be social, economic or educational. This could include a group created specifically for the purpose of taking ownership of the land. "take ownership"
Once a piece of land has been identified which a community group believes falls within the definition, the group must make reasonable attempts to identify a legal owner, including Land Registry searches, enquiries with the local council and advertising in local newspapers and at the site. If no owner can be identified the group may then apply for ownership.

If more than one group has a valid claim for ownership it shall be awarded into joint ownership.

If a valid owner is identified within five years after any land being awarded to a local group that owner shall be entitled to claim reimbursement from the community group of the value of the land at the time it was awarded to the community group (during this process it may be suggested that the community group take out adequate insurance against this eventuality).

Usage of land

Acquisition of land through this process shall carry certain conditions:

- no individual or commercial organisation within or outside the community shall benefit directly or indirectly from the acquisition of the land except in so far as the land is being utilised for the community benefit
- the land may only be used for the benefit of the community, whether directly as, for example, the site for a community activity, or indirectly by deriving an income for the use of the community is some other way as, for example, providing nursery facilities
- if the group owning/managing the land is dissolved the land must be disposed of as any other asset and for the benefit of the community, this could include donating it to another local organisation
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:

George Campbell

Text of petition:

Petition by George Campbell, on behalf of the National Alliance Against Tolls Scotland, calling for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive not to extend the tolling regimes on the remaining toll bridges (Erskine, Forth and Tay), but instead to take over the bridges and their approaches as part of the national road system and to remove the tolls forthwith.

Period for gathering signatures:

Closing date: 31 January 2006
Additional information:

A decision is needed now on the issue of Scotland's three remaining tolls - Erskine, Forth and Tay. This is partly because of the "Tolled Bridges Review" but in any case tolls will soon end on two bridges unless the Executive make an Order to keep them. Tolling periods were extended, but the existing power for tolls on the Erskine Bridge ceases on 1 July 2006 (originally 1991) and on the Forth Bridge on 31 March 2006 (originally 1995).

Submissions against the tolling regime on one or more of the bridges have been made by:-

Argyll & Bute Council - "this Council reiterates its fundamental objection to tolls continuing on the Erskine Bridge"

Dunbartonshire Chamber of Commerce - "It is our policy that the tolls on the Erskine Bridge should be withdrawn .... Tolls create an artificial barrier to trade and discourage the free and true movement of goods and labour from one side of the Clyde to the other."

Federation of Small Businesses - "Ideally we would envisage the bridges being part of the wider trunk road network and consequently toll-free."

Fife Council - "Council has reaffirmed its principled opposition to bridge tolls"

Freight Transport Association - "would prefer to see all bridges toll free"

Glasgow City Council - "... Council's view that the tolls on the Erskine Bridge should be abolished."

Inverclyde Council - "... considered that tolling on the Erskine Bridge will have adverse effects ... especially on the lower Clyde. As a result the Council agreed that tolling on the Erskine Bridge should end immediately"

Renfrewshire Council - "... continues to hold the view that the bridge should be free in the same manner as the remainder of the strategic road network in this area.... The strong social, economic and environmental arguments for abolishing tolls on the Erskine Bridge were forcibly made to the Executive ... in a letter signed by the 9 Council leaders associated with the Clyde Valley Community Planning partnership."

Scottish Council for Development and Industry - "As a supporting mechanism for economic development and social inclusion, SCDI feels that the abolition of tolls on all bridges in Scotland would be the most equitable course of action".

Strathclyde Passenger Transport - "... the ongoing presence of tolls on the (Erskine) bridge affects accessibility to employment opportunities, adversely affects local communities and increases traffic flows on the A82, the Clyde tunnel and the M8 in Renfrewshire."

Transport Research Institute - "remove all tolls and pay for maintenance etc from fuel duty"

West Of Scotland Transport Partnership - "The Partnership believes that tolls on the Erskine Bridge should be abolished."

Some of the points that we have made to MSPs and the Executive:-

Bridge Tolls were intended to be temporary
Tolled crossings were promoted at Westminster on the basis that tolls would only be levied for a limited period, during which the original cost of construction would be recovered. Some tolls remain, because promises have been broken and the goal posts moved to keep the income from tolls.

Unfair
Tolling is discriminatory and unfair to the few who have to use these roads. Tolls are regressive and unrelated to income or size of car. They hit those who have to travel long distances to work and who already spend a disproportionate amount of their income on fuel duty and other roads taxes.
Uneconomic
Tourists avoid areas where there are tolls. Businesses where road transport is important will prefer to locate elsewhere. The removal of these three tolls, would give Scotland a competitive advantage in attracting business from other areas of the UK and EU that suffer from tolls.

Tolls Income is an infinitesimal part of Scotland's budget
Tolls on the three bridges raise a gross amount of about £21 million, (Erskine £5m, Forth £12m, Tay £4m). This is a great deal of money to the few who carry the burden, but it is insignificant in relation to the Executive's budget of £27 billion for 2005/06, or the £4 billion or more which is Scotland's share of UK taxes on roads users. If the bridges were assimilated into the normal road network, then there would be large savings in administration and toll collection, and maintenance needs could be judged more objectively.

Tolls do not reduce "Congestion"
When Forth bridge tolls were last increased the authorities said (press release 21st April) that the new level of tolls "would not deter significant numbers of bridge users". Toll collection prolongs congestion periods. Where there is a choice, drivers avoid toll roads and use other roads, causing longer journeys, more fuel consumption and more emissions. Toll advocates also want to bring in higher tolls at certain times and/or on faster lanes. In the USA these are referred to as "Lexus" tolls or lanes, as it is the drivers of big luxury cars who use them.

New Forth road bridge
It has been suggested that a new bridge is needed because either the existing bridge will have to be closed due to corrosion or to cope with increasing traffic. Traffic is actually less in 2005 than it was in 2003 and there are various ways in which traffic flow can be improved. If it is proved that a new bridge is needed at some stage then this should be provided as part of the national road network.

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Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting an e-petition:

The NAAT Scotland made a submission to the Executive as part of the consultation on the current Tolled Bridges Review. We have also been in contact with various MSPs.
### Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting an e-petition:

The NAAT Scotland made a submission to the Executive as part of the consultation on the current Talled Bridges Review. We have also been in contact with various MSPs.

### 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.*

Why should anyone consider it to be fair to continue with an archaic tolls system when roads users are already paying about £7 to Gordon Brown for every £1 that is spent on the roads?

### Petitioners appearing before the Committee

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| I do NOT wish to make a brief statement before the Committee | □ |

### Signature of principal petitioner:

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<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>19 December 2005</td>
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For advice on the content and wording of your e-petition please contact:

The Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee
The Scottish Parliament
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<td>Professor Dixie Dean</td>
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<td>Petition by Walter Dean calling on the Scottish Parliament to ensure higher parliamentary standards by (a) amending the Scottish Parliamentary Standards Commissioner Act 2002 to put in place an appeal mechanism for complainants whose complaints to the Commissioner have been rejected; (b) providing adequate resources for the Standards Commissioner to carry out these functions properly; and (c) amending the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 to ensure that the Standards Commissioner is subject to its provisions.</td>
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<td>Please enter the closing date for gathering signatures on your petition, which we would usually recommend is a period of between 4-6 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing date: 6th April 2006</td>
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*template for e-petitions, July 2004*
There is evidence under the current system Parliamentary standards are low and protection of MSP is accorded far higher priority than protection of the public interest, which may be a significant contributor to current cynicism.

It may be that this threatens to undermine democracy itself yet a single Commissioner maintains Standards working alone with no office facilities. There is no realistic channel of appeal against questionable decisions.

There appear to be many cases where Commissioner decisions have disappointed the public. Parliament's respect for its own standards, those the public wishes to see, and a more serious attempt to maintain them would, I suggest, encourage and perhaps renew public confidence.

For example:

For three years a campaigning Constituent lobbied his MSP with significant questions related to the Executive's failure to deliver national mental health and asked the MSP to raise them in Parliament. The MSP did not respond to his communications, hence denied him representation.

The MSP continued to ignore the Constituent's letters for six more months. After Constituent complaint to the Commissioner the MSP abruptly asked some mental health questions - but none related to the Constituent's interests, simply requesting published information readily available. The MSP still refuses to discuss those he asks; still will not respond to his letters, hence still denies him representation.

Protocols ensure the MSP's actions inhibit other, Regional MSP from taking interest, closing the only other channel the Constituent has for access to Parliament. In effect, the Constituent has been disenfranchised.
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Approaches have been made to my local MSP, seven N.E. Region MSP, the Parliamentary Standards Commissioner and others. No one has shown interest, which generated this petition.

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.

Many people believe standards of conduct in public institutions are unacceptably low and far from the Nolan Principles of Conduct in Public Life. Parliament is highest in the land so MSP public commitment to higher standards there would exert pressure on other institutions to do the same.

Petitioners appearing before the Committee
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I DO request to make a brief statement before the Committee

I DO NOT request 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 ...

Date 16th February 2006

For advice on the content and wording of your e-petition please contact:
The Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 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
Petition PE951

Maintenance of Parliamentary Standards

A. That the public is seriously concerned about debate, conduct, transparency, ‘tokenist’ response to constituents and general standards in Parliament is widely recognised

Respected authorities and the media have frequently proposed this as a major cause of national disaffection with both Parliament and government, which are de facto supported by a minority of the electorate as shown by low and diminishing voter turn out

There can be little doubt democracy itself is under threat in Scotland and serious self examination by MSP rather than focus on systemic change would, I submit, renew confidence

B. Common perception is that the current system for maintaining standards is unduly balanced towards the protection of MSP rather than their regulation, as demonstrated by my recent experience of submitting a Complaint as well as other examples reported to me

In passing please note that the public relates this to its perception of similar inadequacies in Public Ombudsman services

C. Experience suggests only extremely strong evidence of financial or other ‘Interest’ impropriety is ever seriously investigated, rarely other matters arguably of equal or more interest to individual constituents, the public interest or electorate at large
D. I understand new measures related to the Standards Commissioner Office are or may soon be under consideration.

Whilst welcome it would again reflect public concerns should these be used as ‘window dressing’ to create yet another illusion of improvement – perhaps even suggest strengthening of MSP protection rather than reduction of it.

E. I respectfully submit that increasing resources for the Commissioner's Office without ensuring realistic appeal facilities, transparency and accountability might well deepen the problems leading to this petition, hence increase public cynicism.

F. Britain is the ‘Mother of Parliaments’ - reason for pride in our MSP. But election carries onerous responsibility to be exercised with humility, in the national interests, and above all preserving democracy. Petition dismissal might be interpreted as Parliament approval of current standards hence contempt for the electorate.

I conclude by recognising that MSP need protection but submit that has gone too far and needs redressing in the public interest by amending the Act as Petitioned.