The Committee is invited to consider and agree to the publication of the attached draft annual report.

Committee Clerk
April 2006

The Committee reports to the Parliament as follows—

Introduction

1. This Report covers the work of the Public Petitions Committee during the Parliamentary year from 7 May 2005 to 6 May 2006. The Committee welcomes the continued positive feedback which it has received from many petitioners as illustrated by this comment: ‘The system of petitions to Parliament is an excellent method for members of the public to exercise the right to have their say on important issues.’

Petitions considered

2. During the period of this report the Committee considered 122 new petitions and heard oral evidence from 51 of these petitioners. In terms of the subject matter of petitions, 21 related to health and community care while 12 related to planning matters. Other recurring themes were education issues with 6 petitions relating to school provision and especially school closures and 6 petitions relating to bridge tolls. Common good assets also emerged as a salient issue for the Committee.

3. As in previous years, the Committee can identify a number of petitions which continue to illustrate the effectiveness of the system:

   - **PE786** In response to this petition from the Scottish Burned Children’s Club, the Scottish Building Standards Agency has agreed changes to regulations from 1 May 2006 aimed at preventing children being scalded from hot water.

   - **PE882** The petitioner who submitted this e-petition wrote to the Clerk stating: ‘The response to the e-petition calling for the establishment of a direct link flight between Stornoway and Aberdeen has been highly successful, with nearly 1500 signatures in the first two weeks online.’ While the e-petition was “live” Eastern Airways (UK) Limited agreed to launch such a service.

   - **PE798** The petitioner responding to the Committee stated: ‘Thank you very much for sending the responses from the Ministers regarding our Petition. We are very heartened with progress so far – in particular the interim funding as promised, as well as the steps which have been taken to carry out an independent National Review of Wheelchair Services.’
Committee Events

4. The Committee continues to actively promote the public petitions system and has held two further events in its rolling programme aimed at providing practical advice and guidance on petitioning the Parliament. The first event was held in Ayr in June 2005 and the second event was held in Dunfermline in January 2006. Both events included formal meetings of the Committee at which a number of local petitioners were invited to give evidence.

5. The Committee acknowledges from the feedback at these events that there continues to be a need to publicise the petitions system. For example, one petitioner stated: ‘I was only aware that I could raise a petition after visiting the website. Perhaps more public awareness through press, leaflets etc.’ One suggestion that the Committee has taken up is to produce an educational DVD, *Petitioning the Scottish Parliament*, which was launched in December 2005 and is available from the clerks.

E-petitioning

6. 41 e-petitions have been submitted over the period of this report, a number of which are still active, attracting over 22,000 signatures.

7. The Committee also welcomes the continued global interest in the e-petitions system and notes that the German Bundestag launched a pilot of e-petitioner on 1 September 2005. The system has also been awarded an eGovernment good practice label and was selected as a finalist for an eEurope award on eGovernment. The Committee was invited to exhibit the system at the Ministerial Conference in Manchester on 24-25 November 2005 and made the final shortlist of 4 nominees from over 100 submissions.

Equality issues

8. The Committee continues to mainstream equality and will shortly publish its annual equalities report based on statistics collated from equal opportunities monitoring forms which all petitioners are asked to complete. The Committee also continues to target equality groups in organising committee events. The Committee also provided BSL interpretation services at two of its meetings in this parliamentary period.

Inquiries and Reports

9. The Committee published no reports during this parliamentary period.
Bills and Subordinate legislation

10. The Committee did not deal with any bills or subordinate legislation during the year.

Meetings

11. The Committee met 20 times from 7 May 2005 to 6 May 2006. All of these meetings were held in public with only 1 item being held in private for the purpose of considering a claim for witness expenses. In addition to meeting in Edinburgh, the Committee also met in Ayr and Dunfermline.