REPORT OF THE PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE EVENT,
JEDBURGH, 26 JUNE 2006

Introduction

1. The Public Petitions Committee (PPC) held the fifth event in its rolling programme of external meetings at Jedburgh Town Hall on Monday 26 June 2006. In order to make it more open and accessible to the local community, the meeting was held in the evening. The formal meeting was followed by an informal question and answer session where members of the public could comment on the meeting and ask questions about the petitions system. This report provides background to the event and a brief summary of the main issues which arose during the evening.

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.

5. The fourth promotional event was held in Dunfermline on 30 January 2006. Again, this meeting allowed local petitioners to present their petitions to the Committee in front of their local community.

6. The Committee agreed to hold it fifth promotional event in Jedburgh on 26 June 2006.
Formal Meeting of the PPC

7. At its meeting in Jedburgh, the PPC considered four new petitions and three 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.

8. In addition to the Members of the Committee, constituency MSP Euan Robson and regional list MSP Christine Grahame also attended this meeting. A member of the Parliament’s public information staff was available to provide general information on the work of the Scottish Parliament.

9. The meeting was held in public and 64 members of the public attended.

10. The Minutes of this meeting are attached at Annexe A. Regrettably, there will be no Official Report (the substantially verbatim written report of proceedings) of this meeting as the recording of the meeting was stolen along with other recording equipment shortly after the meeting took place. Speaking after the theft, Convener of the Public Petitions Committee Michael McMahon MSP said:

With passionate submissions on subjects including “the role of rural and community hospitals” and “the funding of Citizen Advice Bureaux”, we are hopeful that the police investigations will be successful or that someone will see fit to hand the recordings in.

“All of the members of our committee are very disappointed that the official record of evidence from Jedburgh has been stolen not least because it is representative of a lot of hard work on the part of the petitioners.”

11. All of the new petitions considered by the Committee originated in Jedburgh or the Scottish Borders. The subject matter of these petitions included the funding of Citizen’s Advice Bureaux, bankruptcy, the role of rural and community hospitals and the diagnosis and treatment of sleep disorders.

12. The PPC agreed to seek views from a number of organisations in relation to each of these petitions. Full details of all decisions taken by the Committee are provided in the Minute. Once responses to these petitions have been received the petitioners will be invited to provide comments on those responses. The Committee will then consider what further action to take in relation to each of the petitions.

13. The current petitions considered by the Committee, which also originated in the Borders area, related to a sports academy in the Borders, European funding for the South of Scotland and the right to buy land or premises for member-based sports clubs. Again, the outcome of the Committee discussion of these petitions is provided in the Minutes.

14. Petitioners are kept up to date with the progress of their petition throughout the 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).

The Question and Answer session

15. The Committee was pleased that many members of the public who had been observing proceedings from the public gallery participated in the lively question and answer session which followed the formal Committee meeting.

16. Following some brief introductory remarks by the Convener of the Committee, Michael McMahon MSP, members of the public were invited to ask a question or comment on proceedings.

17. A number of issues emerged during this session:

- **Comment**: This has been an interesting experience and the fact the Committee has tried to bring central Government out to the people is important. It is also important to know the system is accessible.

- **Question** – I have a question about the Committee’s priorities. I got the impression the Committee was slightly more favourable to the last petition than the petition on Community Hospitals. Would you respond to that?

  **Answer** – The Committee considers all petitions equally. Where a petition raises an issue which the Committee may not have previously considered in any great detail, such as sleep disorders, Committee Members may spend more time gathering information from the petitioner. Where a petition raises issues with which the Committee is already familiar or on which previous petitions have been submitted, such as the closure NHS hospitals, the Committee may not need to devote as much time gathering information from the petitioner.

- **Question** – How can the PPC influence a decision the Minister has already taken on cottage hospitals?

  **Answer** – It is the Minister for Health’s role to approve proposals such as that announced by NHS Borders in relation to Coldstream Cottage Hospital. The Committee’s primary role is to scrutinise the work of the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Ministers. By asking the Minister to respond to petitions which have been placed before the Committee and bringing to his attention discussions which have taken place at meetings of the Committee, the Committee can ensure that the Minister is aware of the strength of feeling that exists and the arguments which have been made.

- **Comment from a petitioner** – The process is excellent. There was a lot of guidance from the staff and the feeling that they were on our side. It is good that the Committee come out to hear people asking questions. I think it is a very good experience and a good thing for the Scottish Parliament.
Comment from petitioner - One of the sad things is that there are no school children in the hall. We have schools who could have sent representatives here. We should involve young people. Particularly with the Public Petitions Committee. We should invite them to such events. We need to make sure the next generation are aware and involved in the Scottish Parliament.

Response from Committee – The Committee is keen to encourage the participation and involvement of young people in the petitions process. The Committee has considered a significant number of petitions from both primary schools and high schools (including petition PE849 which was considered by the Committee today) and works closely with the Parliament’s Education Services department to reach out to children and young people. The next event in the Committee’s rolling programme will take place in a secondary school in Glasgow.

Comment from previous petitioner – This previous petitioner spoke about his petition being closed and asked the committee to tell the present petitioners that the same would happen to theirs.

Response from the Committee – The Committee will only close petitions once it feels there is nothing further it can usefully do to pursue the petition.

Question – Your evaluation form asks how we knew about this session. I would like to ask if you contact the rotary clubs in the areas you go to invite them to these sessions.

Answer – A range of community groups and organisation, including the rotary club, are invited to attend events organised by the Committee. The Committee is particularly keen to reach out to individuals and organisations who may not otherwise be engaged with the Parliament.

Comment – I helped to present a petition in the past and was very comfortable with it. The outcome was not successful but the experience of being involved in bringing a petition was very positive and impressive.

Feedback

18. All attendees were asked to complete an evaluation questionnaire. In general the feedback from completed questionnaire’s was very positive. The only area which attracted any significant negative comment was in relation to the information supplied before the event. 5% regarded this information as “excellent” and 42% as “good”. However 42% thought “fair” and 11% “poor”. The results of the questionnaire are provided in the following charts:
The information supplied before the event

- Excellent: 5%
- Poor: 11%
- Good: 42%
- Fair: 42%

The organisation of the event

- Excellent: 32%
- Fair: 5%
- Good: 63%

The venue and facilities

- Excellent: 32%
- Fair: 0%
- Good: 68%
The formal Committee meeting

- Excellent: 21%
- Good: 74%
- Fair: 5%
- Poor: 0%

The Question and Answer session

- Excellent: 26%
- Good: 69%
- Fair: 5%
- Poor: 0%

The overall usefulness of the event

- Excellent: 32%
- Good: 63%
- Fair: 5%
- Poor: 0%
19. Additional comments provided are reproduced in full below:

Advertising seems skewed. Posters and newspapers do not generally reach the under 30s. What about local radio/TV?

Really useful to see Committee in action and get a sense of its effectiveness.

Does the relatively low public attendance reflect general disillusionment with the parliamentary process? Excellent time keeping! An approachable Committee who appear to be listening.

Perhaps more on purpose of public presence.

Could copies of the submissions from the speakers be made available to the public.

Had the members used the stage /stood up when the introduced themselves, people on the floor would have had a better view. Question and answer session was excellent. The explanation of the workings of the Petitions Committee was very clear – Thank you.

Meetings should be on time and committee members should not wander in late with no apology. Most of committee were inaudible to majority of audience. Excellent to see Parliament working and being brought out to different parts of the community.

Very useful insight into Parliament workings and accessibility. Appreciate some of the problems raised. Not sure exactly what to expect as this is the first event I have attended. Must visit Holyrood! Coffee and biscuits good!!

A very interesting event and certainly it must be right to try and bring central government to the people.
Very interesting. I asked about informing local Rotary Club. I understood the answer but I still think informing them would be a good idea. Getting anybody here from organisations of any kind must be hard.

Interesting and informative.

Conclusions and Recommendations

20. The next in its current series of events is a formal meeting of the Committee in Glasgow at the end of October. This meeting will take place in an inner-city high school and it is anticipated that the Committee will consider a petition from pupils from the school.

Dr Jim Johnston
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PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE

MINUTES

12th Meeting, 2006 (Session 2)

Monday 26 June 2006

Present:

Helen Eadie
Michael McMahon (Convener)
John Farquhar Munro
John Scott (Deputy Convener)
Sandra White

Apologies were received from Charlie Gordon, Jackie Baillie and Rosie Kane

Also present: Christine Grahame MSP and Euan Robson MSP.

The meeting opened at 6.09 pm.

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

PE973 Petition by Aileen Orr calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive, following the recent closure of four Citizens Advice Bureaux in the Scottish Borders and the cuts in the opening hours of a further four centres, to ensure that adequate resources are provided to prevent cuts in services both in the Scottish Borders and elsewhere in Scotland.

The Committee heard from Aileen Orr and agreed to seek views on the petition from the Scottish Borders Council, COSLA, Citizens Advice Scotland and the Scottish Executive and to seek the views of the petitioner on these responses once they have been received.

PE974 Petition by Jesse Rae calling on the Scottish parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to review the operation of the Accountant in bankruptcy to ensure the rights and wellbeing of debtors and their families are fully considered during the sequestration process and to place all aspects of the sequestration process within the remit of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.
The Committee heard from Jesse Rae and agreed to seek views on the petition from the Scottish Public Services Ombudsmen, the Accountant in Bankruptcy, Money Advice Scotland and the Scottish Executive and to seek the views of the petitioner on these responses once they have been received.

PE972 Petition by Rev Jim Watson calling for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to fulfil its commitment in the Partnership Agreement to “develop the important role of community hospitals, and develop a strategy for sustaining small, rural and community hospitals” especially in areas such as the Scottish Borders.

The Committee heard from Rev. Jim Watson and agreed to seek views on the petition from NHS Borders, the Scottish Borders Council and the Scottish Executive and to seek the views of the petitioner on these responses once they have been received.

PE953 Petition by Ms Jean Gall, on behalf of the Scottish Association of Sleep Apnoea, calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to increase awareness, promote the proper diagnosis and treatment and provide sufficient resources, including adequately funded sleep centres, to tackle the health problems associated with Obstructive Sleep Apnoea.

The Committee heard from Jean Gall, Colin Tyler and Dr Renato Riah and agreed to seek views on the petition from the Sleep Apnoea Trust, Lothian Sleep Centre, National Services Division of NHSScotland, the Public Health Institute for Scotland and the Scottish Executive and to seek the views of the petitioner on these responses once they have been received.

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

PE849 Petition by Kayleigh Boyd, on behalf of St Ronan’s Primary School, calling for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to establish a sports academy in the Scottish Borders.

The Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Executive.

PE850 Petition by Andrew Wood, on behalf of Supporters of the South of Scotland Alliance, calling for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to apply pressure on the UK Government to renegotiate the NUTS 2 boundaries with the European Commission especially in relation to the South of Scotland.

The Committee agreed to forward a copy of this petition to the European and External Relations Committee for information only and, on the basis that no response has been received from the petitioner, to close consideration of this petition.

PE868 Petition by Ronald M Sutherland calling for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to bring forward legislation to create a right to buy for
member-based community sports clubs occupying or using land and / or premises for recreational or sports purposes.

The Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Executive to express its concern at the lack of response to this petition.

The meeting closed at 8.16 pm.

Dr James Johnston
Clerk to the Committee
Annexe B – List of Attendees

Campbell, A T  David Thomson & Son
Craig, John  Coldstream Hospital Action Group
Craig, Margot  Patient Participation Group - Coldstream Practice
Darling, B R  Gavinton Fogo & Polwarth CC
De Ville, Roy  Elder Voice, Galashiels
Frost, Mike  Lanton Village Hall Comm
Frost, Wendy  Lanton CC
Gall, Jean  Petitioner, Scottish Assoc Sleep Apnoea
Graham, Doreen  Lomond Newband CC
Higgs, George  Racial Equality group
Kenyon, Amy  Weber Shandwick
Miller, John  Hawick High School
Orr, Aileen  Petitioner
Paterson, Margaret  U3A (Third Age Trust)
Rae, Jesse  Petitioner
Renton, F  Gavinton Fogo & Polwarth CC
Riha, Dr Renata  Scottish Association of Sleep Apnoea
Robinson, Margaret  Jedburgh Community Arts
Sharp, Noose  Borders Equality Forum
Tebbutt, Barry  Community Education
Thomson, Vivian  Lomond Newband CC
Tyler, Colin  Scottish Association of Sleep Apnoea
Wild, Robin  Senior Executive Programme
Watson, Rev James  Coldstream Churches Together
Coldstream Hospital Action Group x 11

Individual members of the public

Noble, Dr Lorna Meehan, D  Wyse, Len
Ouldcott, Malcolm  Meehan, V
Shile, Sandra  Gaunt, Mr
Greenwell, John  Gaunt, Mrs
Green, William  Elliot, M
Bathgate, M  Elliot, G
Rankine, A E  Coulson, J
Ramsey, S.  Fotheringham, Ken
Ramsey, A  Fotheringham, J
Ramsey, S.  Dobson, Mr
Ramsey, L  Brown, A
Gillygan, B  Cook, E
Gratehead, R  Millar, I
Annexe B – List of Attendees

Wallace, Mrs                    Hogarth, Mr.
Total:  64 attendees including representatives of 20 organisations