



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

How to submit a public petition

How do I submit a public petition?



This leaflet describes how to petition the Scottish Parliament and how its Public Petitions Committee works.

Introduction

Petitioning the Scottish Parliament is one of the principal means through which members of the public can have a direct influence and role in the policy development process by raising issues of national concern directly with elected Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs). MSPs may not themselves submit petitions but otherwise there are no restrictions on who can submit a petition and there is no requirement to collect numerous signatures in support of a petition, only one signature is required. Petitions can be lodged in any language. The petitions system is therefore key to meeting the Parliament's objectives of:

- power sharing
- accountability
- accessibility
- equal opportunities.

The Public Petitions Committee (PPC)

The PPC is a parliamentary committee dedicated to considering admissible petitions. It generally meets fortnightly when the Parliament is sitting and its meetings are held in public. Its membership broadly reflects the balance of the various political groupings in the Parliament.

New petitions are normally considered at each meeting as well as current petitions. Should the PPC consider it necessary, in order to broaden its understanding of a petition, it may invite a petitioner to give oral evidence before it.

The role of the committee is to consider the issue raised and decide what action to take in respect of each admissible petition.

This may involve hearing oral evidence from the petitioner or seeking written evidence from organisations with an interest in the issues raised e.g. the Scottish Government.

Following consideration of the written and any oral evidence, a decision will be taken as to what further action to take. The committee may refer a petition to the relevant subject committee of the Parliament for further investigation. It can also bid for parliamentary time for a petition to be debated by the whole Parliament. Having considered a petition the PPC (or the relevant subject committee) may agree that no further action is required and close it. In all cases, the petitioner will be notified of any action.

Admissibility of petitions

Petitions should raise issues which relate to matters within the Scottish Parliament's responsibility; in general these will be devolved matters. A list of devolved matters can be found at the bottom of this page.

Some issues are dealt with by the UK Parliament. These are known as reserved matters and include things like foreign policy, defence and national security, employment legislation and social security. For reserved matters petitioners may wish to raise their concerns directly with their Westminster MP or through the UK Government's petition system (<http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk>).

Devolved matters include:

- agriculture, forestry and fishing
- education and training
- environment
- Gaelic
- health
- housing
- law and home affairs
- local government
- natural and built heritage
- planning
- police and fire services
- social work
- sport and the arts
- statistics and public records
- tourism and economic development
- transport

A primary role of the PPC is to hold the Scottish Government to account. It has no remit to intervene in the operational decisions or actions of other public bodies in Scotland such as health boards and local authorities. A petition which requests the Parliament to do something it clearly has no power to do is inadmissible.

However, many petitions are driven by the experience of petitioners at a local level. For example, a campaign to stop a local school closure or prevent development on a local playing field. While the PPC cannot become directly involved in such matters it can ask the Scottish Government to review the wider national policies and/or guidance which govern the actions of local authorities and other public bodies.

Petitions may not ask the PPC to adjudicate on personal or commercial interests which should be determined by a court or other tribunal. Petitioners must also be able to demonstrate that there is a public interest in what they are calling for. The PPC is unable to consider petitions that bear on other matters being determined by the courts (sub judge) or which are potentially defamatory or otherwise contain offensive language. Petitions should therefore generally avoid naming individuals.

Petitioners should demonstrate that they have taken previous steps to resolve the issue raised by their petition, for example, through raising it with their MSP or local councillor or directly with the Scottish Government.

Petitions which are the same or substantially similar and which are lodged by or on behalf of the same person or organisation during the same parliamentary session shall be considered inadmissible unless more than a year has passed since the original petition was considered by the PPC.

Advice on admissibility can be obtained from the clerks to the PPC whose contact details are provided at the end. In cases of dispute, the PPC shall decide whether a public petition is admissible.

Outcomes

The petitions process allows ordinary members of the public to have direct influence in the political process. Petitioning provides direct access to elected MSPs and other key policy makers. It can raise the awareness of a particular campaign and put issues on the agenda which might not otherwise be considered by the Parliament or Scottish Government.

Petitions can inform the scrutiny of legislation, lead to changes in the law, or be considered as part of a wider parliamentary or governmental review of policy. They can stimulate parliamentary debate and discussion and can result in policy changes by the government and/or other public bodies.

How do I submit a petition?

Petitions should be submitted using the online system or the template on the Parliament's website. Petitions should include the following information:

- Details of the principal petitioner: Your name, a contact address where all correspondence will be sent to, and an email address (only the petitioner's name will be published).
- Text of petition: state clearly and concisely what action you want the Parliament to take.
- Additional information: provide additional information relevant to your petition and the reasons why you consider the action requested to be necessary. This information will be made available to the PPC prior to its consideration of your petition and should be limited to no more than three sides of A4.
- Action taken before submitting the petition: provide a summary of the action you have taken to resolve the issue of concern including details of elected representatives you have approached.
- Appearing before the PPC: the PPC may invite you to appear before it to speak in support of your petition and answer questions that Members may have. You should indicate whether you are willing to do so.

Completed petitions should be submitted to the clerking team. Section 100 of the Postal Service Act 2000 provides that petitions can be posted to the Parliament free of charge if handed in at a post office. To make use of this service, petitions should be clearly marked "Petition to the Scottish Parliament" and should use the postal address provided overleaf. Where possible electronic submission is encouraged (see email address below). Petitions should not include:

- offensive, intemperate, inflammatory, sarcastic or provocative language or language to which those reading could reasonably take offence
- false or defamatory statements
- information which is protected by an interdict or court order
- commercially sensitive or confidential material
- the names of individuals, or information whereby they may be easily identified, in relation to criminal accusations.

Petitions which do not follow these guidelines will be considered inadmissible, in which case you will be informed in writing.

What if I want to use my petition to gather support?

The [online system](#) enables you to promote your petition on the internet from where you can attract a wider audience and gather names in support before it is formally lodged for consideration by the PPC.

Online petitions can be hosted on the website for an agreed period, usually between four and six weeks.

During this time each online petition can enable visitors and supporters to discuss and debate the petition and related issues. Petitioners should provide some initial comments to stimulate online discussion.

When the period for hosting the online petition is over, it is formally lodged and will be scheduled for consideration by the committee.

What happens next?

You will receive an acknowledgement once your petition has been formally lodged and advised of when it is to be considered.

All petitions are considered in public and petitioners can view proceedings from the public gallery. Alternatively, you can watch live broadcasts, or read transcripts of committee meetings in the Official Report, on our website.

Petitioners are informed by the clerks of decisions taken at the meeting.

Who should I contact if I need assistance or have any queries?

This guidance note is available in a range of different languages. Petitions can also be submitted in Braille and, where appropriate, in other formats by those with individual requirements. You should discuss any such requirements with the Clerk to the Committee.

Further information and advice on the petitions process to the Scottish Parliament can be obtained from:

Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP
Telephone: 0131 348 5254
Email: petitions@scottish.parliament.uk
Website: www.scottish.parliament.uk/petitions

The Scottish Parliament Public Information Service provides information about the Scottish Parliament, its membership, business and procedures. Contact details are given below:

Public Information

Public Information can help you find out about the business, membership and procedures of the Scottish Parliament.

 **Address** Public Information
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

 **Telephone** 0800 092 7500
0131 348 5000

Fòn 0131 348 5395 (Gàidhlig)

Textphone users can contact us on 0800 092 7100. We also welcome calls using the Text Relay service.

 **Text** 07786 209 888
 **Email** sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk
 **Website** www.scottish.parliament.uk
 **Twitter** twitter.com/ScotParl