



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 26 June 2012

Session 4

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - www.scottish.parliament.uk or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Tuesday 26 June 2012

CONTENTS

	Col.
NEW PETITIONS	675
Sports Facilities (PE1434)	675
Scotland-Pakistan Youth Council (PE1435)	684
CURRENT PETITIONS	687
Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 (Snares) (PE1124)	687
Acquired Brain Injury Services (PE1179)	688
Youth Football (PE1319)	689
Institutional Child Abuse (Victims' Forum and Compensation) (PE1351)	690
Lesser-taught Languages and Cultures (University Teaching Funding) (PE1395)	691
Staffordshire Bull Terriers (PE1396)	694
Wild Animals in Circuses (Ban) (PE1400)	694
Access to Insulin Pump Therapy (PE1404)	695
Ferry Fares (PE1421)	698
Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 (PE1422)	701
Public Sector Staff (Talents) (PE1423)	701
Remote and Rural Areas Transport Provision (Access to Care) (Older People) (PE1424)	703

PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE

11th Meeting 2012, Session 4

CONVENER

*David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP)

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP)

*Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab)

*Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con)

*John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP) (Committee Substitute)

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Nairn McDonald (Scottish Youth Parliament)

Katherine Vezza (Scottish Youth Parliament)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Anne Peat

LOCATION

Committee Room 2

Scottish Parliament

Public Petitions Committee

Tuesday 26 June 2012

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 14:03*]

New Petitions

Sports Facilities (PE1434)

The Convener (David Stewart): Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I welcome you all to today's meeting of the Public Petitions Committee. As always, I ask those present to turn off mobile phones and electronic devices because they interfere with our sound system. We have received apologies from Mark McDonald, and Joe FitzPatrick is substituting for him. I thank Joe FitzPatrick for coming along.

Nanette Milne has intimated her resignation from the committee with effect from Thursday. On behalf of the committee, I thank Nanette for all the work that she has done not just for this committee but for its predecessor. We appreciate all her help and thank her for her contribution.

Item 1 is consideration of two new petitions. The first new petition is PE1434, by Nairn McDonald, on additional funding for sports facilities and a minimum level of sports facilities. Members have a note from the clerk, a Scottish Parliament information centre briefing and a copy of the petition. I welcome our two witnesses, Nairn McDonald, who is a member of the Scottish Youth Parliament, and Katherine Vezza, who is the youth engagement worker for the Scottish Youth Parliament. In the past, we have had great contributions from the Scottish Youth Parliament and we appreciate your help in speaking to the petition today. I invite Nairn McDonald to make a short presentation of around five minutes.

Nairn McDonald (Scottish Youth Parliament): After seeing that my own school was missing certain facilities, I was made aware that there is inequality in the sports facilities that are provided in schools in Scotland. In 2006, the national audit for sports found that there was an ageing stock of sports facilities in Scotland. The fact that some schools have superior and excellent facilities is great, but the fact that a large number of children do not have access to such facilities will not help our fight against childhood obesity, heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

As many studies have shown, and as the committee will agree, sport promotes a healthy lifestyle and general fitness. Studies of those who come from deprived backgrounds show that they

are already set back in their lives and have a lower life expectancy, so making sporting facilities available to all members of the public and to children from those backgrounds will help to increase their life expectancy and improve their health. It will also enable them to contribute more to the local community.

When the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament discussed the matter, they said that they wanted a greater use of sport hubs and to unlock the potential of school facilities. The potential of school facilities could be unlocked if all schools had better facilities. I accept that some schools will have superior facilities but, when it is stripped back to the basics, they should all have a minimum level of facilities, which should be provided for all children to access.

Equality between schools can help not only the pupils but the whole community. If a community has a school or an area where facilities are available, it will be able to use those facilities to improve its health, lowering the risk of obesity, heart disease and type 2 diabetes. The benefit will be passed on to their children and to their children's children, making the community a generally better, happier and healthier place.

I realise that sport may be a local government issue, but the policy could be one for the whole of Scotland. If only one school in each local authority did not have the same facilities, that could equate to almost 32,000 young people missing out on opportunities. They may have to travel, or they may be deterred from taking part in sport or even from watching sport altogether. It is not a local issue—it is a national issue for all our young people. In these years of the Olympics and the Commonwealth games, and with Glasgow making a bid for the youth Olympics in 2018, now seems the perfect time to increase and develop our sporting facilities throughout Scotland.

We must ensure that we all have access to at least the same basic level of sporting facilities. In my eyes, that should include an AstroTurf pitch with lighting because, if a school does not have floodlit facilities, they cannot be used in the dark or in the winter unless portable lighting is brought in. There should also be regular safety checks and upgrading of equipment every five years, as equipment gets to the point at which it is not usable any more.

I thank the committee for its time.

The Convener: Thank you for your comments. It is interesting that you make those links with health. Looking ahead in our agenda, I noted that we have items on diabetes, which you mentioned, and youth football, so there is some integration with our later discussions.

I was interested in your point about the importance of having sport hubs and how schools should develop facilities not just for their own pupils but for the local community. Could you say a little bit more about that?

Nairn McDonald: I believe that the school is at the centre of each community. The community or town may have a sports centre, but it may be at the other side of the town. Even in the small town that I come from, there are different communities. The school should be at the centre of its community—it should be the hub where people can go for clubs outwith term time and school time. The facilities should be available for physical education lessons and should broaden the variety of sports that the school provides.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): Many years ago, I benefited from schools being open to the community. I was able to go and play netball and hockey at clubs in the schools because of that, so I am a great believer in schools being available to their communities. I continue to push for that but, many years ago, I was told that not all schools could be opened up. I will give you an example, and you can see whether you agree with it. A school in one of the areas that I represented had a swimming pool and a fitness suite, but the only people who could use them after school hours and at weekends were the teachers. I agree with you 100 per cent that schools should be community hubs.

You said that all schools should have facilities such as AstroTurf pitches with floodlighting and that they should be in the community. I certainly hear from young kids in my constituency that they might not particularly want to go to the school to use the facilities, but they might go to the floodlit pitch down the road. Is a compromise possible there?

Nairn McDonald: Yes. I got the message from my Youth Parliament constituents that they want to play in the floodlit sports facilities, but if schools had those facilities, the compromise might be that instead of going to the floodlit pitch down the road, they would go to the school. That would encourage more young people, who could bring their parents along, and that would encourage more people in the community to get involved.

Sandra White: I have a tiny wee follow-up. We know the cost of using AstroTurf pitches. The prices are reasonable in some areas and in others they are extortionate. If schools were to provide those facilities, do you see them charging for their use during out of school hours?

Nairn McDonald: Yes. North Ayrshire has K:A Leisure, which allows children to use the facilities for free at certain hours. It makes a small but not unreasonable charge of a couple of pounds at

other times. There can be discount options. In North Ayrshire, the clubs get discounts on rents to encourage the use of sporting facilities and to encourage young people to keep up their fitness levels.

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I note that your petition refers to creating

“a minimum level of facilities available.”

You have mentioned floodlit AstroTurf pitches. Are there any other facilities that you think should be part of the minimum provision of sports facilities?

Nairn McDonald: Floodlighting should be a basic requirement for an AstroTurf pitch, although there should also be basic standards for the safety and age of equipment. If the playing equipment is not being renewed or kept in good condition, people will not benefit from it. It deters young people from doing sport if they know that the equipment is 10 or 15 years old; they do not really like the idea of using it, even though it might be perfectly safe. They like the idea of using new, up-to-date basketballs and netballs. There should be a minimum standard for the age and safety of equipment. There should be complete safety checks every couple of years to see whether equipment needs to be replaced or reused or thrown away.

John Wilson: I asked that question about the minimum level of facilities because more and more young people want to take up sports and I believe that if a sport is made available for someone to take up, they might come to excel at it. Sandra White mentioned netball, and other sports that I could list include basketball, swimming, running, hockey and shinty—not everyone wants to play football. We need to make facilities available so that we give a rounded sports education rather than just concentrating on the main sports.

Would you like to see further developments in ensuring that we have more sports facilities in schools that cater for people who want to do those other activities? As you say, the Olympics are taking place this year and the Commonwealth games will take place in 2014. People will engage in many sporting activities during those games and many children in Scotland will never have seen the equipment that is being used by the athletes. Would you like more playing areas to be available in schools such as running tracks, and long jump and high jump facilities?

14:15

Nairn McDonald: I know that AstroTurf can be used for hockey, football and other sports, but I would love to see a facility that could be used for more sports. I could not play football if I tried; I prefer netball, hockey and other such sports. I like

the idea of having a wide variety of sports in schools. Some people might not prefer running, jumping, hockey, basketball and football; they might prefer badminton or tennis. We should offer the widest possible range of sports throughout Scotland.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): Thanks very much for coming—we are served really well by the Scottish Youth Parliament, which adds to our work as a Parliament. Has the Youth Parliament looked at whether the examples of unacceptable standards and facilities from your experience are replicated in other places?

Nairn McDonald: While preparing the petition, I spoke to MSYPs whom I know throughout Scotland. Schools might have facilities, but the levels of facilities differ between schools. I have always accepted that some schools will be able to provide a little bit extra but, when all that is stripped away, a basic minimum level should be available. There should not be schools that fall way behind in providing sports.

Joe FitzPatrick: In my city, Morgan academy has an old building and limited grounds, so it does not have the space to provide what might be considered to be the minimum standards. However, the pupils can access the facilities in Dundee international sports centre, which is relatively close. Does the Youth Parliament think that that is an acceptable compromise?

Nairn McDonald: That kind of compromise is acceptable. Schools that do not have the space for what is considered a minimum level of provision must reach compromises, but schools that have space and land must provide a minimum level; otherwise, their students will not get the same benefits as students who are 5 miles away in the next town.

Joe FitzPatrick: I will press you a little on that. Is the most important issue having access to facilities for young people in a school, rather than having facilities in a particular location?

Nairn McDonald: Access is one of the most important things. When I travel throughout my constituency, I see schools lying empty at weekends, because they cannot provide facilities, whereas a school in a town across a border might have a bustling community and have weekend sports, as it provides facilities.

If facilities are close enough, students can use them. However, some schools are not close enough to facilities; they would have to transport students or trust them to make their own way to facilities.

In my area, North Ayrshire, there is a school that is about 15 minutes' walk away from a sports centre. The school would have to trust children to

make their own way to the centre or fund a bus to get them there, whose cost would mount up in the long run. If a school had facilities, that would bring it a long-term financial benefit.

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I do not think that anybody round the table disagrees that what you propose would be the ideal situation. Opening up sport to as many young people as possible is important. However, there are lots of barriers to that. In recent years, a number of playing fields have been sold off for development. That is not happening as much it did, but it happened in my area for a number of years.

You have touched indirectly on the big issue, which is opening up the school estate outwith school hours. Often, people's difficulty is in being able to afford to use schools because, for example, the presence of a janitor is insisted on, and he must be paid for. Some areas now have designated key holders—they might be members of a football or netball group—who can open and close school buildings and who are responsible for insurance purposes if anything goes wrong. I am interested in what you think about that, but what you are asking for—you have been told this by various politicians—is costly. Has the Scottish Youth Parliament worked up any ballpark costings? Do you have any idea of the amounts of money involved?

Nairn McDonald: I always imagined that funding sports facilities would be expensive, but I was hoping that organisations that already get funding such as sportscotland, active schools and even councils—which are able to get external funding—could be encouraged to provide support. With the push on the Olympics, the Commonwealth Games, and the youth Olympics, which Glasgow hopes to host in 2018, and with people coming to Scotland, I am sure that showcasing our facilities and how funding is used to encourage sporting activities would be of great benefit to the country as a whole.

Nanette Milne: You see it as a legacy of, for example, the Commonwealth games.

Nairn McDonald: Yes.

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): Good afternoon. I have much sympathy with your petition, and I congratulate you on promoting the issue.

You raised a valid point about the different levels of facilities that are available, and you mentioned that an authority across the border has better facilities. I represent Falkirk East; in Falkirk, we have built four new NPDO—non-profit-distributing organisation—schools. We also have four private finance initiative schools that were built under a previous administration. The services

and facilities that are available in the two schemes are as different as chalk and cheese.

Nanette Milne mentioned the selling-off of playing fields by local authorities, which has thankfully lessened in the past few years. Is that an issue in North Ayrshire?

Nairn McDonald: That is an issue in North Ayrshire. Local authorities throughout Scotland are building new schools, but it would be much cheaper in the long run if they provided adequate sports facilities, rather than waiting to find the money to build new schools. By that time, many pupils will have left school. There is a school being built in North Ayrshire that will take four or five years, so the children in secondary 3 will not see the benefits. However, a sports facility could be built in a year and that would allow more children to access it and build up a healthier lifestyle that they can carry on into adulthood.

Angus MacDonald: What is the general condition of the school estate in North Ayrshire? Have any new schools been built recently?

Nairn McDonald: Yes. We have two new schools, and schools throughout the local authority area have been updated, but work is prioritised. The local authority—I think that this is the same with all local authorities—is not able to give equal facilities to every school because that is not possible with the funding cuts to local government.

The Convener: I think that Anne McTaggart has a question.

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): Welcome. Nanette Milne has covered the funding issue that I wanted to raise, so I have no questions.

Sandra White: There have been many good questions—and answers. Nairn, you referred to every school having a sports facility, and your answers to Joe FitzPatrick were spot on; they also covered some of the points that I was considering.

I want to narrow the focus of the questions. You have called for sports facilities to be made available in every primary and secondary school. In my area of Glasgow, we have a great community-based sports club called Broomhill sports club. It uses training facilities at Hyndland secondary school, but it also uses parks such as Scotstoun park. It would be very difficult for the club if it was limited to using schools. We also have the velodrome that is being built for the Commonwealth games, to which we want kids to have access as well.

The point that I am trying to make is that it is all about money. Is it realistic to think that every primary and secondary school can have the same sports facilities? Unfortunately, in some of the inner-city schools in my area—as in Joe FitzPatrick's area—there is not even room for a

playground. Are you asking for the same facilities in every primary and secondary school? What would be the knock-on effect for sport hubs, 50 per cent of which will be in schools and the other 50 per cent of which will be in other places where, for example, Broomhill sports club could use them? There is also the Commonwealth games village and the velodrome. John Wilson made the point that kids are not necessarily into football; they might be into cycling. They start off on mountain bikes and will, hopefully, progress when they see the facilities that are there.

I am sorry that that is quite a lot of questions. Maybe you can clarify some of it for me.

Nairn McDonald: The focus is more on secondary schools. In North Ayrshire, each town has a secondary school and a cluster of primary schools that are not far away. If the secondary school had those facilities, the young people in the primary schools would be able to access them. In schools such as mine, PE is not going on constantly, so there would be times when they could use the facilities.

I do not think that, if schools got the facilities, the sports clubs should be limited to using the schools. They should still be able to use the facilities that they usually use; it would be providing an extra facility for them and allowing them to provide a key bit of extra sport to help more young people.

The Convener: Katherine, do you want to add anything at this stage?

Katherine Veza (Scottish Youth Parliament): No. Nairn is doing a great job.

John Wilson: As Sandra White said, there are areas in Scotland where local authorities have good public parks. When I went to school—it was a number of years ago—there was a public area, which was not part of the school, that had a running track, football pitches, a long jump track and various other bits and pieces. It was not attached to the school but was operated by the council. Would you welcome closer links between the existing council facilities and schools instead of looking for a minimum standard of facilities for every school? Should we make greater use of the existing public park facilities in local authority areas? In Coatbridge, in North Lanarkshire, where I live, the council built a new school that had no facilities but which made use of a public park. The council put in a 3G football pitch and various other facilities within the boundaries of the public park. Would it not be a better use of resources to tie up existing public facilities with the schools in order to make greater use of public amenities, rather than creating additional amenities?

Nairn McDonald: In Kilwinning, we used to have tennis courts in our public park. However,

because it cannot be guaranteed that everybody will use such facilities sensibly and responsibly, they can be abused and vandalised. If they were in a school that was locked overnight, they would be protected and people would not have the opportunity to abuse and vandalise them. They would be kept in excellent condition and could be used for many years.

14:30

The Convener: As I am sure members will agree, the petition is a good one. It is important that we continue the petition so that we can get further information from the Scottish Government, Education Scotland, sportscotland and the Scottish Sports Association. Do members have any suggestions for additional organisations to write to?

John Wilson: I suggest that we write to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, as the issue is very much a local authority one, in relation to the education provision and, as I said, how we utilise public parks where there are public playing facilities. We need to take on board Nairn McDonald's point about the security and safety of the use of public parks beyond the usual opening hours.

Nanette Milne: I agree with what has been said. Once we get a response to the letters that we plan to write, would it be appropriate to refer the petition on with the responses to the Health and Sport Committee, which is planning to do an inquiry on community sport in the fairly near future?

The Convener: That is certainly an option that we should consider when all the information comes back.

Angus MacDonald: For clarification, would we still have time to refer the petition on, given that the Health and Sport Committee launched its inquiry on 25 June?

Nanette Milne: It is in September.

Angus MacDonald: Okay—sorry.

The Convener: I think that we still have time, but we will take advice from the clerks on that.

Joe FitzPatrick: When we write to the Government, we should ask whether any audit work has been done since 2006 to find out whether things have improved and are improving.

The Convener: I am advised that the Health and Sport Committee inquiry has just been launched, and that it will continue for a number of months, so the timescale is fine. We will be conscious of that and try to get information back quickly enough.

If members have no further points, I thank Nairn McDonald and Katherine Vezza for coming. As you have heard, we are enthusiastic about your petition, but we have a lot more work to do to get information from various statutory and Government agencies.

I suspend the meeting for a minute to allow the witnesses to leave.

14:32

Meeting suspended.

14:32

On resuming—

Scotland-Pakistan Youth Council (PE1435)

The Convener: The next petition is PE1435, by Wajahat Nassar, on a Scotland-Pakistan youth council. Members have a note by the clerk, which is paper 2, a SPICe briefing and the petition. I invite the committee to consider the petition and ask members for their comments.

Sandra White: As this is the first time that the petition has come before us, we should give it due consideration. However, in my opinion, it would be difficult if we went down the road of setting up various councils for various people. We have many cross-party groups in the Parliament on issues such as older people and China. As this is the first time that the petition has come before us, we should write to the Scottish Government, the Scottish Youth Parliament, the British Council, the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on Pakistan, the Scotland-Pakistan Network and the Scottish Asian Pakistan Foundation to ask for their thoughts on the petition and what they want to do. However, I want to put on the record my opinion that it would be difficult if we start down the road of creating groups for everyone who writes in.

Joe FitzPatrick: The general thrust of the petition is to be supported in principle. Perhaps we should at this stage refer the petition to the Scottish Youth Parliament. We have just seen an example of how capable the members of that Parliament are. That might be the best place for the petition to start. There is a piece of work to be done.

The Convener: That is a novel idea that has a lot of merit.

Angus MacDonald: I note that, according to the petitioner, the Scottish Government has stated that it cannot endorse the proposal for a Scotland-Pakistan youth council and that the Scottish Youth Parliament has also said that it is unable to support the initiative. However, if we land the

petition in the Scottish Youth Parliament's lap, that might well help to move it forward.

The petitioner raises valid points in comparing the Scottish Government's India plan to its Pakistan plan. It would not do any harm to seek the Scottish Government's view, just to clarify that issue.

I am happy to support Joe Fitzpatrick's suggestion that the Scottish Youth Parliament takes the petition a little further.

Nanette Milne: Reading through the briefing papers, it strikes me that the British Pakistani Youth Council already exists, having been set up in 2009. Apparently, the council works with national and devolved Government on issues relating to British Pakistani young people. I suggest that we contact the organisation and find out what it does. It might be an umbrella organisation and the petition may fit in with its work.

The Convener: Joe Fitzpatrick raised an interesting point about the Scottish Youth Parliament. I am enthusiastic about that idea, but Nanette Milne made a good point about checking the status of the petition first by going to the umbrella organisation. Once we get that raw material back, we will have better guidance on referring the petition to the Scottish Youth Parliament.

The Scottish Youth Parliament did some excellent vox pops among its members on possible next steps in relation to Mosquito devices.

Sandra White: I have read the petition and some of the petitioner's comments, which are not particularly helpful. They mention the China and North America plans, which are dealt with by the Government and the European and External Relations Committee.

As I have said, I do not think that we should seek to see differences between anybody or any particular groups; we should be all inclusive. That is why we should afford merit to the petition and perhaps send it to the Scottish Youth Parliament.

Someone suggested that we should send the petition to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association—of which I am a member—and ask for its thoughts. However, that would be a precedent that could grow arms and legs, because so many other groups would wish to be involved. We have very good relations with the Pakistani community in Scotland through the Scottish Parliament and cross-party groups, and through initiatives from this Government and previous Governments.

The Convener: That is very useful. Do members agree that, in the first instance, we

should refer the petition to the British Pakistani Youth Council to seek its advice and guidance, and then consider options involving the Scottish Youth Parliament and other options thereafter?

Members indicated agreement.

Current Petitions

Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 (Snares) (PE1124)

14:38

The Convener: We have quite a heavy workload this afternoon. There are 12 current petitions. PE1124, by Louise Robertson, on behalf of the League Against Cruel Sports, calls for a ban on snares. Members have a note from the clerk, which is paper 3, and submissions. I invite contributions from members.

John Wilson: This petition came before the committee a number of times in the previous session of Parliament, and it has tracked the legislation on snaring as that has gone through the Parliament.

It is clear that the petitioners have a keen interest in the issue, and I put on record my thanks to the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals for its submission, which is before us today.

There are still a number of issues to be dealt with regarding the use of snares in the countryside—and elsewhere, because the issue does not concern only the countryside. The SSPCA has clearly indicated some of its findings in the period since the new legislation came into force.

I suggest that we take advice from the petitioners, who state clearly in the last paragraph of their submission, based on the latest information, that they would like the petition to be referred to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, which is about to consider the new snaring orders that are being imposed. The petitioners respectfully request that the Public Petitions Committee agrees to forward all the material that we have gathered to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee for its consideration.

The Convener: That is a reasonable point. The clerk's briefing paper points out that the new snares orders have already been considered. Nevertheless, it would be appropriate to do that.

Nanette Milne: I accept what John Wilson says. However, in view of the fact that the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee has already considered the orders, I wonder whether we should close the petition. The impact of the new regulations will not be assessed until 2016 and I do not see that there is much more that we can do at this point. It will be open to the petitioners to submit a similar petition in 2016 if they do not like what they hear then.

John Wilson: I forgot to refer to the full paragraph in the petitioners' submission. They are calling for an earlier review of the effect of the new snaring orders. Rather than wait until 2016, they want the Government to carry out an earlier review. The SSPCA did a review shortly after the introduction of the legislation and has identified 65 animals that have been trapped in snares—and those are only the ones that have been reported to the SSPCA; I am sure that many other incidents have never been reported or recorded. It might be worth passing on that information from the SSPCA to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, asking whether it would consider an earlier review. If the SSPCA can pull together that information in such a short period, I am sure that other information could be brought to that committee's attention prior to 2016.

Nanette Milne: I accept that.

The Convener: Are members happy with John Wilson's suggestion that we formally refer the petition to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Acquired Brain Injury Services (PE1179)

The Convener: The second current petition is PE1179 from Helen Moran, on behalf of the Brain Injury Awareness Campaign, on acquired brain injury services. Members have a note by the clerk—it is paper 4—and the written submissions.

Sandra White: I have read the papers and the recommendations. I suggest that we close the petition because the Government is committed to introducing legislation on the integration of adult health and social care, and some councils have already gone ahead with that. I note the petitioner's concerns about the replies from local authorities, but I think that the replies that we got were full. We could ask the petitioner to participate directly in the gathering of evidence for the legislation.

John Wilson has a particular interest in the petition and might want to comment on it.

John Wilson: Not at this point.

Sandra White: Okay. My recommendation is that we close the petition.

Nanette Milne: I agree with Sandra White, particularly as we have received confirmation from the Government that an acquired brain injury subgroup is undertaking work to move from a clinical network to a care network over the next two years. I think that everything is being done. It has been a good petition that has achieved its purpose.

Angus MacDonald: I agree with those comments. However, it should be noted that the

petitioner expressed disappointment that out of the 32 councils that were approached for responses only 12 replied. That is disappointing.

The Convener: The petitioner is not alone in feeling disappointed. We have had problems in getting feedback from some local authorities.

John Wilson: I have now gathered my thoughts on the petition, and I would not want to see it closed at this point as the petitioner has made another three recommendations. Although the written submissions that we have received from local authorities are good, they show that there is no consistency in how the different health boards and local authorities deal with the issue. The petitioner has rightly made another three recommendations:

“1. That a separate care category be set up for ABI so that spending on ABI services can be ring fenced, and monitored.

2. That all councils and Health boards together be directed to develop a current ABI strategy, along with consultation with their local ABI population and carers.

3. That all councils and Health boards be directed to begin the set-up of local Managed Care Networks for ABI, so that the approaches used with individuals are within a context that will allow proper support.”

Those recommendations need to be addressed. Based on the responses that we have had from local authorities so far, it is clear that there is not a common approach to the issue, so it would be useful to ask the Scottish Government to respond to the recommendations that have been made. I hope that, by doing that, we will get a clearer picture of the guidance that is given to local authorities and health boards on how they should be dealing with acquired brain injury.

14:45

The Convener: May I suggest a compromise position? As the Scottish Government has set up the sub-group, I propose that we close the petition under rule 15.7 but refer the three recommendations that Mr Wilson mentioned to the Scottish Government and ask for them to be discussed as part of the sub-group’s analysis. In that way, we will achieve both objectives. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

John Wilson: I bow to the majority view of committee members.

The Convener: I thank Mr Wilson for his Henry Kissinger-like diplomacy.

Youth Football (PE1319)

The Convener: Our third current petition is PE1319, by William Smith and Scott Robertson, on improving youth football in Scotland. Members

have a note by the clerk and the written submissions. Mr Smith is in the public gallery. I declare my interest in Scottish football and my directorship of Inverness Caledonian Thistle Football Club.

This is an interesting and positive petition that has raised many issues, not just about football per se but about the effective employment of young people, the European convention on human rights, and contractual obligations and young people. It is much wider than just football.

I understand that, at one level, it is for the football authorities to determine their future, but there is a governmental role that we, as the Public Petitions Committee, have a fair wind to discuss. I note that the footballing authorities have set up a new committee to investigate the subject, and I put it on the record that I am happy with that. We will certainly want to look at that in more detail.

With that preamble, I ask members whether they have any comments.

Sandra White: I do not want to echo what the convener has already said, but I have been very interested in the petition as well. I have always been a football fan, but I did not realise what was going on behind the scenes. We should continue the petition. There is a working party review going on—that is a success that has come from the petition—and we will want to look at that. We should draw the working party’s attention to the evidence that we have received on the petition.

Anne McTaggart: I agree. It is important that we continue the petition so that we get further evidence from the working party.

The Convener: If we do that, it does not rule out our using other tactics in the future, such as looking at the subject in a bit more depth or having a fuller debate on it in a plenary session. It is a novel and interesting petition and I thank Mr Smith again for the trouble that he has taken to put it before us.

Do members agree that we should continue the petition, await the outcome of the formal working party’s review and draw its attention to the evidence that the committee and its predecessor committee received on the issue of contracts?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: I thank Mr Smith again.

Institutional Child Abuse (Victims’ Forum and Compensation) (PE1351)

The Convener: Our fourth current petition is PE1351, by Chris Daly and Helen Holland, on a time for all to be heard. Members have a note by the clerk, which is paper 6, and the written submissions. I invite comments from members.

Sandra White: The petition has been with us for quite a while. It is a very emotive subject. The petitioners should be praised for their stalwart work and the tenacity that they have shown. A lot of work is being done on the issue, and we have had evidence from ministers and from various groups. Given the amount of work that is going on, we should continue the petition and perhaps schedule a review of progress for the autumn.

John Wilson: We have considered the petition a number of times and taken evidence on it. The petitioners have raised a number of questions on how the petition should be progressed, which I think that we should take cognisance of. I suggest that we forward them to the Scottish Government and seek responses, because there are aspects of the questions that only the Government can respond to. I know that the petitioners have a number of concerns about how the process is being dealt with. There was an expectation that, once we had the Shaw commission report, the Government would move much more quickly than it seems to be moving, so we should ask it to respond to the issues that have been raised.

The Convener: Do members agree to John Wilson's suggestion?

Members indicated agreement.

Lesser-taught Languages and Cultures (University Teaching Funding) (PE1395)

The Convener: The fifth current petition is PE1395, by Jan Čulík, on targeted funding for lesser-taught languages and cultures at universities. Members have a note by the clerk—paper PPC/S4/12/11/7—and the submissions. This is another very strong petition. I welcome Hugh McMahon to the gallery—thank you for coming along again.

The petitioners have requested that we take specific follow-up action. I felt that I could not do that under my own steam and that the whole committee would have to agree to it. I invite views on whether we should follow up on the petitioners' request.

Sandra White: Members will be aware of the letters that have come in on the petition and the interest that I and others have in it, given that it comes from the University of Glasgow, which is in the area that I represent. The petitioner has asked that we look at the outcomes agreement that has been signed by the university and the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council and get an update on what is to happen. I suggest that we support the petitioners' request regarding the outcomes agreement.

Nanette Milne: Is it within our competence to do that?

The Convener: The clerks advise me that it is within our competence to write to whomever we wish to write. The point that I was making was that the request was made to me. The advice that I have been given by officials—which I think is the correct advice—is that it would be best that a committee decision be made on the matter, and that it is not a decision that I could make in my own right.

Joe FitzPatrick: Can I clarify what we are being asked to do? I think that we are being asked to take a view on the education provision in an autonomous university, which would be a strange thing for the committee to do.

The Convener: What we are being asked to do is outlined in paragraph 15 of paper 7.

Joe FitzPatrick: I would be uncomfortable about the committee making such a recommendation.

The Convener: I am happy to take further advice and get back to committee members. I am advised that it would be within our competence to act in the way that has been suggested.

Nanette Milne: My concern is that the request relates to a specific university, whereas the petition is much more general. That is why I asked whether it is within our competence to meet the request.

The Convener: I think that we could write in more general terms, but still reflect the sentiments of the petitioners. I take the points that members are raising.

Joe FitzPatrick: I am concerned about the committee taking that view. I think that it might be better to refer the matter to the Education and Culture Committee, which could look at whether that line could be pursued. If we act as has been requested, we will be going further than we should, given the evidence that we have received.

Sandra White: I take on board the concerns that members have expressed, but the committee has checked with the clerks that it is within our competence to write to the SFC. We would not be asking it to take specific action; we would be making a request. I know that Joe FitzPatrick is filling in for Mark McDonald, but the threat to Slavonic studies is a huge issue, not just in the University of Glasgow, although that is where the petition comes from. Courses in Slavonic studies and languages will be lost. It is not a tiny issue. I understand where Joe FitzPatrick is coming from, but the teaching of Slavonic studies as a whole will be affected, because such courses will be lost. Glasgow is the only place outwith London where such courses are available. If we lose those courses, anyone who wants to do Slavonic studies

would have to go to London—they would not be able to do it in Scotland.

Anne McTaggart: We need to act on this issue, as it has been raised as a huge concern not just by constituents in Glasgow but with the cross-party group on Poland. Moreover, having spoken to the West of Scotland Regional Equality Council, which runs a project in the department, I know that it, too, is concerned that, as Sandra White suggested, it might well have to go to London if course provision is done away with. The relevant population is very concerned about the matter.

The Convener: At one level, the petition is not about one particular university, but about the strategic importance of lesser-taught languages. That is the key issue that we are trying to develop. I do not know whether Joe FitzPatrick has followed all our meetings, but we have received very good evidence on the matter.

Joe FitzPatrick: Obviously I have not been here for all the evidence sessions, but I am concerned about suggesting that the outcomes agreement contain specific reference to one topic and feel that we might be almost trying to direct an autonomous educational institution to treat it differently from everything else. I understand the concerns that have been expressed and the importance of the issue, but I wonder whether there is a different way of addressing the situation or whether we should ask the Education and Culture Committee to take a wider look. I simply think that we are taking a very narrow approach. I know that the petition refers to one particular subject but I am not sure that we should recommend that it be specifically covered in the outcomes agreement.

John Wilson: While acknowledging Joe FitzPatrick's point about our recommending that the outcomes agreement specify that Glasgow University should maintain Slavonic studies, I wonder whether we should write to the funding council and the university itself to ask whether Slavonic studies has been specifically included in the outcomes agreement between both—and if not, why not—and what other option or provision is available to students in Scotland who wish to study the subject. We would not be directing the university or the funding council, but simply asking the questions.

The Convener: We will also be asking in general about Czech, Polish, Russian and Slavonic studies.

John Wilson: That is right.

The Convener: That sounds like a very useful compromise. Do members agree with that approach?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Thank you again, Mr Wilson.

Staffordshire Bull Terriers (PE1396)

The Convener: PE1396, by Ian Robb on behalf for Help for Abandoned Animals (Arbroath), is on overbreeding and abandonment of Staffordshire bull terriers. The committee has a note from the clerk and various submissions. I invite comments.

Nanette Milne: I do not think that we can take the petition any further. The Government has written to COSLA; however, given that it has not yet received a response, we will need to hold the petition over until we hear what that response might be.

The Convener: Do members agree with that suggestion?

John Wilson: I realise that the clerk's note says that the Government wrote to COSLA on 17 May, but I think that, instead of leaving the matter hanging, we should write to the Scottish Government to ask when it expects to get a response from COSLA. I know that it will have the summer recess to respond but it will be useful to find out if and when COSLA intends to respond.

The Convener: So the suggestion is to continue the petition and to write to the Scottish Government to ask when it expects to get a reply from COSLA. Are we agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Wild Animals in Circuses (Ban) (PE1400)

15:00

The Convener: Our seventh current petition is PE1400, by Libby Anderson, on behalf of OneKind, on a ban on the use of wild animals in circuses. Members have a note by the clerk, which is paper 9, and the written submissions. I invite comments from members.

Sandra White: This has been a useful petition. The Scottish Government has said that, due to high-priority work, it is unable to do any work on the matter before winter 2012. As Nanette Milne suggested about the previous petition, can we schedule consideration of the petition for the end of the year?

The Convener: Do members agree?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We will continue the petition and schedule it for consideration again at the end of the year.

Access to Insulin Pump Therapy (PE1404)

The Convener: Our eighth current position is PE1404, by Stephen Fyfe, on behalf of Diabetes UK Scotland, on access to insulin pump therapy. Members have a note by the clerk, which is paper 10, and the written submissions.

For the record, I advise that the committee had an informal meeting in Glasgow yesterday with patients and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. A note on the visit will be prepared and circulated in due course. I thank the committee members who attended, the representatives of the health board and the patients and patients' representatives who were at the very interesting two-hour meeting. There are clear issues in that NHS area about the targets for insulin pumps, and I certainly got a greater sense of the direction. Clearly, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde is the biggest health board and a very significant one. I put on the record our thanks for the work that was done on the issue yesterday.

I invite members to comment.

Nanette Milne: Yesterday's meeting was extremely useful as it explained quite a lot about some of the things that we had concerns about.

I note that the cabinet secretary has asked the health boards to make action plans available. I recommend that we wait and consider the petition again once those action plans and the first quarterly report on them by Diabetes UK Scotland are available.

The Convener: That is a good point. I suppose that we are looking at the profile of the ability of health boards to achieve the number of pumps that the Scottish Government laid down, which was emphasised in the chief executive's letter. In the case of Glasgow, for example, we are talking about a huge shift. I think that it needs another 99 pumps for under-18s. As members know, the target is 25 per cent for under-18s who have type 1 diabetes. Looking at the past trend, my gut instinct was that there was no way the board was going to achieve that, and I think that it is fair to say that the board agreed on that. The good thing is that it accepts that there is an issue and it is moving up to achieve that target.

What I am not aware of—perhaps we should drop a letter to the Scottish Government to clarify this—is whether there is any sanction if health boards do not meet the target by March next year. I do not think that there is, but it might be worth clarifying that. There is also £1 million of new money to go in, but an issue was raised yesterday—I think that it is an issue across Scotland—about whether the staff budgets reflect what it will cost to run that new improvement.

I am also interested in the point about pump procurement. It makes sense for what was Procurement Scotland to access pumps on a Scotland-wide basis, and it does that by determining the three firms that it recommends be used for pump procurement. There is an issue about whether there is a cost to health boards for that in the first year, but it is clear that it is important to have central buying power for pumps. It will be worth our while to have a look at that.

Sandra White: I thank the committee members who were able to come along to the meeting, and I thank the clerks for setting it up. I found it very interesting. The convener mentioned NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's ability to meet the 25 per cent target that the Government has set. It has to be put on the record that the reason why the board is having to work at that is that it started from a low base of supplying the pumps.

One interesting thing that came from the meeting yesterday was that a lady had to supply her own pump at a cost of £2,000 plus £1,500 a year to keep it going. The specialist told her that she needed a pump, yet the health board told her that it would not supply one.

I acknowledge that there was an interesting meeting with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and I appreciate the dedication of the doctors and everyone involved, but it must be put on the record that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde did not even accept the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence recommendations. I am glad, though, that we took evidence from the health board. I agree with Nanette Milne that we should continue the petition, but we need to keep a close eye on the issue, particularly on how NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde addresses it.

The Convener: Sandra White makes a good point about self-funding of pumps. I think that we all agree that there should not be a vox pop whereby people can say that they want a pump and just get it. We all accept that it must be decided through a clinical judgment. However, if people are self-financing after there has been a clinical judgment, that must be reassessed and the consumables—the cost of insulin and so on—should be paid for by health boards. We might need to write to the minister to clarify that issue.

Nanette Milne: I agree with Sandra White that we must keep a careful eye on the issue. I hope that, when we see the action plans for all the health boards, we will have a clearer picture of how things stand across the country, which is important for us to know.

Anne McTaggart: I agree that we should write to the Scottish Government on the issue and that we should continue the petition, given the evidence from yesterday's exceptional meeting.

As well as asking the Scottish Government about sanctions that may be imposed for not meeting the targets, we should ask the Government what support it might be able to offer NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, given the increase that we heard about.

The Convener: There are also concerns about training issues, because appropriate nurses cannot be invented overnight. I appreciate, too, that in a big, complex organisation, moving someone from one area to another will affect other aspects of healthcare. However, it might be worthwhile to clarify those issues with the Government.

Joe FitzPatrick: The issue is important, and I know that the convener has a long-term interest in it. I wonder whether it would be worth while to get the minister to come to the committee, because that might help to drive the issue forward. It is not good enough just to have targets. They must work in practice so that people get the pumps and so on. Given that we have a number of questions on the issue, it would probably be helpful to both the minister and the committee if the minister came to give evidence.

The Convener: In fairness—I should probably not say this—I have had the sense over the years that Nicola Sturgeon is keen to ensure that there is a higher outturn of insulin pumps. I know that the term “postcode lottery” is a cliché, but there is one in this case. It is of huge concern that some health boards have a figure of 8 per cent for pumps but Glasgow’s figure is 1.3 per cent. Mr MacDonald, who is from the Western Isles, will note that the figure is even lower for that health board area, unfortunately.

That situation raises real issues in different health board areas for people who need diabetic care. Why should there be such a massive difference in health provision? We need to explore that, so are members agreeable to our writing to ask the minister to come to a future committee meeting?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Do members have any further points?

Sandra White: I have a point that I just remembered. We heard that specialists from Yorkhill hospital were going to the Western Isles for a meeting. It might be useful for us to do the same or to get some information from that meeting. I think that they are opening a hub in the Western Isles, or working towards that.

The Convener: The clerk has that in hand. Members will recall that we agreed to decide at our planning meeting during the recess what visits

to make, and the Western Isles was identified as an area to be considered in that regard.

For clarification, there is an arrangement between NHS Western Isles and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde about the provision of diabetic care, which means that specialists from Glasgow do some clinics in the Western Isles. I think that that has worked very well.

Ferry Fares (PE1421)

The Convener: The ninth current petition is PE1421, by Gail Robertson, on behalf of the Outer Hebrides Transport Group, on fair ferry fares. Members have a note by the clerk, which is paper 11, and the submissions.

Rhoda Grant, an MSP for the Highlands and Islands, has kindly come along to the meeting for our discussion of the petition. Would you like to say a few words, Rhoda?

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Yes. Thank you, convener. I appreciate the committee’s consideration of the petition. I ask the committee to keep it open until the economic impact study has reported, which will allow the committee to review that report. If the committee decides to do that, there are two issues that I am keen for it to look into further in the meantime.

First, the issue of hauliers needing to retender for contracts that have already been won on the old pricing system has come to light. Where haulage costs have gone up by 50 per cent on ferries, hauliers need to recontract with the people for whom they carry to ensure that they recoup those costs, but sometimes they are tied into contracts, which has not allowed them to do that. Big cash-flow problems are being created when hauliers have to absorb the increased costs, and there is a limit to the time for which they can absorb them without going out of business. That issue needs to be looked at as a matter of urgency.

Secondly, NorthLink and CalMac Ferries operate a traders rebate scheme, and I am sure that such a scheme operates under the new northern isles contract. Hauliers are offered a rebate of up to 15 per cent, based on their utilisation of capacity on the ferries. I have heard from people in the Western Isles that that offer was not open for road equivalent tariff routes, but now that the RET has been withdrawn from the Western Isles, some operators are able to claim the 15 per cent whereas others are being told that they cannot claim it.

I lodged a question on that, in answer to which the Minister for Housing and Transport, Keith Brown, stated that there is a

“Traders Rebate Scheme which offers hauliers a rebate of up to 15% ... other than on the current RET routes (Western Isles, Coll and Tiree).”—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 19 June 2012; S4W-07640.]

My understanding is that the RET has been withdrawn from the Western Isles, Coll and Tiree. However, there seems to be an issue. Some port offices are offering the traders rebate scheme in the knowledge that the RET has been withdrawn, whereas other port offices are telling hauliers that they are not offering it. A very unlevel playing field is operating in the islands with the traders rebate scheme. Given that the petition is about fair ferry fares, it would be useful if the committee looked into that issue and into where the additional costs go when people have already contracted services. The petition should be kept open until the economic impact has been reported.

The Convener: To be clear, are you suggesting that those questions should be addressed only to the Scottish Government or that we go down some other route as well?

Rhoda Grant: They could go to the Scottish Government to start with. However, it might not be aware of the retendering. The chamber of commerce and some of the haulier companies themselves will obviously be aware of whether companies have been able to recoup any of the additional costs and, if not, how long they will be able to absorb them before they are forced out of business.

The Convener: Perhaps we could ask the Road Haulage Association those questions.

Rhoda Grant: Yes.

The Convener: The first issue is whether we should continue the petition. As we heard, an economic study is being carried out. It would seem sensible to keep the petition open until we know the results of that. What are members' views on that? Angus MacDonald has some experience from the Western Isles.

Angus MacDonald: Yes. Given the points that Rhoda Grant raised, it is only fair to continue the petition. It is also fair to say that, in my experience, the Outer Hebrides Transport Group does not represent the majority view of island residents or, indeed, all the hauliers in the Western Isles. It is therefore clear that there is more investigation to be done.

Joe FitzPatrick: It is certainly worth while to continue the petition until there is a report back on the study. However, I wonder whether it would be appropriate for Rhoda Grant MSP to ask some of the questions that she has raised in her capacity as a regional member.

Rhoda Grant: I have raised them. As I said, I lodged a question. It is unclear to me whether the

Government looks on the routes as having had the RET removed from them or whether it is still treating them as RET routes. The petition is about fair ferry fares. Obviously, it is unfair if some hauliers are getting an additional 15 per cent discount whereas others are not qualifying for that. That issue needs to be raised, and it would be helpful to have it dealt with with the petition.

Anne McTaggart: It is important that we continue the petition, given that we are waiting for the results of the study. Also, the questions raised by Rhoda Grant have not been answered—as a committee, we can ask the Scottish Government those questions.

15:15

The Convener: I note Joe FitzPatrick's distinction between a member's regional role and questions related to the petition. Obviously, I have an interest as well, but I think that the questions are relevant to our understanding of the petition and to our getting more information. I was not aware of some of the details in the questions, and that detail will be useful in understanding the petition. The Government will give us an official view, which will help us to understand a bit more how to deal with the petition.

Joe FitzPatrick: I am concerned that the questions come from one particular angle. My feeling is that it is better that they are dealt with by Rhoda Grant as an MSP rather than by the committee. We should continue the petition until the report is out, but I would say no to the suggestion that the committee should write the proposed letters.

John Wilson: I take on board Joe FitzPatrick's point of view, but the committee is listening to the evidence that we have received so far on the issue. Rhoda Grant, as a local member, has come along to the committee and made us aware of other issues that might be affecting the area. It is up to the committee to decide whether it wishes to proceed with the petition and take on board the issues that she has raised. If we are to give the petition full consideration, we have to do that.

Members of this committee or other members of the Parliament are welcome to piggy-back on the petitions that are before us and raise their own questions with ministers. However, the committee is within its rights to take on board the issues that Rhoda Grant has raised and seek answers to them. In that way, we can investigate the petition in the round—because there are other aspects—rather than just as the petitioner sees it.

We often take that approach. As we have heard today, petitioners will submit further questions and it is up to the committee to decide whether we wish to take them on board. In this instance,

Rhoda Grant has raised a number of relevant questions. If the committee is to consider the petition fully, it has to ask ministers questions to get answers to the points that have been raised.

The Convener: Is that a reasonable point?

Joe FitzPatrick: I am not going to oppose that.

The Convener: I thank the member for that and I thank Rhoda Grant for coming to the meeting.

Do members agree to continue the petition until the work of the six-month study has been reported on and to write to the Scottish Government and the chamber of commerce about the two points that Rhoda Grant has raised?

Members indicated agreement.

Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 (PE1422)

The Convener: The 10th current petition is PE1422, by Wendy Barr, on the inequality of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. Members have a note by the clerk, which is paper 12, and the submissions.

Sandra White: The question is whether to continue the petition or close it on the basis of the evidence that we have. Having read it and the various recommendations, I think that we have given it a fair amount of time. A lot of good replies came back. I recommend that we close the petition given the point in Scottish Natural Heritage's submission that

"the Act is statutory law, arrived at through a full democratic and Parliamentary process. As its title makes clear, it is a 'Land Reform' measure, which re-defines by statute certain key aspects of what property ownership means in Scotland".

John Wilson: I thank the petitioner for her lengthy response to the written submissions that we received from other organisations and to the SPICe briefing. The petitioner indicated in one of her latter responses that there are two sides to the story. Clearly, she has a particular view and various organisations have a different view. As the petitioner has raised no new questions, I support Sandra White's suggestion that we close the petition.

The Convener: As no other member wishes to comment, do we agree to close the petition under rule 15.7, for the reasons that Sandra White identified?

Members indicated agreement.

Public Sector Staff (Talents) (PE1423)

The Convener: The 11th current petition is PE1423, by Gordon Hall, on behalf of the Unreasonable Learners, on harnessing the undoubted talents of public sector staff. Members

have a note by the clerk, which is paper 13, and the submissions. Do members have any comments?

Nanette Milne: I would like to keep the petition open. I note the disappointment that the petitioner has expressed with some of the responses. The petitioner comments that, although great effort is being invested in moving the public sector forward, it will not make much progress because new initiatives and methods tend to be layered over the old command-and-control thinking. That is probably a valid comment.

As was suggested when we discussed the petition previously, we should have a round-table discussion on the issue. There are significant minds that can contribute to forward thinking on it. Gordon Hall has suggested to me a number of people who would have a valid opinion. It could be an interesting discussion if we involve different aspects.

The Convener: That is a good idea, but I have a question on scale. Are you suggesting a meeting in a committee room or a discussion on a larger scale, perhaps in the chamber?

Nanette Milne: I had not thought that far ahead, but why not have it in the chamber? Gordon Hall has suggested a number of people to me and I have spoken to one or two others. For instance, the former MSP Jim Mather, whom I happened to meet recently, is interested in the thinking in the petition and he would make a significant contribution to such a discussion. There are a number of other people.

The Convener: If members agree to having a round-table discussion, we will need to do some work behind the scenes on the numbers. If a committee room is required, the discussion will be at a committee meeting, but if a larger meeting is required, we will have to approach the Conveners Group about that. We can certainly pursue the issue.

Nanette Milne: I would like to include some of the petitioners, too.

The Convener: Yes. We can discuss the details at our business planning day in August.

Sandra White: It is too late now, but the issue would have been a fantastic subject for the festival of politics. Maybe next year we could include it, but we have missed the boat this year.

Nanette Milne: I do not think that the issue will go away any time soon, so it might well be an issue for a future festival of politics.

The Convener: As no other member wishes to comment, do we agree to continue the petition so that we can set up a round-table discussion, the

details of which we will organise at our August planning event?

Members *indicated agreement.*

**Remote and Rural Areas Transport
Provision (Access to Care) (Older People)
(PE1424)**

The Convener: The final current petition is PE1424, by Joyce Harkness, on behalf of the road to health team, on improving transport provision for older people in remote and rural areas. Members have a note by the clerk, which is paper 14, and the submissions. I invite comments from members.

Sandra White: Like most members, I support the petition. I suggest that we take action 1 in the paper from the clerk, which is to keep the petition open pending the publication of the report of the working group on healthcare transport.

The Convener: Do members agree to that suggestion?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Meeting closed at 15:24.

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice to SPICe.

Available in e-format only. Printed Scottish Parliament documentation is published in Edinburgh by APS Group Scotland.

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.scottish.parliament.uk

For details of documents available to
order in hard copy format, please contact:
APS Scottish Parliament Publications on 0131 629 9941.

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000
Textphone: 0800 092 7100
Email: sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

e-format first available
ISBN 978-1-4061-9217-9

Revised e-format available
ISBN 978-1-4061-9228-5

Printed in Scotland by APS Group Scotland
