

Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee on petition PE2228: Protect Scotland's volunteer-run community fairs and gala days

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review the “increasing licensing, regulatory and financial burdens placed on volunteer-run community fairs and gala days across Scotland”.

According to the petitioner, there are rising costs, growing bureaucracy and complex licensing requirements which are placing these events under significant pressure.

The Scottish Government in its response to the petition states:

“In 2025, the Scottish Government convened a Task Force on Civic Licensing to review a range of existing licensing provisions of the 1982 Act. One of the licensing policy areas being looked at is the legislation in relation to public entertainment licensing. It is expected that a report setting out any proposed reform, recommendations and potential changes to the 1982 Act will be presented to the Scottish Ministers in due course for consideration.”

There is surprisingly little in the way of information about this Task Force other than, when it was established, it was supposed to report in Spring 2026 (see [news release from legal services firm TLT](#)). Given the scope of [the 1982 Act](#) it is likely that its remit will be very broad. It is unclear to what extent the Task Force has consulted with community groups.

Background information

[According to the Scottish Government:](#)

“Celebratory events bring local communities together and will always play a vital role in modern Scotland. They are a powerful expression of community spirit, bringing people together to celebrate their local areas and to share a sense of belonging.”

However, the petitioner, Ewan Irvine, chair of the Corstorphine Fair committee, [told the Edinburgh Evening News](#):

"Yet year after year, organisers face increasing bureaucracy, inconsistent licensing decisions, late documentation, and rising costs that threaten the future of these much-loved events."

The [Gala Day Event Guide](#) published by the City of Edinburgh Council gives an idea of the licensing requirements placed on events organisers in Edinburgh. Of course, the situation may be different for events organisers in other local authority areas.

Licensing regime

Community events and gala days can require a range of licences, depending on the nature of the activities provided. Potential licences include public entertainment licences, street trading licences and food related licences.

These licences come under the “optional” provisions in Parts I and II of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982. They are called the optional provisions because it is up to licensing authorities (local authorities) to decide whether to license the various activities covered by them.

If a local authority does want to license a particular activity, it must pass a resolution setting out the details. A public entertainment licensing resolution must state what forms of public entertainment are covered. Local authorities therefore have considerable discretion about what and how they license under these parts of the 1982 Act. There is significant variation in approaches between local authorities.

The 1982 Act requires that the fees charged by licensing authorities cover their costs (although it is up to local authorities to decide what resources they use for licensing). The fee lists from [Fife Council](#) and [City of Edinburgh Council](#) highlight the contrast between different local authorities’ approaches.

Community events and gala days will often involve activities which would usually require a market operator’s licence. However, there is a specific exemption which appears to cover this type of event in the legislation. Section 40(2)(a) of the 1982 Act states that a market operator’s licence is not required for “functions held by charitable, religious, youth, recreational, community, political or similar organisations”.

It is not clear how this exemption is reflected in City of Edinburgh Council’s guidance or fee structure. [City of Edinburgh Council’s public entertainment licensing resolution](#) would also seem to exempt smaller scale community events.

Previous Parliament work in this area

The Scottish Parliament considered the [Travelling Funfairs \(Licensing\) \(Scotland\) Bill](#) at the end of Session 5. The Bill was brought forward to address concerns from the showperson community about the complexity and inconsistency around public entertainment licensing requirements for travelling funfairs in Scotland.

The Bill did not progress beyond Stage 1, However, the [Policy Memorandum](#) and [SPICe briefing on the Bill](#) provide some insight into this issue and the contrasting approaches of local authorities.

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14 September 2026

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition
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