REPORT OF THE PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE EVENT
INVERNESS, 29 NOVEMBER 2004

Introduction

1. The Public Petitions Committee (PPC) held a participation event on 29 November 2004 at the Highland Council Chambers, Inverness. This report provides a brief summary of the main issues which arose from the event.

Background

2. The PPC is unique in that its agenda is almost wholly determined by members of the public, including individuals and organisations.

3. At its meeting on 31 March 2004 the Committee agreed that effective promotion of the public petitions system would be useful in developing the work of the Committee and further agreed to hold a participation event in Dundee aimed at equality organisations, local community groups and other local organisations.

4. Following the success of the Dundee event on 14 June 2004 the Committee at its meeting on 15 September 2004 agreed a rolling programme of events aimed at raising awareness of the Parliament’s public petitions system among groups traditionally marginalised from the political process. The Committee aims to cover each of the 8 Scottish Parliamentary regions in the current parliamentary session and the second in this series of events was held in Inverness on 29 November 2004.

5. The Parliament’s public participation officer worked closely with local community and equality groups and voluntary sector organisations throughout the Highland region in publicising the event and over 300 formal invites were distributed.

6. The primary aim of the event was to provide an overview of the petitions system, draw upon the individual experiences of previous petitioners and provide practical advice and guidance on petitioning and e-petitioning the Scottish Parliament.
The Event

7. The event was attended by 60 representatives from local community and equality groups and voluntary sector organisations and a list of attendees is attached as Annexe A. The event was also attended by the Convener, three other Members of the Committee and a local MSP. There was also some interest from the local media and the Parliament’s public information staff were on hand to provide general information on the work of the Parliament.

8. Delegates received presentations on the e-petition system and the experience of petitioners themselves before being asked to participate in workshops on the practicalities of petitioning the Parliament. The Committee would like to thank all participants for their views and comments throughout the day.

Feedback

9. All delegates were asked to complete an evaluation form at the end of the event and 30 were completed and returned to the Committee Clerking team.

10. All 30 respondents indicated that the event met their expectations. 17 respondents suggested that the organisation of the event was good while 12 thought that it was excellent. In relation to the structure and content of the workshop sessions 21 individuals suggested that it was good while 6 thought that it was excellent. In terms of the overall enjoyment of the event 20 respondents thought that it was good while 9 suggested that it was excellent.

Comments

11. Below are listed a selection of some of the comments and suggestions which delegates made on their evaluation sheets:

‘The Committee has now made one of the most remote areas of Scotland more aware of the petitions system. The way the communications work in remote areas does not always reflect truly local needs and their significance to small groups in remote communities. I hope this aspect of the petitions system will always be recognised’

‘It is very important to further publicise the existence of the public petitions committee system, promoting its successes and possibilities through the press and other media. There should be an emphasis on petitions which have resulted in positive change to encourage petitioners to participate. Today’s event provided a very useful insight into the role and the reality of the petitions committee and the Scottish Parliament – Well done and thanks’
‘I would have liked to have heard from a wider range of individual petitioners speaking about their experience of petitioning parliament rather than talking about their own pet project’

‘Good day. Lots of networking and information sharing. Where were our Highland Councillors? More of these sort of sessions please’

‘Having not known anything about the public petitions system the day achieved the objective of raising the profile of the petitioning system and the steps to take in putting forward a petition’

‘More public awareness for remote areas. Visit more of the Highlands – west/north coasts for example’

‘Enabled me to see that the Scottish Parliament welcomes input from the public’

‘I support the view that a higher public profile for the petitions committee is needed – perhaps a good tactic would be to stress the innovative nature and how lucky Scotland now is to have it!’

‘This session has reduced my habit of cynicism to a manageable level. This is the sort of vehicle that could get ordinary folk to re-engage in the political process’

‘Very impressed by the openness and accessibility of the Scottish Parliament to the public. Thank you – a good role model’

‘A very refreshingly real event made the more effective by the involvement of members of the Committee working well together. The Committee is showing real leadership in Scotland, supporting the values of an open questioning society, where all can and should be heard. It challenges us to think how we can follow this example in a local way, and to embed honesty and openness and willingness to listen to others in our institutions, local associations and indeed in our personal lives’

Conclusions and Recommendations

12. On the basis of the feedback sheets and comments from participants throughout the day the Committee agreed:

- In order to build upon the momentum of the Inverness and Dundee events the Committee may wish to consider holding the next event in Ayr between Easter recess and Summer recess and to delegate
authority to the Clerks to take the arrangements forward for this event including taking account of the feedback on the previous events;

- the possibility of holding a formal committee meeting in Ayr in the morning and the committee event in the afternoon;

- further mechanisms through which to promote the public petitions system especially in rural areas;

- a greater use of technology such as video-conferencing to facilitate a wider engagement with the work of the committee;

- that it is appropriate to allow e-petitioners to set up laptops in public areas such as shopping centres to gather signatures in support of an e-petition.
Annexe A

Introduction to the public petitions system
Highland Council Chambers, Inverness
29 November 2004

Attendee list
Kate Adamson Carr-Bridge Community Council
Norma Anderson Scottish Socialist Party
Peter Anderson personal assistant
Colin Ballantyne Creich Community Council
Sarah Barker personal assistant
Ann Bell Muir of Ord Community Association
Margaret Binnie Cromarty & District Community Council
Gary Blyth Safe, Strong and Free
John Bryce Craigmonie Woodland Association
Alasdair Campbell Iomairt Cholm Cille (The Columba Initiative)
Frances Campbell Inverness Access Committee
Sandy Chalmers Creich Community Council
Martha Chisholm Muir of Ord Communications Group
George D Christie Inverness West Community Council
Tom Colville Acharacle Community Council
Lt Col James Cornwell Fortrose & Rosemarkie Community Council
Isla Crudened University for the Highlands & Islands
Karen Davis Victim Support, Highlands
Dixie Dean Scottish Socialist Party
Molly Doyle Highland Senior Citizens Network
Johanna Dundas Tain Community Council
Lt Cdr B Edwards Loch Duich Community Council
Alister Ferguson Alness Community Council
Marian Findon personal assistant
Michael Findon Highland Disabled Ramblers
Pamela Galbraith Highland Council
Sura Giwa-Osagie Black & Ethnic Minorities Infrastructure Scot
Sandra Gorman Volunteering Highland
Bob Grant Muir of Ord Communications Group
Morris Grant Dingwall Community Council
Tom Greig Alness Community Council
Bill Hall Skeaboot & District Community Council
Christine Hammond Muir of Ord Communications Group
Arthur Harris Smithton & Culloden Community Council
David Henderson Muir of Ord Community Association
Nora Hobbs Alness Community Council
Ted Hobbs personal assistant
Jim Holden NHS Highland – Gypsy Travellers’
Lisa Kennard Ross-shire Women’s Aid
Rev Alan Lamb Arisaig & District Community Council
Bob Litster Alcohol Counselling Inverness
Janet MacDonald (individual)
Fiona MacEwan Lochalsh Community Council
Daviad MacGarth Smithton & Culloden Community Council
Frances MacGruer Muir of Ord Brownies and Football Club
Muriel Mackay Muir of Ord Hall Steering Group
Sheila MacKay Highland Senior Citizens Network
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<td>M Mackintosh</td>
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<td>Doug Winship</td>
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<td>Diana Wortham</td>
<td>Highland Community Care Forum</td>
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