



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Public Petitions Committee

Thursday 20 December 2018

Session 5



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PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE

19th Meeting 2018, Session 5

CONVENER

*Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)

*David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

*Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Kit McCarthy (Scottish Youth Parliament)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Sarah Robertson

LOCATION

The Sir Alexander Fleming Room (CR3)

Scottish Parliament

Public Petitions Committee

Thursday 20 December 2018

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:31]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Johann Lamont): I welcome everyone to the 19th and final meeting of the Public Petitions Committee in 2018. The first item on our agenda is to consider whether to take agenda item 4, consideration of a draft report on PE1319, on improving youth football in Scotland, in private. Do members agree to take item 4 in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

New Petitions

Mosquito Devices (PE1713)

The Convener: The next item is consideration of two new petitions. The first new petition is PE1713 by Amy Lee Fraioli MSYP—member of the Scottish Youth Parliament—and Kit McCarthy MSYP, on a ban on the use of Mosquito devices in Scotland. Members have a copy of the petition and the briefing prepared by the Scottish Parliament information centre and the clerks.

We will take evidence from Kit McCarthy. I welcome you to the meeting, and you have an opportunity to make a brief opening statement of up to five minutes.

Kit McCarthy (Scottish Youth Parliament): Good morning and thank you for inviting me to the committee.

My name is Kit McCarthy, I am 16 years old and I am one of the two democratically elected members of the Scottish Youth Parliament for north-east Fife. The Scottish Youth Parliament is an independent charity representing the views of young people from all backgrounds.

My parents recently had a problem with mice in our house. They bought a small device called a sonic rodent repellent. It emits a high-pitched tone that, while inaudible to humans, is painful to the ears of mice, rats and other vermin. Imagine the same device, but instead of being targeted at mice, it is targeted at children. Such a device is already on the market. It is called the Mosquito and it is used by shopkeepers, public authorities, transport companies and others. The Mosquito takes advantage of the fact that hearing deteriorates with age, so it can generally only be heard by young people. Initially, the noise is irritating. After a few minutes, it is painful.

The SYP has been campaigning for a ban since 2010. I will first say why we object to the devices and then explain why we believe a ban is appropriate.

The former director of Liberty, Shami Chakrabarti, describes the effect of a Mosquito as follows:

“At Liberty, we once bought a Mosquito to test out its effectiveness. I remember being completely oblivious to it (I was already in my early thirties). Then suddenly, one of our trainee solicitors covered her ears, burst into tears and ran out of the room in evident agony.”

Think of the outcry if a device were introduced that caused blanket discomfort to people of one race or sex. However, there is seemingly no issue with a device that targets one age group. Mosquitos treat even well-behaved young people as if they were no better than rodents.

That hardly fosters mutual respect between generations; rather it encourages resentment. Discriminatory and demonising treatment will have a negative, rather than a positive effect on young people's behaviour. Mosquitos are counterproductive; they do not prevent antisocial behaviour, they just move it elsewhere.

The United Nations, the Council of Europe, the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland and the Children's Commissioner for England have condemned Mosquitos as violations of all the major human rights instruments. There are also health concerns, and there has not been sufficient research on the safety of these devices.

In April 2013, this committee heard PE1367, submitted by Andrew Deans MSYP, which also called for a ban on Mosquitos. The petition was closed because both the committee and the Government thought that there was insufficient evidence to support a ban.

Understanding the prevalence of Mosquitos is not straightforward. There are no exact figures on the number of devices in Scotland or how many are in regular use. In 2013, it was believed that around 200 devices had been sold for use in Scotland. We now have more evidence. A survey this year of 725 young people that was conducted by Young Scot and commissioned by the Scottish Government received 105 reports of Mosquitos being used. ScotRail has admitted to using three units. Freedom of information requests submitted by me have revealed between five and eight devices in Perth and Kinross, including five on school premises, and four in Fife, including three on school premises.

Following the Scottish Youth Parliament's campaigning work, Fife Council, Perth and Kinross Council and ScotRail agreed to remove their Mosquitos, and Fife Council has banned them on all council property. However, other councils' records do not reveal where the units are placed. Moreover, we know that at least 100 Mosquitos have been sold to private users, with no record of their positioning. For that reason, further guidance to councils is unlikely to be effective. What is needed is a legislative ban.

There is widespread support for such a ban. We want this committee to pressure the Government, as a world leader in the protection of human rights, to outlaw Mosquito devices without reservation.

Thank you for your consideration.

The Convener: In your petition, you indicate that you have continued to raise your concerns about this issue directly with the Scottish Government. Is that dialogue on-going? What sort of response have you had?

Kit McCarthy: The last response from the Scottish Government was received in, I think, September 2017. It stated that the position of the Government was that, although it was opposed to the use of Mosquito devices, it did not believe that there was sufficient evidence for a legislative ban. That position has been repeated to us multiple times in correspondence from people in the community safety directorate.

In January 2018, when the SYP survey was released, the position of the Scottish Government changed, and it said that it did not believe that it had competency to legislate on the issue.

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): The briefing that we have before us refers to the previous petition from the SYP, which you mentioned. It says that the petition was closed because the position of the Scottish Government was that, to legislate for a ban on the devices, there needed to be policy justification, based on sound evidence. More recently, in September last year, the then Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs stated that she had written to all local authorities and other stakeholders, including Police Scotland and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, to seek information on their policies on the devices. Are you aware of whether any such information has since been provided to the Scottish Government?

Kit McCarthy: As far as I know, the only information that has been provided to the Scottish Government has been the Young Scot survey. The other information that is available concerns the examples that have arisen in relation to Mosquitos being used by ScotRail, Perth and Kinross Council and Fife Council. Further, there is a confirmed use of a Mosquito in Loreburne shopping centre in Dumfries and Galloway.

Angus MacDonald: You mentioned that ScotRail had removed three devices. How recently was that?

Kit McCarthy: I think that that was at the end of 2017.

Angus MacDonald: You refer to evidence from, for example, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and to the 2010 recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. You also refer to the much more recent advice from the Department of Justice and Equality in Ireland. Have you raised those matters with the Scottish Government?

Kit McCarthy: As far as I am aware, not directly.

Angus MacDonald: Do you have plans to do that?

Kit McCarthy: As far as I am aware, yes, we do.

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): Just over 700 young people took part in the survey. That is not necessarily representative of all young people—it is a very small number compared with the number of young people in Scotland. What are your general thoughts on the survey findings? Have there been any developments since it was published?

Kit McCarthy: Out of 725 respondents, 105 indicated that they had experienced Mosquito devices and 85 per cent indicated that they had experienced them on a recurring basis. That means that 15 per cent of survey respondents had come into contact with such a device.

The survey admits that it cannot necessarily be considered as representative of all young people in Scotland. It says:

“However, the survey provides a ‘snapshot’ insight into young people’s views and experiences and contributes to developing understanding of the overall impact of Mosquito devices.”

The Convener: If I have read the survey right, 41 per cent of that 15 per cent said that they had experienced a problem.

Kit McCarthy: The survey found that 41 per cent of the 15 per cent said that they had experienced health impacts; about 85 per cent of that 15 per cent said that they had experienced Mosquitos on a recurring basis.

The Convener: But not necessarily in a way that had affected them—they were just aware of them.

Kit McCarthy: As far as I am aware, there is no statistical link between the 41 per cent and the 85 per cent; they are both separate figures. I think that 85 per cent of respondents—

The Convener: No, the survey says that only 41—

Kit McCarthy: It says that 41 per cent of respondents experienced health issues, but that is obviously a separate—

The Convener: It is 41 per cent of 15 per cent.

Kit McCarthy: Yes, so a much smaller—

The Convener: A much smaller figure.

Kit McCarthy: A much smaller figure, yes.

The Convener: There is a general view among respondents that they did not like the devices but that the devices did not have any effect on them.

Kit McCarthy: Generally, yes—59 per cent did not experience health effects.

The Convener: I suppose the issue is the extent to which this sounds like it is a big problem—when you say 85 per cent of something,

that is a lot; but if that is 85 per cent of a small number, that is not very many. A separate issue is whether the devices should be used at all, but I wonder whether your findings perhaps suggest that it is not that big an issue for young people.

Kit McCarthy: Perhaps. However, we are concerned about the health effects of the devices. The fact that any young people indicated that they had experienced pain and distress because of Mosquito devices makes us believe that we have credible grounds to seek further scientific research on their health effects. There has not been sufficient research on the possible risks.

The Convener: Is your position that there should be research to establish whether they should be banned?

Kit McCarthy: To a certain extent. However, another aspect to the ban is to do with it being a rights-based issue. Both the Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland and the Council of Europe have identified Mosquito devices as violating potentially four or five separate rights under the European convention on human rights.

The Convener: Will you explain the competence point? Why did the Scottish Government think that it was not competent to act? Although it has said that it wants such devices banned, why did it say that it had no legislative competence to do so?

Kit McCarthy: The original position was that a ban on Mosquito devices would come under trade, which is reserved to Westminster. We would like the issue to be reframed—we think that it should be considered as a health, justice and equality issue, and the Scottish Government has competence to legislate in those areas.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Good morning, Kit. Will you expand a little bit on the health effects experienced?

Kit McCarthy: The survey says:

“41% of respondents experienced health effects or discomfort from”

the devices—that is 41 per cent of the 15 per cent that had experienced them—

Brian Whittle: Sorry, but my question was about what the health effects are.

Kit McCarthy: The reported impacts cover physical and mental health, and can be broadly grouped into these categories: headaches or migraines; ear problems, including tinnitus; dizziness or nausea; and anxiety or panic. Anxiety or panic was experienced by 5 per cent; dizziness or nausea by 20 per cent; tinnitus, hearing issues or earache by 48 per cent; and headaches by a majority—68 per cent.

Brian Whittle: In your petition, you mentioned the FOI requests that you submitted to all local authorities. You have noted that some success has been achieved through those requests. I think that you referred to Fife Council and Perth and Kinross Council in that regard. Will you update us on those two areas, and whether you anticipate that other local authorities are prepared to follow suit in response to your FOI requests?

09:45

Kit McCarthy: Can you repeat the second half of your question?

Brian Whittle: Can you give me an update on the responses of Fife Council and Perth and Kinross Council? Do you anticipate other local authorities following their lead in responding to your FOI requests?

Kit McCarthy: In response to the FOI requests that we submitted and our further campaigning, Fife Council issued an outright ban on the devices being used on council property. As far as I am aware, Perth and Kinross Council has removed the devices from schools across Perth and Kinross, but I do not believe that it has issued a full ban. Since then, we have had no further contact with either council.

Brian Whittle: Do you expect any reply from the other councils that you have written to?

Kit McCarthy: We have not had a response from any other councils. The only other use of a Mosquito device that was reported through the FOI requests was in Dumfries and Galloway, but that was by a private operator.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Good morning, Kit. I am interested in the part of the survey that says that most of the young people surveyed had not heard of Mosquito devices. I wonder how extensively people understood the survey that was done and the groups that were reached, particularly groups such as those with autism. Written evidence that we have states that the

"harmful effect of these devices is exacerbated when experienced by groups of young people with protected characteristics".

Our written evidence goes on to quote evidence from Jenny Paterson, the director of the National Autistic Society, who said:

"Many autistic people have very sensitive hearing, experience sensory challenges and struggle with social anxiety. As well as being painful to hear, the sudden, high-pitched buzz of the 'mosquito device' could further increase the social isolation we know autistic people face by making them feel unable to access the public spaces that many of us take for granted."

Did the Scottish Government survey reach those people who have protected characteristics? Do you have any further comment or more information on the issue?

Kit McCarthy: The survey did not ask respondents to state whether they had any particular disability or autism specifically, so the survey cannot comment on that directly. In terms of the autism issue, I am autistic and I can testify that the tone produced by the Mosquitos has a horrific effect. I know that other people with autism for whom I have reproduced the sound have found that too.

Rachael Hamilton: Do you think that the fact that people have not heard of the Mosquito devices in the first place means that they are unaware that they are experiencing what they are experiencing?

Kit McCarthy: That is something that I have wondered about. It is possible that a higher number of young people have experienced Mosquitos, but because they were unaware that the device was being used, they would have responded in the negative to that question in the survey.

Rachael Hamilton: Okay. Do think that the survey has been left wanting in terms of its detail?

Kit McCarthy: Yes, possibly.

Rachael Hamilton: My next question is on the response of the local authorities, which Brian Whittle touched on. Do you intend to follow up the FOI requests to the local authorities that did not respond? Why do you think that you got such a low response? Do you believe that the local authorities have not responded because they are not using the devices?

Kit McCarthy: All the local authorities and, indeed, the transport companies that we directed FOI requests to responded within the statutory timeframe. The vast majority said either that they held no records or that they were not aware of the use of Mosquito devices. What that suggests to us is that, on the basis of the reports received by the survey, most Mosquito devices are used by private operators. At the moment, we have no specific intention to follow up any of those FOI requests with the councils, because we are not sure that there is further information that they can provide us with.

Rachael Hamilton: Should Mosquito devices be registered if a private company installs them, so that local authorities have the data and are aware of where they are, how they are being used and their effects?

Kit McCarthy: Due to the rights-based considerations, we want there to be an outright ban. However, if the Scottish Government

considers that there is not sufficient evidence for a legislative ban, we would welcome any form of regulation of the devices—as, indeed, would the inventor of the devices, who said so in his evidence to the committee in, I think, 2012. I need to be slightly careful, because the SYP does not have a formal policy on alternative measures to an outright ban on Mosquito devices, but, as far as I am aware, the SYP would support further regulation if a legislative ban was not considered appropriate.

David Torrance: The research that was published in January makes the point that the devices are not an effective deterrent. How would you respond to people who might suggest that, if they are not effective, there is no justification in banning them?

Kit McCarthy: Whether or not the devices are effective is disputed. On its website, the manufacturer will give as much evidence as it wishes on how valuable Mosquito devices have been to individuals and small businesses. There is no question but that they are effective.

However, last month, Sadiq Khan was very relieved to be able to announce that he had sold off the three water cannons that were acquired by his predecessor. The water cannons were not sold off because anyone disputed that they were effective; they were sold off because there were serious moral and safety concerns about their use. Exactly the same applies to Mosquito devices.

There is limited dispute on how effective the devices are. In many cases, they succeed in dispelling young people from an area. However, we do not consider that the end justifies the means that the devices use.

David Torrance: You say that the devices dispel young people from an area. What would you say to residents who have suffered years of antisocial behaviour and who might get relief for the first time in years after a private operator installs the devices? Would that not be an effective use of the devices?

Kit McCarthy: Our response is—and has always been—that antisocial behaviour is not a justification for the use of a device that breaches four separate rights under the European convention. The SYP favours a mature response to antisocial behaviour, including improved youth work and community policing. We do not accept that Mosquito devices are an acceptable way in which to target antisocial behaviour.

The Convener: Do you make any distinction between public places and private businesses? It could be argued that a young person has the right to go to a train or bus station because they want to travel, but young people gathering around a private premises and causing distress to the local

community is a different issue. Should a distinction be made between locations?

Kit McCarthy: The same rights-based and health-based concerns apply to all locations. One issue that has been raised—we can use the example of the device at Loreburne shopping centre in Dumfries and Galloway—is that, even if Mosquito devices are privately operated, they can often intrude on public rights of way. There should not necessarily be a distinction between a device that is operated privately and one that is operated publicly.

The Convener: However, on rights of access, a young person has the right to use public transport—I can understand that—but they are not obliged to go to a particular private premises. If a proprietor wanted to use the device to protect their property and the local community, that would be a different case. Nobody needs to go to such premises, because they would not be accessing services.

Kit McCarthy: That is true, but if a Mosquito device is installed on the outside of a corner shop, anyone who walks past that corner shop will experience the mosquito sound. The effect of the Mosquito device cannot be limited to just the private property; it will intrude on public space.

The Convener: Do you believe that there is now sufficient evidence on the harmful effects of the devices, or do you accept that the research is pretty minimal and flawed? Would it be better to have a more substantial research base before we expect the Government to act?

Kit McCarthy: We believe that the medical research on the health impact of Mosquito devices is limited and needs to be continued. We believe that the rights-based concerns alone are sufficient to justify that.

The Convener: I will play devil's advocate. Do you accept that if a community feels that it is being bullied and intimidated by people—not necessarily just young people—and tries to control that antisocial behaviour, there might be conflicting human rights?

Kit McCarthy: When the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland spoke before the Scottish Youth Parliament when it last sat here in the Scottish Parliament, he said that rights are in no way contingent on responsibilities—they are absolute. We cannot get into a situation in which we qualify rights, based on certain circumstances. Although I accept that antisocial behaviour is an issue that we need to tackle, antisocial behaviour does not justify the violation of rights.

The Convener: On the other side, it could be argued that if a young person's right to live in peace in their community is being violated by

groups that are intimidating and bullying them, they have the right to ask for support to allow them to exercise that right.

Kit McCarthy: If we were to interpret the European convention on human rights in a manner in which the articles were consistent with one another, we would reach the conclusion that one should be able to protect those rights equally. As I have mentioned, there are other ways of preventing antisocial behaviour beyond the use of Mosquito devices, including youth work, community policing and increased security measures.

The Convener: Do you support antisocial behaviour orders and having the right to move people on?

Kit McCarthy: Because there are some limits to SYP policy on how we believe that antisocial behaviour should be tackled, I am slightly wary of saying what alternative strategies we think should be used. However—

The Convener: Does the Scottish Youth Parliament accept that antisocial behaviour by some young people is a serious issue—particularly for other young people—that cannot simply be dismissed? Do you agree that we cannot say that such antisocial behaviour is not a concern, and that we need to tackle it through youth work, community policing, enforcement of the law and so on, which some young people might not be happy with?

Kit McCarthy: Absolutely. We do not for a moment suggest that antisocial behaviour is not a serious issue. However, the violation of rights that is posed by Mosquito devices is also a very serious issue, and the two must be balanced.

Rachael Hamilton: I am interested in why a local authority might choose to use a Mosquito device. It does not take away from the aim of the petition, but a local authority might decide to use the device as a last resort when all other options have been exhausted. I know that a ban is sought, but the issue is whether all options other than use of a Mosquito device have been looked at.

The Convener: For some local authorities, it might be the easy option, because they might not be able to guarantee that the police will turn up or that youth work will be an option. They might feel that sticking up such a device would resolve the problem—it is the equivalent of putting up an electric fence instead of trying to deal with people who are intruding on your property.

It has been an interesting session, and I thank Kit McCarthy for his evidence and his responses to our questions. I am interested in the question of the competence of legislation in this area. I think

that the previous Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs was pretty firmly opposed to it.

I mentioned the issue of conflicting rights in communities. There is a particular issue concerning young people with autism, and I think that we should write to the various organisations that represent and support people with autism to find out whether they have a view on the petition.

Brian Whittle: I have been frantically scribbling some notes. The session has thrown up quite a few questions that we should ask. With regard to the suggestion that there is no evidence that Mosquito devices cause any harm, we have heard today that, at the very least, there is anecdotal evidence of harm. More important, there is no evidence that the devices are not harmful to health. Linked to that is the fact that we do not know how many of the devices there are.

The Convener: The only thing that I would say on that—gently—is that we were there with mobile phone masts for a long time, trying to prove a negative.

10:00

Brian Whittle: However, we have heard anecdotal evidence that there is a harm issue here, especially around people with autism. We cannot ignore that. Also, that is linked to the fact that we do not know where the devices are. There is no register of them, so how on earth can we make any kind of judgment around that? I wrote that down when Rachael Hamilton asked about it. There should at least be a register. The thing about mobile phone masts is that we all knew where they were, but we do not know where Mosquito devices are. Fundamentally, they prevent a section of the public from accessing public places. That is the issue that we have here, which speaks to a human rights issue.

A number of issues are thrown up here. As you say, convener, it would be interesting to see what the Scottish Government has to say on the matter, and maybe Police Scotland and COSLA.

The Convener: We want to contact the Scottish Government, Police Scotland and COSLA. I suppose the question is to what extent there has been a failure of public policy if people have to put up Mosquito devices because communities feel that they are not properly protected from antisocial behaviour.

Rachael Hamilton: Yes. Other forms of enforcement, including antisocial behaviour orders, could be deemed to be breaches of human rights as well. It is about the way that local authorities approach these situations. We should not take away from what the petitioner is asking

for, but all the other points of discussion that we have brought up today are incredibly important.

The Convener: Okay. Is there anyone else that we should contact?

Angus MacDonald: No. I agree with Brian Whittle that we should contact the Scottish Government, Police Scotland and COSLA. I wonder whether we could assist the SYP by making reference, when we write to the Scottish Government, to the position of the Department of Justice and Equality in Ireland, and also the stated views of the Council of Europe. That might help to cut the time down. Given that the petitioners have not contacted the Scottish Government with regard to those issues, we might be able to do so for them.

Rachael Hamilton: I am a little concerned that, if we contact only the National Autistic Society, we will miss out other groups with protected characteristics. I do not know whether we should look only at autism.

The Convener: I think we would hope that other views will come through the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland.

Rachael Hamilton: Okay.

The Convener: Groups that support people with autism have specifically flagged up the issue. I do not think that we know about any other health consequences, but that would be something that we would ask the Government to look at. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Thank you for your attendance and your evidence, Kit. We will get responses from the organisations that we have agreed to write to and you will have an opportunity to comment on them once they come in.

I suspend the meeting for a couple of minutes.

10:03

Meeting suspended.

10:05

On resuming—

First Aid Training (Primary School Children) (PE1711)

The Convener: The next petition for consideration, PE1711, is on first aid training for all primary school children in Scotland. The petition, which was lodged by Stuart Callison on behalf of St Andrew's First Aid, calls for basic first aid training to be incorporated as an integral part of the primary school curriculum, and for the

provision of funding to deliver high-quality training materials, along with appropriate training for teachers.

The briefing prepared by SPICe and the clerks outlines the current curriculum requirements in the Scottish Government's policy framework and refers to "Out-of-Hospital Cardiac Arrest: A Strategy for Scotland", which the Scottish Government published in 2015 and which was discussed by the committee when we heard evidence on petition PE1707 on public access defibrillators. The briefing also refers to two members' business debates on the issue.

I have had some dealings with St Andrew's First Aid on the importance of first aid as a life skill. I had not really thought about it fully before, but I am convinced that all our young people should learn first aid.

One of the things that came out of the evidence on out-of-hospital cardiac arrest was the fact that people in poorer communities are not only disproportionately more likely to have a cardiac arrest but are disproportionately less likely to have somebody around them who can help them.

First aid is such a basic thing. My staff have now been trained in first aid, and I am pressing for the Scottish Parliament to ensure that we all have access to first aid training, because if you have had the training, you can literally save a life. I feel quite strongly about the issue, and about the important work that St Andrew's First Aid and others, and their volunteers, do to support community events and so on. I suppose that I am declaring an interest at the outset, but I would be interested in other members' views.

Brian Whittle: I have a fantastic memory and can remember my school days. It was routine to do first aid training but, like lots of other things, it seems to have been dropped from the curriculum. As you say, convener, it is a life skill. It was something different in the school day, and being able to carry out first aid is quite empowering. I have a lot of sympathy for the petition.

The Convener: I cannot remember my school days, but I remember doing accident prevention and first aid in the guides. Youth organisations did a lot of that, and I am sure that they still do, but it does not get the same level of coverage.

Rachael Hamilton: I am sure that Brian Whittle had lots of time to reflect when he was daydreaming at school.

The petition fits beautifully with the petition on access to defibs in public places—it is almost as if they are linked. It is unfortunate that they are not linked, although they will run in tandem.

Through the curriculum for excellence, it is up to schools to decide on the health and safety

education that they provide. It is very much up to schools how they take forward issues such as knife crime awareness.

I have my own business, and our first aid provision has to be assessed on an on-going basis. I wonder whether it would be good to work out how many people in a school—including young people—are qualified in first aid at any one time. Many groups, such as the scouts and the groups that do Duke of Edinburgh awards, offer first aid qualifications. In a school, it is important that, in every class and in the building at any one time, a certain number of people are available to administer cardiopulmonary resuscitation. From the point of view of a blanket approach, the provision is fantastic, but we should ask whether it is age limited. Lots of questions are thrown up. The provision depends very much on the school.

The Convener: I was struck by the petition's rational approach. First, it identifies the problem of disproportionality—the fact that someone in a poor community is more likely to need first aid support but is less likely to have somebody around them who can help them. The petitioners are targeting disadvantaged communities first. They are also targeting primary-age children, because first aid is a skill that all people should learn rather than something that they acquire by accident.

There is also a distinction to be made between CPR and first aid skills more broadly. Understandably, people focus on CPR, which is a big thing. The petition links with the need for people to know about defibrillators and to not be afraid of such machines, which should be used if they are available and should be registered. All such provision is about trying to make people safe if they become ill. It feels as though the petition is quite systematic in what it is saying. There is not a school in the world that would not want to give its young people these skills, but do schools have access to training and materials? The more that is provided, the more likely it is that a school will find space for first aid in the curriculum. If the school has to design the course, it will be less likely to do that.

David Torrance: I put on record the fact that I am a member of the Scout Association. First aid skills are taught to all uniformed sections, which means that children as young as six, who are in the beaver section, acquire them as life skills. I fully support the petition, because first aid skills make a big difference. I have seen them being used in real life by people who have been taught them.

The Convener: We have not had the petitioners in front of us, but I would be interested in hearing from them about why they have focused the petition on children and consistency. My understanding is that they would want to bring

evidence from their volunteers about the difference that they have made. Perhaps we should see whether we could schedule that in the new year.

As Rachael Hamilton has said on the subject of defibrillators, there is an interest here, because it feels rational, logical and sensible to give people such skills, because they can literally save a life. I sense that the committee would support that, so perhaps we should write to the Scottish Government and local authorities to seek their views on the action that is called for in the petition, whether it is doable and whether they would want to approach the issue in that way.

Is there anything else that we could do at this time?

Rachael Hamilton: It is important that we write to local authorities, but I go back to my point about the bespoke stuff that is done in schools. I do not think that local authorities have a handle on the good work that is done on a voluntary basis by teachers and organisations or on how many people are involved in that. A deep dive needs to be done to assess what schools are currently doing. Although local authorities would show us their guidance on what they do, I am not sure that that would bring back exactly what we want to see, which is absolutely key to this.

The Convener: Perhaps we could ask St Andrew's First Aid what the extent of the coverage is, in its experience. I know that it has all sorts of activities for different age groups. I think that the group for wee ones is called the thistles. They were in the Parliament on one occasion, and they taught us how to do CPR. It would be interesting to find out St Andrew's First Aid's sense of what the pattern is.

At this stage, I am reluctant to ask for a survey of what is done in schools. The amount of time that it would take for them to respond would make that hard to do.

Rachael Hamilton: From a health and safety point of view, a school should absolutely know, each day, how many people in the building are trained in first aid, including young people who might be involved in a situation in which no teacher is available to administer it.

10:15

The Convener: There is a distinction to be made, which I was conscious of when I first asked about first aid training in the Parliament. We were told that we could identify who the first aid person on our corridor was, but that was not what I was asking. I was asking about the extent to which we could all do it, if we were put in that situation. It is not just about having a named person in an

institution; it is more a question of how we permeate first aid training throughout communities.

Brian Whittle: Following on from that, when we discussed defibrillators, the question that came to my mind was: where is our nearest one? I know that now. The petition also raises the whole idea of the dissemination of information.

The Convener: It is about empowering people to respond so that it is not just the named person who does so.

We have covered a lot of ground. I would be interested in hearing directly from St Andrew's First Aid. If we write to the Scottish Government and local authorities, perhaps we could ask the local authorities not just about the extent to which they map the legislative requirement to have a named person in schools and other institutions but, beyond that, about the extent to which they have an understanding of who has first aid skills in their institutions. Do members agree that we should do that?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We thank the petitioners for the petition. We will look to have a session with them in the new year, when we have got back the responses. We recognise that the petition raises some substantial issues that we want to consider further.

Continued Petitions

Abusive and Threatening Communication (PE1652)

10:16

The Convener: The next item on the agenda is consideration of continued petitions. Petition PE1652, by Irene Baillie, which we last considered in November 2017, is on abusive and threatening communication. The petition calls for a change in the law with regard to abusive and threatening communications sent from a mobile phone, to deem the owner of the phone responsible for any communications sent from that device.

The clerk's note provides a summary of the current position, following Lord Bracadale's review of hate crime legislation in Scotland and the subsequent debate held in Parliament in June 2018. The Scottish Government has recently launched its consultation on Lord Bracadale's recommendations, which closes on 24 February 2019.

Do members have any comments or suggestions for action?

Angus MacDonald: There is merit in waiting for the conclusion of the consultation. I would be loth to close the petition at this time. In the first instance, we should contact the Scottish Government to seek information on whether the conclusions of Lord Bracadale's review address the call for action in the petition. The petitioner clearly has a valid argument. We may all have been subject to such communication in this occupation. I have a lot of sympathy with the petition.

Rachael Hamilton: I was interested in what Lord Bracadale said about online activity and the need to prove who had sent messages to meet the requirement for corroboration. He specifically said that that posed challenges. However, the review goes on to state:

"The question of whether corroboration should be abolished generally, and whether any safeguards would be needed if that were to happen, is currently with Ministers."

It is important that we do not close the petition until there is further consideration of that as part of the consultation and ministers have been given the opportunity to comment on it.

The Convener: We want to highlight to the Scottish Government that although we are not clear whether the consultation will address any of the detail of the petition, it should be alive to the petition.

I am interested in what would happen in similar circumstances in other parts of the United

Kingdom. I can see the logic of deeming a person to be responsible if there is consistent behaviour over time from their mobile phone to your mobile phone. However, if a coercive person has taken your mobile phone and is using it to send messages to somebody else, you would be liable for that. I am sympathetic to the petitioner's case, but we need to tease out which part of the issue is a result of Scots law and which part is because it is a complicated crime that is difficult to deal with.

Are we agreed that we should not close the petition until the consultation is closed and that we will write to the Scottish Government on the issues that we have highlighted?

Angus MacDonald: Clearly, the corroboration issue is the salient point. I think that we are still waiting for the petitioner to comment on the final report of the independent review. It would be good to get the petitioner's view on that.

The Convener: Yes—that would be useful.

Do members agree to that approach?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I again thank the petitioner. If she wishes to respond to the final report, we would be interested to hear her views.

Independent Water Ombudsman (PE1693)

The Convener: The next continued petition is PE1693, by Graeme Harvey on behalf of the Lowland Canals Association, on an independent water ombudsman. We first considered the petition in September, and we have a note from the clerk that summarises the submissions that have been received following that meeting.

The submissions from the Inland Waterways Association and the Royal Yachting Association Scotland express some support for the establishment of an independent water ombudsman as called for in the petition. The Inland Waterways Association expresses its support on the basis that the Waterways Ombudsman carried out the function between 2005 and 2012. The Royal Yachting Association considers that there is an argument for the establishment of an independent water ombudsman, but with a broader remit than that proposed in the petition.

Both submissions consider that current Scottish Government funding is not sufficient for Scottish Canals to carry out its functions efficiently. The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity's submission addresses those concerns, highlighting the additional funding that has been provided to Scottish Canals in recent years.

Scottish Canals and the Scottish Waterways Trust do not support the action that is called for in the petition, on the basis that it will result in an additional layer of regulation and is not the best use of public money at this time. The cabinet secretary indicates that the Scottish Government does not consider the establishment of an independent ombudsman to be the most appropriate way to address the petitioner's concerns. He adds that, although no specific cost analysis has been undertaken, significant resource is likely to be required to set up and run such a body.

Do members have any comments or suggestions for action?

Rachael Hamilton: It is difficult, because there are so many conflicting pieces of evidence. For example, the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman said that having a water ombudsman would not be the best use of public money, but the Royal Yachting Association wants one. There is a clear concern that public money has been wasted, particularly over the millennium link project. Audit Scotland says that it plans to

"consider these potential risks further in the 2018/19 external audit, alongside how Scottish Canals continues to fulfil its statutory obligations".

We are a long way off reaching a conclusion on the issue, which is a shame, because the main issues are the detrimental fall-out for tourism and maintenance. I am interested in what other members think we should do.

The Convener: My sense is that people think that there is a problem and have suggested having an ombudsman as a way of addressing it. Even if we do not agree that there should be an ombudsman, there is still a problem. Scottish Canals says that there is constant wear and tear and increased usage and that it has a queue of maintenance projects. However, there is a repair backlog of £70 million, and we are also told that there is a risk of collapse. The Royal Yachting Association said:

"It is our opinion that Scotland's Canals are close to the tipping point at which the successful regeneration achieved over many years is at risk of collapse and the £98M of public money invested in the Millennium Link Project, wasted."

It feels to me that, even if an ombudsman—or whatever—is going to cost money, it cannot possibly be anywhere near the £70 million repair backlog, with the danger of losing the benefit of all that investment and having a network that is in disrepair and cannot benefit the tourism industry.

Brian Whittle: I noted the £70 million backlog as well. The Transport (Scotland) Bill is going through Parliament at the moment. I wonder whether this should feed into the bill, or at least

whether we can highlight the petition to the lead committee, because it should fit in with the overall picture. The worrying thing is the amount of money that is going to be required to maintain this heritage asset, or at least to bring it back up to a standard where it can be used by those who want to use it.

The Convener: It feels like a false economy. We can certainly flag up the issue to the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, which is handling the Transport (Scotland) Bill. I have an overwhelming sense that public money is currently being wasted and the benefits of the strategy are being lost. Scottish Canals is taking quite a defensive approach, saying that it is all difficult and complicated and that it cannot do things because they would not work. There seems to be vagueness about what the SPSO can currently do. It does not seem to be able to do terribly much.

I am also quite interested in the suggestion—I am not sure which group made it—that there should be a broader strategy about boating and people who use the water for leisure beyond just canals. I found that an interesting and compelling argument.

Angus MacDonald: The petition came about as a result of frustration with Scottish Canals, particularly because some bridges had been closed on the Forth and Clyde canal. The problem was exacerbated by a perception that Scottish Canals was not on top of its game. Clearly, Scottish Canals has a number of challenges, and has been landed with the £70 million backlog. The bridges are now being repaired thanks to a lump sum that the Scottish Government has given Scottish Canals to get it sorted, but that cannot continue. You cannot just stick a plaster on everything as and when it comes up.

I have a lot of sympathy for the petition, but I can see the argument regarding the cost of setting up a separate ombudsman, particularly when we look at the number of cases that have come in to the SPSO to date. I think that it has only dealt with around 10, and there are cost issues in setting up another ombudsman, although there is clearly an argument for it. I would be keen to get more information from Scottish Canals, and possibly also from the Royal Yachting Association. We need to get different viewpoints on the setting up of a separate ombudsman.

Rachael Hamilton: There is merit in what Angus MacDonald has suggested. We also need to tease out the discourse about the fact that Scottish Canals has statutory obligations. As mentioned by the petitioner, the Royal Yachting Association has noted Scottish Canals' comment on the

“changing nature of our business from a canal body to an increasingly leisure related business.”

The cabinet secretary has stated:

“Scottish Government Grant in Aid cannot be used for commercial investments.”

However, the Government has said that it wants to see how things develop and what return there will be on the investment that it has made, which I assume will be used for maintenance. Further on, there seems to be a reference to wear and tear being caused not just by usage but by climate change, which adds in a new factor.

10:30

The Convener: It feels a bit like the thinking went, “You don’t have to give one explanation; just give as many as you can think of.” Part of the issue must be that Scottish Canals has to try to develop surpluses through its commercial programme. The petitioner’s argument was that Scottish Canals has lost sight of its core business and that we could end up losing the benefit of all the investment in the millennium link project. In addition, the backlog is still not being dealt with, which must be compounding over time.

It would be useful to take evidence from Scottish Canals. There are a number of submissions from other interested groups. We may want to hear from Scottish Canals and get responses from other groups thereafter. Members mentioned the Royal Yachting Association in particular. Maybe, in conversation with those groups, we could see what the best approach would be.

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We will continue with the petition in recognition of the important issues that are in it. I thank a number of organisations for the substantial responses that we have received from them.

Adoption (PE1701)

The Convener: The next petition for consideration is PE1701, by Nathan Sparling, on changing the law to allow adoption for people over the age of 18. Members will recall that we first considered the petition in September, when we heard evidence from the petitioner. The submissions that have been received to date are included in our meeting pack and are summarised in the clerk’s note.

Adoption and Fostering Alliance Scotland and Adoption UK are broadly supportive of the action that is called for in the petition, although they caveat their respective positions. AFA Scotland has indicated that the immediate priority should be to ensure that the current law is made fit for purpose for children in the care system, and

Adoption UK has suggested that any changes in respect of parental rights and responsibilities

“would be hollow in practice.”

In their joint submission, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and the Minister for Older People and Equalities acknowledge the motivation behind the petition, but consider that

“the current legal provisions strike an appropriate balance between the interests involved.”

They do not believe that the current law amounts to a breach of article 8 of the European convention on human rights or of the Human Rights Act 1998.

The Law Society of Scotland has summarised the current legal position, particularly on parental rights and responsibilities and succession, and has noted that there are options

“to mitigate the lack of legal status between two adults who consider themselves to be in a relationship akin to parent/child”.

It has further noted that there is no international consensus on the issue, that it would potentially be a significant change to the law, and that reform

“should not be undertaken without further debate and research.”

It has suggested that such research should include a

“comparative study of the position in different jurisdictions.”

Do members have any comments or suggestions for action? I am interested in finding out something from the Scottish Government. It acknowledges the petitioner’s motivation, but considers that

“the current legal provisions strike an appropriate balance between the interests involved.”

I do not know what interests are in conflict with each other so that a balance between them is being sought. I might be missing something there, but I wondered whether we could pursue that further with the Scottish Government. Would it be to the detriment of a group of people for legislation to go through? I am not quite sure why that would be.

Rachael Hamilton: Professor Kenneth Norrie said something similar. He said:

“That depends on a balance of what the new law would achieve, with the difficulty of achieving it. In my view the complexities, and costs, far outweigh any potential benefit.”

The Convener: That is a different argument. That says that it is not worth it, because it would cause a lot of fuss to do it. The Scottish Government has implied that there is a conflict of interests and that the current position seeks a balance between the two interests. I do not know who it would be problematic for to permit an adult to be adopted by the person who brought them up.

I am not sure what the conflict of interests is. It would be useful to have that amplified. I understand absolutely that the adoption organisations want to focus on young people, but whose interests would not be met by legislation saying that adults could be adopted? That is the question that I was wrestling with.

Brian Whittle: I am trying to work out who would be harmed by that. On the flipside, Adoption UK said that changes to adoption legislation

“would be hollow in practice.”

I am wrestling with the idea of whether we need legislation.

The Convener: I suppose that the petitioner’s argument is that they knew that they could get succession rights. A will could be written and all the rest of it, but it is significant emotionally for the petitioner to have that relationship recognised in law. The argument from the lawmakers is whether an individual experience like that merits a change in the law, particularly if it had other consequences. However, I am not quite clear about what those other consequences are.

Brian Whittle: I would like somebody to tell me.

The Convener: I assume that the petitioner is perfectly clear that they could get succession rights through a will but still wanted to lodge their petition. We found the petitioner’s evidence quite compelling when we first considered the petition. We are asking what the harm would be in changing the law in the way that the petitioner seeks. There is clearly resistance to doing that, but it does not seem to be because it is complicated and people do not want to go there.

Brian Whittle: The law obviously changes for a person when they reach 18. For example, one of the boys who I coach has just turned 18 and he lives in foster care, so there is a huge change in his legal position now. I understand that there would be an issue around that legal age with regard to the petition, but I fail to see where legislation comes into the matter otherwise. I would like somebody to come in here and tell me what the downside is with what the petitioner seeks.

The Convener: The petitioner has not yet responded to the submissions received on the petition, so it would be good to hear from him regarding whether the law could do things in other ways and whether publicly declaring that he was adopted would be sufficient. We should also ask the Scottish Government what the conflict of interest might be, where it perceives there to be a possible downside and what makes it think that the law has the right balance on the matter. The Law Society of Scotland suggested that we also

contact the Scottish Law Commission on the issue, so it might be worth getting its views.

Rachael Hamilton: The Scottish Government says that the option currently available to adults provides a “sense of belonging”, and that adults can

“change their name, have official records amended and ... make arrangements for succession”.

Does that mean that the Scottish Government believes that there is already an informal option in place and that it would therefore be reticent about taking matters further?

The Convener: Yes. I suppose that the Scottish Government’s view is “If it can be done that way, why do you need to do it this way? Why do you need to change the law?” That is what we could tease out from the petitioner. We could also say to the Scottish Government: “If it isn’t a terribly complicated thing, we should just do it. To whose detriment would that be?” If the committee agrees, therefore, we will write to the Scottish Government and the Scottish Law Commission, and ask the petitioner to respond to the submissions received today and to the comments in our discussion of the petition.

Rachael Hamilton: If it is possible, I would like the clerks to ask about something that Professor Norrie said, which was that when adoption was first introduced into Scots law, it allowed for the adoption of adults, if only in limited circumstances. I would like to know more about the background of that, because if that was possible, why is not it an option?

The Convener: We could also ask the Scottish Government for its response to the Law Society’s suggestion that we need research and that it would be interesting to get international comparisons. Is that all agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Autistic People (Targets and Outcomes) (PE1704)

The Convener: The next petition for consideration is PE1704, by Duncan MacGillivray, on improving targets and outcomes for autistic people in Scotland. The clerk’s note provides a detailed summary of the submissions received since our first consideration of the petition in September. Those submissions are included in our meeting papers. Members have before them a copy of the petitioner’s response to those submissions. His response is also available on the petition web page.

In his submission, the petitioner states that he was

“very disheartened at the poor response from other stakeholders”,

noting that only 12 of the 32 local authorities responded to the committee’s call for their views on the action called for in the petition. He adds that the content of those 12 responses highlights the

“great disparity across Scotland in the nature and quality of autism support and services”.

The petitioner also considers that some of the responses from local authorities were defensive. He notes that many of those who responded referred to assessment processes that have

“promising titles but ... are vague and unclear in what they actually mean or entail”

and which are also unclear in terms of an indication of their effectiveness. He considers that it must be acknowledged that views from service providers have a bias towards their own positive portrayal.

The petitioner notes that a number of responses acknowledged that there require to be

“real measurements of the impact of the Scottish Autism strategy”,

and he considers that the provision of carer needs has been affected by the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016, which allows local authorities discretion to assess criteria for support. He refers to that as

“a subtle but highly significant change in supporting carers and families”

that has, in his experience,

“produced a reduction in support”.

The petitioner also highlights his concern that service users and autistic people appear to have a lack of voice. He provides an example of autism strategy events being scheduled in venues and at times that were prohibitive in terms of the ability of parents, service users and carers to attend. He also observes that, where it was possible to attend events, those events

“were always top heavy with professionals”.

Other issues that the petitioner identifies in his submission include concerns that there are insufficient resources across local authorities to provide the required level of support, which is exacerbated by a shortage of educational psychologists as well as a lack of courses to increase the numbers of those professionals.

Do members have any comments or suggestions for action?

Brian Whittle: I declare an interest in that I have a couple of constituency cases that relate to the issues that this petition raises.

One of the things with being a list MSP is that you work across a number of constituencies. From that experience, I can say that it is evident that there is a disparity in how even neighbouring councils address this issue. I have heard of parents moving house so that they come within the jurisdiction of another authority that performs a much tighter investigation in relation to kids who potentially have autism.

The issue that has been raised is a problem. The submission from the Educational Institute of Scotland talks about the policy being one of "inclusion without resources". That phrase jumped out at me.

We are duty bound to investigate the difference in the way in which councils approach the issue of the needs of people who require additional support for learning. As I have seen in individual cases in my constituency, the issue has a major impact on individuals and families. Across the political spectrum, people say that it is something that has to be addressed.

Angus MacDonald: I agree that there seems to be an issue in relation to the disparity across Scotland.

I must agree with the point that the petitioner makes at the start of the petition, which is that it is not acceptable that only 12 of the 32 local authorities have bothered to respond to the request from the Public Petitions Committee. That is unforgivable. I suggest that we contact the local authorities that have not bothered to respond and ask them again to give us a submission on the issue.

The Convener: I think that we would all agree to that, as it would enable us to get a proper picture.

I was quite struck by the defensive tone of the responses from the Scottish Government and the local authorities. All the responses stressed that the issue was complicated and that there cannot simply be the kind of assessment that is proposed. In a sense, the situation is similar to the one that we discussed in relation to the first petition that we dealt with this morning, in that it is recognised that there is a problem but there is not necessarily an agreement with the solution that has been identified by the petitioner. That is particularly the case around the issue of a possible autism act. We could tease that out further, but it would be interesting to know what the circumstances are across the country.

I should say that I also sit on the Education and Skills Committee, which is considering the question of support for young people with autism in education, as a direct consequence of the report, "Not included, not engaged, not involved", which was produced by the National Autistic

Society Scotland, Scottish Autism and Children in Scotland. It contains strong evidence that some young people are not able to access education because people around them are not appropriately trained to provide that education.

10:45

Those young people might be on part-time or other timetables, because they are managed in the main stream or there is no longer appropriate specialist provision. Due to the presumption of mainstreaming, there is a double hit, so young people who should be supported in the main stream are not supported sufficiently, and there is no longer alternative provision for young people for whom mainstreaming is not appropriate. That is an issue to—*[Interruption.]* I think that that noise is coming from the crèche.

Rachael Hamilton: It is like the Mosquito device.

Brian Whittle: One other issue that we need to look at is access to assessment. In some councils, there is resistance to allowing kids to be assessed.

The Convener: Is it not more that they are resistant to putting a timescale on assessment? That feels to me as though they are having to manage a limited resource.

There is a small but significant issue about educational psychologist courses. We put a Scottish statutory instrument through the Education and Skills Committee on re-establishing bursaries or other financial support for people who are studying for such a qualification. However, we are being told by the EIS that only one university in Scotland was due to offer the training next year, but it is not going to run the course now, presumably because there was not enough demand. The people who do such assessments in schools will not be replenished any time soon.

Rachael Hamilton: The petitioner is asking for diagnosis within a calendar year, which is not unreasonable. I was astounded that the National Autistic Society Scotland said that it found in its research that young people have to wait 3.6 years for diagnosis.

There are a number of issues here. It runs parallel with the mental health service pathways because it is about the clarity of pathways. It is not one size fits all, and it seems that there are no clear guidelines in local authorities. Some people are presuming that children with autism or children whose parents believe that they have autism are being seen within an appropriate timeframe, but there is no evidence of that. As there was a lack of input from many local authorities, I imagine that they are unaware of the timescales.

I am also struck by the different ways that boards look at the pathways through learning disability services or, when appropriate, mental health services. The pathway comes first and then the timeframe comes into it. They have to get the pathway right. I said that one size does not fit all—it has to be bespoke—but perhaps those services need to work together a little bit more so that the resources can be used collaboratively.

The Convener: There is a challenge in whether support follows the assessment—that is another issue.

There are a number of issues to write to the Scottish Government about. There is the question about educational psychologists, and the question of whether the Scottish Government will commit to recording, publishing and monitoring autism diagnosis waiting times, which, in itself, might be helpful. The Scottish Government said that there is

“a recognition that varying waiting times across Scotland are too long and should be improved”,

so we can ask how it will do that.

There is also a question about whether school teachers are sufficiently supported by support staff to meet additional support needs. The other thing is about training for everybody in the school community. For student teachers, should that be in initial training? Also, what training and support is there for people who work in schools with young people with autism?

Is there anything else that we could ask? Have I missed anything from what has been highlighted?

Rachael Hamilton: We could question the Government on whether it believes that it will transform the lives of autistic people by 2021, which is when it has committed to deliver those priorities. That is not very far away. From what we have seen here, the Government has a lot of work to do.

The Convener: There is also Angus MacDonald's point about going back to the local authorities. Although we understand the pressures that they are under, it would be useful to get their responses to our questions on this area. Are we agreed on all that?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: In that case, we have a substantial amount of work to do. I thank the petitioner for his further submission, which has given us a lot to think about with regard to what has already been established. We will revisit the petition when we have had a response from the Scottish Government and, hopefully, local authorities.

We have reached the end of the public session. Before we close, I thank the committee, our

petitioners, people who have given evidence and those who have responded to us. We have done a substantial amount of work this year.

We wish everybody a very happy Christmas and a peaceful new year.

10:50

Meeting continued in private until 11:08.

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