



Official Report
Aithisg Oifigeil

DRAFT

Public Petitions Committee

Comataidh an nan Athchuingean Poblach

Thursday 8 October 2026

Session 7



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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CONTENTS

	Col.
DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE	1
NEW PETITIONS	2
Wallace Day (PE2214).....	2
William Wallace Letter (PE2245)	3
Beehives (Ban) (PE2232)	4
Hyperscale Data Centres (Moratorium) (PE2233)	5
MSP Salaries (PE2234)	7
Rates Relief (Charities) (PE2236).....	9
Health and Social Care (Benefits) (PE2237)	10
Child Sexual/Domestic Abuse (Removal of Parental Rights) (PE2238)	11

PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE

4th Meeting 2026, Session 7

CONVENER

*Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Julie MacDougall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)

*Cara McKee (West Scotland) (Green)

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)

*attended

LOCATION

The Adam Smith Room (CR5)

Scottish Parliament

Public Petitions Committee

Thursday 8 October 2026

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Paul Sweeney): Good morning, and welcome to the fourth meeting of the Public Petitions Committee in session 7, at which we have eight new petitions to consider. We have received apologies from Marie McNair.

Ahead of each meeting, we notify non-committee members of petitions that we will be discussing and on which they have expressed an interest. We have not been advised of any members joining us today.

I welcome all the attendees in the public gallery. I remind everyone that only members sitting at the table can participate in formal proceedings, and I ask everyone to ensure that their devices are on silent and that all notifications are turned off for the duration of the meeting.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on taking business in private. Do we agree that items 3 and 4 should be taken in private?

Members indicated agreement.

New Petitions

Wallace Day (PE2214)

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is consideration of new petitions. PE2214 is the first of two petitions submitted by David Reid, who we understand is the convener of the Society of William Wallace. The petition was published on 18 June and calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to officially declare and promote 23 August as Wallace day in honour of Sir William Wallace.

The Scottish Parliament information centre briefing notes that the Society of William Wallace, a Scottish charitable incorporated organisation that was established to uphold William Wallace's memory, already runs an annual Wallace day event on the Saturday nearest to 23 August.

The briefing explains that commemorative days in Scotland can be marked in different ways, for example through sustained civic and cultural practice or with the added status of a bank holiday. Bank holidays are created under the Banking and Financial Dealings Act 1971 and are days on which financial dealings may be suspended. They include days that are specifically listed in the act, as well as days that are proclaimed by the King. In addition to national bank holidays, local authorities in Scotland set their own public holidays, which vary from area to area and have no statutory basis.

The Scottish Government response states that it recognises the significant role that Sir William Wallace played in Scotland's history and national story. However, the Government does not have an established policy framework for the creation of new nationally recognised commemorative days. It further notes that there is currently little evidence of widespread public support for the petition's ask or a clearly defined proposal for how such a day would be observed.

The response goes on to note, however, that the then Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture met representatives of the Society of William Wallace in November last year to discuss their proposal, as have Scottish Government officials. During those discussions, advice was provided on approaches that could help to build support for the concept of a Wallace day. The response states that officials have indicated a willingness to continue engaging with the society and to provide advice where appropriate as the proposal develops.

Do members have any comments or suggestions for further action on the petition?

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I note the Government's willingness to continue engaging with the Society of William Wallace on the

establishment of a commemorative day in honour of William Wallace and I wonder whether the committee would consider keeping the petition open. In doing so, the committee might wish to write to the Scottish Government to ask it to keep the committee informed of any progress made on the matter.

Julie MacDougall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): I support keeping the petition open and allowing the Scottish Government to go through that process.

The Convener: Are we all happy with that?

Members indicated agreement.

William Wallace Letter (PE2245)

The Convener: PE2245, which was also lodged by David Reid, was published on 25 August. The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to keep the Wallace letter—known as the safe conduct or letter of introduction—in Scotland. The petition notes that the letter is on loan from the National Archives and is a key item of significant cultural importance to Scotland and our history. It further notes that the loan ended in September and calls for the letter to remain in Scotland indefinitely.

The SPICe briefing explains that the National Archives holds official physical ownership of the Wallace letter in the National Archives building at Kew. The Wallace letter was loaned to the National Records of Scotland from 2012 until September this year, when it was returned to the National Archives. It will return to the NRS on loan again from 2028 to 2031.

The Government's response states that ministers believe that the Wallace letter should remain in Scotland due to its significant cultural and historical importance to Scotland. It notes, however, that whether the letter remains permanently in Scotland is not solely a matter for the Scottish Government, as the document is owned by the National Archives. Decisions regarding the location and display of the document therefore require agreement between the custodial institutions that are involved. The Government states that Scottish ministers will renew negotiations regarding the document's longer-term future once the letter has returned to Scotland for the renewed loan period, with the aim of settling it permanently in Scotland.

Do members have any comments or suggestions for further action on the petition?

Cara McKee (West Scotland) (Green): It is really important that the letter should belong to Scotland, but there does not seem to be any harm in loaning it to England. It seems as though negotiations are already in place for that, but I

would be minded to keep the petition open and write to the National Archives and the NRS to seek their views on the action that is called for.

The Convener: I am happy with the idea of corresponding with those institutions. Does everyone agree?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Great. We will set out those items of correspondence, and I hope that we can move things forward.

Beehives (Ban) (PE2232)

The Convener: PE2232 was published on 21 July and was lodged by Susan Kirkness. It calls for a ban on beehives in public spaces until statutory national safety regulations are in place. The petition was motivated by an incident in which two members of the petitioner's family—an adult and a young child—were stung more than 150 times each by swarming bees in a public area. It calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ban beehives in public access spaces until new safety laws are introduced. The petition states that new laws should clearly regulate beehives, including through the use of mandatory safety signage when beekeepers are working in public access spaces.

The SPICe briefing explains that there are currently no specific regulations in Scotland governing the siting of beehives or the related use of signage. It notes that the incident behind the petition was raised at a meeting of the bee health improvement partnership in October 2025 and refers to the minutes of that meeting. The minutes note that section 49 of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 might be relevant in this instance. The briefing also identifies other potentially relevant areas of law.

In its submission, the Government recognises the seriousness of the incident and the impact that it has had on those involved. It goes on to address the two central asks of the petition. It notes that such incidents are rare and, as such, considers that there is insufficient evidence to suggest that legislative change for an initial ban on beehives in public spaces is a necessary and proportionate step. It sets out a bullet point list of several practical questions that would be raised. The Government also considers that legislation requiring mandatory signage is neither practical nor proportionate, noting that local authorities can already take action under section 49 of the 1982 act. The Government explains that it encourages the promotion of good husbandry and responsible beekeeping, including the issue of responsibilities around public safety, through a range of work with stakeholders including the bee health improvement partnership.

In her submission, the petitioner notes that the Government refers to a range of legislative instruments but that they all relate to bee health rather than addressing public safety. She argues that that is confirmed by the SPICe briefing, noting that there is no statutory guidance on safe hive placement, risk assessment for public access areas, public-facing safety measures during hive manipulation or signage requirements. She further argues that the 1982 act is reactive and insufficient, and sets out her position on why the actions that she calls for in her petition are proportionate and necessary, reiterating her view that the Government response focuses principally on bee health regulation rather than public safety measures.

Do members have a view on what we should do next?

Julie MacDougall: I suggest that we keep the petition open. We could write to the Scottish Beekeepers Association and Scotland's Rural College to get their views on the action that the petition calls for.

The Convener: Are there any further suggestions?

David Torrance: I wonder whether we could write to the Government, seeking its views on the petitioner's concerns around a lack of provision in respect of public safety in relation to beehives and public spaces, and to hear what steps it is taking—other than through legislation—to mitigate the risk to the public.

Cara McKee: I agree with getting in touch with the Government and the stakeholder groups. It seems as though there is a gap in regulation around beehives, but it is important that we think about our ecosystems when dealing with bees.

The Convener: That is a reasonable and balanced approach. Do we all agree with those actions?

Members indicated agreement.

Hyperscale Data Centres (Moratorium) (PE2233)

The Convener: Our next petition is PE2233, lodged on 21 July by Katherine Jones on behalf of Action to Protect Rural Scotland, which calls for the introduction of a moratorium to prohibit planning permission from being granted for any hyperscale data centres until the Scottish Government has carried out a thorough assessment of their impacts on Scotland's communities, greenhouse gas emissions, land and water resources and electricity grid; regulations are modified to require all hyperscale artificial intelligence data centres to carry out an environmental impact assessment; and the

Scottish Government puts in place guidance on hyperscale AI data centres and green data centres.

There has been a significant amount of public and parliamentary interest in this issue in the early months of this parliamentary session, with a number of questions and motions having been lodged on the subject and a debate having been held in Opposition time. The Scottish Parliament information centre briefing highlights the recent direction that was issued by the Scottish Government, which requires any planning application for a data centre with a power capacity in excess of 50MW to be accompanied by an environmental impact assessment. The briefing is also clear that the Scottish Government could introduce what is effectively a moratorium by adopting a "no support" policy, as it has done for new coal mines and oil and gas developments that employ fracking. The briefing goes on to explain how that principle works in practice.

In its submission, which was provided before the direction that was issued on 16 September, the Scottish Government suggests that it is not clear whether a moratorium would be lawful, noting that the Government cannot prevent applications from being submitted and that each application is considered on its merits. It further notes that planning authorities already have a responsibility to consider environmental impacts. The Government argues that there is a large opportunity to be had with attracting large-scale investment into Scotland through data centres and that

"there is a unique opportunity to design a system with controls and guidance that gets it 'right' from the start."

In their submission, the petitioners indicate that they are content that points 3 and 4 of the petition have been addressed. They consider that point 3 was addressed by the Government's direction issued on 16 September, while point 4 was addressed through the motion that was lodged by Patrick Harvie and agreed to, as amended, by the Parliament on the same date.

However, the petitioners feel that the ask for a moratorium, as set out in point 1 of the petition, and the ask for that moratorium to remain in place until a thorough assessment of the impact of data centres has been carried out, as set out in point 2, have only been partially addressed. The petitioners point to the SPICe briefing and advice that they have received from Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland that is clear that the Scottish Government could lawfully introduce a moratorium, which would address point 1 of the petition.

They also explain that they have not yet had clarity from the Scottish Government on how it will

deliver part 2 of the petition, which is the call for a thorough assessment of the impact of data centres on Scotland's communities, greenhouse gas emissions, land and water resources and electricity grid. The petitioners point to work that is being progressed by the Climate Action Committee and by the Economy, Tourism and Energy Committee. They consider, though, that

"at its heart this is a planning question"

and ask us to consider referring the petition to our colleagues on the Social Justice, Housing and Local Government Committee.

Do members have a view on where we should go next?

Cara McKee: It is important that we keep this petition open. I would like to refer it to the Social Justice, Housing and Local Government Committee, but it is probably worth getting in touch with the committee to see whether it is able to take it on board in its work plan.

We also need some clarity about how the pause on planning decisions is being implemented by the Scottish Government. I do not know whether it is worth us getting in contact with it or whether we should leave that to the Social Justice, Housing and Local Government Committee if we are referring the petition to it.

David Torrance: I fully support that. The Social Justice, Housing and Local Government Committee is finalising its work plan very shortly, so we could wait and see whether it is in the committee's remit to look at it.

Julie MacDougall: I am okay with that. I was minded to say that we should possibly look at closing the petition, and I appreciate that points 3 and 4 have been addressed by the Scottish Government. However, I also appreciate that it is a planning issue, so I am happy for it to be referred to the Social Justice, Housing and Local Government Committee.

The Convener: Okay. We have heard that that committee will consider its work programme after recess, so we will wait to see what it has to say on that. We might also consider the matter as a candidate for a committee debate, if appropriate.

MSP Salaries (PE2234)

10:15

The Convener: PE2234, which was lodged on 21 July by Tomas Frydrych, calls on the Scottish Parliament to permanently cap MSP salaries at the level of median Scottish income for full-time employment, adjusted annually, which is £39,719 as of October 2025—the equivalent of the salary of a band 5 national health service nurse—and to

cap any additional salaries and payments arising from MSPs' extra duties, such as parliamentary offices, Government positions, severance pay and so on, proportionally to the adjustment of the MSP's annual salary, which would result in a 50 per cent reduction.

The SPICe briefing on the petition states that the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body is responsible for the payment of salaries for MSPs and members of the Scottish Government. Those arrangements are made under the Scottish Parliament salaries scheme. The briefing sets out that, when commissioned in 2001, the Senior Salaries Review Body recommended that MSPs' salaries be set at 87.5 per cent of MPs' salaries at Westminster, based on the differing roles of MPs and MSPs. In 2013, in the light of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority review of MPs' remuneration and the 10 per cent salary increase that was proposed, it was decided to break the link with MPs' salaries.

The SPCB provided a written submission in response to the petition that sets out that, although it recognises the concerns that are expressed by the petitioner regarding the remuneration of elected representatives and welcomes debate on how public funds are used, it considers the current approach to MSP remuneration to be fair, proportionate and appropriate to the responsibilities of the role. It notes the unique constitutional role of MSPs, which includes scrutinising the Scottish Government, holding public bodies to account, developing and passing legislation, representing constituents across Scotland and overseeing the expenditure of many billions of pounds of public funds. The submission sets out that the SPCB is not currently pursuing or considering measures that would achieve the petition's specific asks and notes that any future work is likely to focus on reviewing the overall remuneration framework to ensure that it remains fair, transparent, sustainable and reflective of the responsibilities of elected office.

Do members have any comments or suggestions with regard to the petition?

Cara McKee: I have a lot of sympathy with the petition, but, unfortunately, I do not think that it is in our gift to be able to do anything about it. Our pay is worked out independently, which is how it should be. We do not have control over that.

I think that we need to close the petition under rule 15.7 of standing orders because, given the SPCB's response, there is nothing further that we can do about it. However, I say that with a heavy heart.

The Convener: Do members agree with that?

Members indicated agreement.

Rates Relief (Charities) (PE2236)

The Convener: PE2236, which was lodged on 29 July by Tommy Reid, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to transfer the administration of mandatory charitable rates relief from local authority non-domestic rates departments to an independent, third sector-led or community-focused system. The petitioner states that that will ensure that applications from volunteer-led charities are considered by those with a proper understanding of how voluntary organisations operate, rather than through a narrow revenue collection and enforcement lens.

The SPICe briefing explains that a range of reliefs are available to non-domestic rates payers, with charity relief being one of the largest in terms of total relief value. Registered charities—those that are listed on the register that is maintained by the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator—and other organisations of social benefit such as sports, theatre and arts clubs can qualify for both mandatory and discretionary relief of up to 100 per cent of rates liability. Charities must apply to their local council for relief. It is for local authorities to determine whether a property is occupied wholly or mainly for charitable purposes.

The Scottish Government's response to the petition sets out that it does not consider the petition's specific ask to be practical or achievable. It states that, although the Scottish Government sets non-domestic rates policy, including tax rates and reliefs, local authorities are responsible for the administration and collection of non-domestic rates, including billing. All reliefs are administered by local authorities, which reflects their local knowledge and expertise. The Government's view is that transferring those responsibilities to an independent, third sector-led or community-focused system, as set out in the petition, would be unprecedented and introduce significant financial and policy risks. It states that extensive and likely complex legislation to establish the necessary accountability and assurance framework would therefore be required, and significant additional costs would be incurred.

The petitioner's submission states that the petition's core point relates to who determines the statutory test for charity relief for non-domestic rates, by what process and with what safeguards. The petitioner seeks confirmation that the mandatory 80 per cent relief is an entitlement, rather than being determined by local discretion once the statutory test is met. It further queries whether recovery action should wait until the statutory test has been completed. The petitioner asks for there to be consideration of an independent or third-sector process as part of the administration of mandatory charitable rates relief,

even if local authorities maintain responsibility for billing and collection.

Do members have any comments or suggestions for action?

David Torrance: In the light of the Government's response, I wonder whether the committee would consider closing the petition under rule 15.7 of standing orders on the basis that, although the Scottish Government sets non-domestic rates policy including tax rates and reliefs, local authorities are responsible for their administration and collection, including billing. All reliefs are therefore administered by local authorities, which reflects their local knowledge and expertise. The Scottish Government takes the view that transferring responsibilities that are set out in the petition to an independent, third sector-led or community-focused system would be unprecedented and introduce significant financial and policy risks. The Scottish Government has stated that it is committed to a comprehensive review of non-domestic rates and reliefs including improvements to the ratepayer experience, but that there are no current plans to revisit the administration of the system itself.

The Convener: There is limited scope for the committee to progress the petition, so I agree.

Julie MacDougall: I initially suggested writing to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, but I appreciate what has been said. The issue could be picked up as part of the upcoming reforms, because processes such as this one could perhaps be simplified. However, I understand what you are saying about the petition.

The Convener: In the light of the Government's proposed reforms, this point will be factored in during some of the consultation opportunities. We might want to write to COSLA to confirm whether the mandatory 80 per cent relief is an entitlement rather than being determined by local discretion, if that has not yet been established. That is the only outstanding question on which we might want to take a view and furnish the petitioner with information. Beyond that, we cannot take the petition much further, so I am happy to close it. Do we agree with that?

Members indicated agreement.

Health and Social Care (Benefits) (PE2237)

The Convener: PE2237, which was lodged on 29 July by Allan Petrie, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to create a "stage not age" health and social care and benefit system for people with exceptional complex medical needs, including a lifelong foster care model so that such young people do not lose

vital paediatric and family financial support at the age of 18.

In its response to the committee, the Government argues that the proposals that are set out in the petition are not considered to be practical or achievable and that a range of legislation and policies are already in place to support the improvements that are requested. The Government's submission sets those out in detail.

In his response, the petitioner states:

"The question is not whether Scotland has legislation, strategies, guidance and transition planning."

He accepts that it does, but he states:

"The question is whether the services available to children with Exceptional Complex Healthcare Needs (CEN) when they transition into adulthood are actually capable of continuing to meet those needs".

In his view, they are not. He argues that those needs are different and more complex, and that adult services have not yet adapted to meet them.

Do members have any comments or suggestions for action?

Cara McKee: This issue is complex and affects a very small group of people. We should keep the petition open and seek more input from the likes of the Association for Real Change Scotland, the Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection—CELCIS—at the University of Strathclyde, the National Social Work Agency, the Fostering Network and the talking about tomorrow project.

The Convener: That sounds like a good range of stakeholders to engage with.

Julie MacDougall: I agree that it is a complex situation. I have been approached by people who are caught in that system, so I agree 100 per cent that we should keep the petition open and take it further.

The Convener: Do members agree on those actions?

Members indicated agreement.

Child Sexual/Domestic Abuse (Removal of Parental Rights) (PE2238)

The Convener: Our final petition today is PE2238, which was lodged on 29 July by Lynne Steel. It calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to automatically remove the parental rights of individuals who are convicted of child sexual or domestic abuse offences. The petition states that such rights should only be reconsidered by application.

In its response, the Government states that it has a number of concerns around how practical the petition's specific asks would be to achieve.

However, the response also states that the Government is commencing a review of the current legal position in Scotland in relation to automatic restriction or suspension of a person's parental rights and responsibilities when they are convicted of certain serious offences.

In her response, the petitioner states that she welcomes the Government's commitment to a review of the current legal position in Scotland but believes that the committee should press for meaningful legislative change.

Do members have any comments or suggestions for action?

Julie MacDougall: I recommend that we keep the petition open, place it on a tracker and write to the Government to ask it to specifically engage with the petitioner on this very serious matter.

The Convener: That sounds reasonable to me. Does everyone agree with that action?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: That concludes the public part of the meeting. We move into private session.

10:26

Meeting continued in private until 10:55.

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Room T2.20
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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