Official Report
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Public Petitions Committee

Comataidh an nan Athchuingean Poblach

Thursday 5 November 2026

Session 7

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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE
5th Meeting 2026, Session 7

CONVENER

*Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Victor Currie (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
*Cara McKee (West Scotland) (Green)
*Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Iris Duane (Glasgow) (Green)
Monica Lennon (Glasgow) (Lab)

LOCATION

The Adam Smith Room (CR5)

Scottish Parliament

Public Petitions Committee

Thursday 5 November 2026

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:01]

New Petitions

The Convener (Paul Sweeney): Good morning, and welcome to the fifth meeting in 2026 of the Public Petitions Committee. I note apologies from our new committee member, Victor Currie, who I hope will join us at the next meeting. We will be joined by our colleagues Iris Duane and Monica Lennon, who have expressed an interest in petition PE2246, and Jackie Baillie, who has expressed an interest in PE2240. I am also pleased to welcome the various visitors who are attending in the public gallery. I remind everyone that only those who are sitting at the table can participate in formal proceedings, and ask that you ensure that any electronic devices are on silent throughout the meeting.

Agenda item 1 is consideration of eight new petitions.

Bus Franchising (PE2246)

The Convener: PE2246, on accelerating the implementation of bus franchising powers, was published on 25 August and lodged by Ellie Harrison on behalf of the better buses national coalition. The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to improve the process for implementing the bus franchising powers in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 by amending the act to remove the requirement for proposed franchising frameworks to be approved by a panel appointed by the traffic commissioner for Scotland, and instead empowering regional transport partnerships—RTPs—to have the final say. The petition also calls for the provision of additional funding to support RTPs in preparing franchising frameworks, and assistance for them with initial set-up costs once those frameworks are approved.

The Scottish Parliament information centre briefing sets out that local service franchising is a system of bus regulation that is underpinned by the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 and that allows a local transport authority to specify bus routes, timetables and service standards in a designated area. Local service franchising can come into effect only once a local transport authority has developed an overarching franchising framework and then entered into franchise agreements with bus operators.

The Scottish Government response to the petition states that it will review the existing bus franchising model as part of the better buses programme, and that decisions on future funding will be considered as part of the forthcoming annual budget bill process. The Scottish Government has committed to carrying out further consideration of the panel process with stakeholders. The Government also states that it will invest £4 million in the 2026-27 financial year to support local transport authorities to build business cases for local bus improvements through franchising.

The petitioner's written submission sets out details of the better buses national coalition's significant work to date on the matter, and reiterates its call for the Scottish Government to act with urgency to remove the independent panel element of the bus franchising process. The submission notes that Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, which is the regional transport partnership for the greater Glasgow area, has developed initial proposals for the creation of a franchising scheme and calls for new funding to be made available to support the six other regional transport partnerships across Scotland to enable them to take forward bus franchising in their respective regions.

As I mentioned, we are joined by our colleagues Iris Duane and Monica Lennon, who have expressed an interest in the petition. Before we turn to members for their views, I will invite Ms Duane, followed by Ms Lennon, to say a few words on the petition.

Iris Duane (Glasgow) (Green): What a big day for those of us who continue to mourn the loss of Strathclyde Buses. I just give an ode to the campaigners who join us in the public gallery today, who I believe have been campaigning for more than a decade to get this issue to the table. I will try to keep my remarks sweet and short, as I am aware that there are more prepared remarks and I am aware of the passion here.

Just to be clear, the Scottish Government made a submission on 22 September that laid out its position. Since then, the party of government, the Scottish National Party, has had its national conference, at which it said that it would be supporting the franchising of buses by 2031. As the convener related in his initial remarks, SPT has already set out its plan, but it is saying that it will not be able to do it by that date if the model is not changed. It is clear that there is urgency support for the change in the bus franchising model across the country and empowering our RTPs to make sure that they can do that. That is why I am asking the committee to leave the petition open and to ask the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and

Transport for further clarification on the plans, following the initial response.

It should be noted that SPT has previously appeared at the Transport Committee, of which I am a member—I am not sure whether that is an interest I need to declare—and the SPT has also voiced support for a change to the model to allow for simplicity, efficiency and effectiveness of franchising across the country.

The model that we currently have in Scotland was in place in England at one point, but England decided to simplify the model and remove the said panel to speed things up. There are real concerns that If the panel stays in place in the franchising process, the franchising powers that were bequeathed in the 2019 act will not be able to be used in the best way possible for our constituents.

As I said, I am keen that the committee keeps the petition open, acknowledges the support that the petition has gained and seeks further clarification from the Cabinet Secretary for Transport about what action will be taken in this area and how the SNP plans to fulfil the promises that were made at its party conference just a few weeks ago.

Monica Lennon (Glasgow) (Lab): It is nice to be at the committee. Thanks for having us along today. I will echo what Iris Duane has said in terms of paying tribute to the campaigners, including those who have travelled to the Parliament today. Thank you for being here. I think the work that Ellie Harrison, Get Glasgow Moving and now the better buses national coalition have been doing is really important. It has kept this issue in the mind of Parliament and I think that that shows the power of grass-roots campaigning.

As a Glasgow MSP, I put on the record that I understand how important bus services are to connecting communities across the city and, of course, the wider Strathclyde region. Having served on the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee in the previous parliamentary session, I also understand the importance of properly integrated transport planning and I have seen the challenges around turning legislative powers into practical improvements for passengers, so what I want to emphasise is the urgency of the legislative timetable. The First Minister has committed to bringing Scotland's bus network back into public control by 2031, which is great and really welcome. However, there is a question whether the Scottish Government can deliver that commitment unless it acts quickly. In particular, we know that SPT is already progressing its franchising framework and assessment and if we are to accelerate franchising in Strathclyde, the requirement for the independent panel needs to be removed before SPT reaches that stage of the process.

My reflection, having been here in the previous session, is that we cannot afford another lengthy delay. It took more than six years for the statutory guidance under the 2019 act to be published. I think that we need to learn from that experience and the committee could play an important role in that. I also think that it is through this committee that we can try and get that clear commitment from the transport secretary on the timetable for these necessary amendments—on when the amending legislation will be introduced and on whether removing the independent panel can be prioritised as an early measure rather than waiting for a wider legislative package.

The bigger opportunity here is this: we need properly joined-up public transport networks, which are planned regionally, integrating buses with rail and other modes of transport, rather than having fragmented services that are operating in isolation, which is what we have just now.

I believe that the petitioner's proposal to empower and properly resource all seven regional transport partnerships is therefore important, and SPT's work could provide a blueprint for the other partnerships. However, they will need similar powers, expertise and financial support. As for the role of the committee, I think that it would be important to keep the petition open and to ask the Scottish Government for a clear timetable, particularly for the removal of the independent panel.

Secondly, the petition and the evidence on it should be brought to the attention of the Transport Committee. I think that is already the case, but the issue could be built into that committee's work programme more. That will be important, as the Transport Committee will be leading on the scrutiny of the forthcoming better buses legislation.

Sometimes the Parliament gets criticised for not doing legislation well or not scrutinising proposed legislation enough. At this stage in the session, the Public Petitions Committee can play a good role in keeping the issue in the right place, across the Parliament.

To make a linked point, when we know that there are issues and challenges, it is better to consider them early on, rather than waiting until we have a bill before us and the opportunity to influence the bill is diluted. The committee will be receiving a lot of petitions, and I do not think that we should assume that because the Government has given certain commitments, we do not need to do anything. The ambition is there and has always been there. That is really good, but we need to ensure that the work is done, and that there is a tangible process.

Iris Duane did not mention this, but the "Routemap to Better Buses in Scotland by 2031", which members have in front of them—I do not know if I am allowed to wave it at you, but I will give it a plug—is excellent. It is helpful to everyone around the table.

The question for all of us is whether the Government is prepared to act with urgency. I believe that the committee could do a really good job for the people of Glasgow, Strathclyde and Scotland by keeping the petition open and by helping with what will be important scrutiny.

The Convener: Thanks to both of our colleagues for attending today and expressing so many compelling proposals for the petition.

I turn to members of the committee for any further thoughts or actions to propose for the petition.

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I wonder whether the convener would consider speaking to the convener of the Transport Committee, which I know is doing work in this area, and whether we should pass the petition over to that committee or whether it would be beneficial for us to keep the petition. I would like to keep the petition open until we have had that discussion with the convener of the Transport Committee.

Cara McKee (West Scotland) (Green): I wonder whether we could ask the Scottish Government for the updates—as Iris Duane and Monica Lennon set out—about removing the panel and getting started. We need some movement, and it would seem sensible to get going.

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): I am content with those two actions.

The Convener: This is a reasonable point at which to join up our work with that of the Transport Committee, mindful of the legislation that will be coming through, as well as additional work that that committee might be doing.

I think that we are minded to keep the petition open and to pursue the actions that have been proposed. The clear issue is the point made by the traffic commissioner for Scotland. I wonder whether we want to engage with the traffic commissioner on the matter, if that would be helpful. Do members of the committee agree to that?

Members: Yes.

The Convener: That sounds good. We will take on the actions suggested. I really appreciate colleagues attending today, as well as members of the campaign, who have expressed a complex area of policy very succinctly and very well to committee members and to members of the public alike. Thanks very much for all your work.

Automated External Defibrillators (Registration) (PE2235)

The Convener: Our next petition is PE2235, which was lodged by Stephen David Jelfs and published on 29 July. It calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce legislation requiring the mandatory registration of all publicly accessible automated external defibrillators on the Circuit national defibrillator network database and to establish a legal duty on AED owners or guardians to undertake regular and compulsory inspection, maintenance and readiness checks so that devices remain rescue ready and available for use during sudden cardiac arrest emergencies.

10:15

The Scottish Parliament information centre's briefing explains that there is currently no legal requirement to register AEDs on the Circuit, but notes that for community groups and others who receive funding for an AED, registration on the Circuit is a common condition of funding. The briefing indicates that many AEDs conduct regular self-checks, but that owners and guardians are encouraged to check them regularly. Although there is no universal legal requirement for AEDs to be regularly checked and maintained, some AED owners may have legal duties under related legislation.

In its submission, the Scottish Government states that it does not consider the asks of the petition to be justified by the available evidence, citing that there is insufficient international evidence to demonstrate that mandatory registration and inspection regimes result in improved cardiac arrest outcomes. It adds that there is a risk that introducing additional legislative requirements could have unintended consequences by creating barriers to the purchase, deployment, and maintenance of public access AEDs. The Scottish Government indicates that its position is informed by the best available evidence and expert advice and that it works closely with the Save a Life for Scotland partnership and the University of Edinburgh's Resuscitation Research Group—the RRG. It refers to an informal briefing that it received from the RRG, which concluded that the current evidence base is insufficient to determine whether legislation would lead to greater preparedness for cardiac arrest than the well-supported voluntary system. The Scottish Government also refers to a recent announcement by the First Minister of a £2.5 million investment to further improve outcomes from out-of-hospital cardiac arrest, with that funding expected to support the installation of between 1,000 and 1,250 AEDs across Scotland.

In his written submission, PE2235/B, the petitioner welcomes the investment and the Scottish Government's commitment to improving survival rates from out-of-hospital cardiac arrest. He argues, however, that the Scottish Government's response does not address the core issue that is raised in his petition. He contends that a lack of international evidence does not, in and of itself, demonstrate that mandatory registration and maintenance is unnecessary. He also considers that the Government's proposal to identify local guardians is an acknowledgement that somebody must accept responsibility for AED readiness. The petitioner believes that the issue is whether the current voluntary arrangements can provide assurance that AEDs will be ready for use when they are needed. For example, he argues that that should include knowing how many AEDs are in Scotland and how many of those are registered, have an identified guardian and are properly and regularly maintained.

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

Marie McNair: I am supportive of the petition and the petitioner's calls seeking further information. The issue is close to my heart and I championed it as a local councillor, due to family experience. Locally, I know that there can be issues with AED batteries not being charged and with their pads being out of date, for example.

I suggest that we keep the petition open and write to the Scottish Government to invite it to respond to the petitioner's submission and to provide information on the estimated number of publicly accessible AEDs in Scotland and how many are registered in the Circuit, have an identified guardian and documented recent maintenance; how many have verified operational status and accessibility or are temporarily unavailable; and how unavailable devices are identified and addressed. I suggest that we write to stakeholders seeking their views on the actions that the petition calls for. Two stakeholders that come to mind quickly are Save a Life for Scotland and the Ambulance Service, but there are a number of others. I am happy to leave it to the clerks to take it forward.

The Convener: That sounds as though it is a reasonable set of actions. Are members happy with the suggestions?

Members *indicated agreement*.

Gynaecology, Fertility, Early Pregnancy and Maternity Care (PE2240)

The Convener: Our next petition is PE2240, which was lodged by Elizabeth Crammond and published on 4 August. The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to improve gynaecological, fertility and early pregnancy and maternity services throughout Scotland by reinstating a duty of care on general practitioners to provide transitioning care for gynaecology, fertility and maternity care and support, and by introducing a reactive auditing process to minimise delays and ensure the safe delivery of accessible, uniform services across health boards.

We are joined by our colleague, Jackie Baillie, who has expressed an interest in the petition. I note that this is one of a number of women's health-related petitions that we will be considering over the course of this and forthcoming meetings.

I understand that the petitioner is in the public gallery. I thank her for bringing her petition, which is about an extremely significant and personal issue, to the committee.

The Scottish Parliament information centre briefing provides an overview of the issues that are raised by the petition and it notes that the petitioner's experience was raised during First Minister's question time on 10 September. The briefing explains that transitioning care refers to the care and support that are offered to women when they transfer between gynaecology, fertility and early pregnancy and maternity services. It refers to guidance that the Royal College of Nursing issued in 2025. The briefing explains that each national health service board has an early pregnancy unit—an EPU—and is responsible for developing its own access arrangements for early pregnancy care in line with the Scottish Government's delivery framework for miscarriage care in Scotland.

On the reactive auditing aspect of the petition, the SPICe briefing sets out that each NHS board is responsible for developing its own internal audit processes, informed by the Scottish Government's blueprint for good governance. It adds that, since January 2025, Healthcare Improvement Scotland has had a specific responsibility to conduct inspections of maternity services in Scotland and that it published a set of standards for maternity care in March this year.

In its submission, the Scottish Government states that it does not consider it necessary to reinstate a duty on general practitioners to provide transitioning care, as GPs already have responsibilities in relation to the assessment, management and referral of patients. It observes that arrangements for access to maternity services vary across Scotland. In some health board areas, women contact their GP for referral to maternity services, whereas in other areas women will self-refer.

The Scottish Government says that it continues to work with NHS boards and national

improvement bodies to support safe and effective maternity services across Scotland. It refers to work that is being undertaken by Healthcare Improvement Scotland and considers that that provides a mechanism for identifying and addressing quality and safety issues within maternity services across NHS Scotland.

In her submission PE2240/B, the petitioner sets out her experience of navigating maternity services and the challenges and vulnerabilities that women can be exposed to when transitioning between a range of services. She states that women can find themselves in a period where responsibility becomes unclear and support becomes fragmented between services, and that delays and uncertainty can arise during those transitions. The petitioner considers that that highlights the importance of timely access to early pregnancy units for both physical and psychological wellbeing.

The petitioner points to the exchange between Jackie Baillie and the First Minister in September and the First Minister's acknowledgement that, in this case, the service clearly did not work as it is designed to. Further, in her submission PE2240/C, the petitioner refers to a significant inconsistency regarding the role of GPs and asks why, if GPs retain an ongoing duty of care, patients are being advised that responsibility lies elsewhere.

The petitioner contends that reactive auditing would assess outcomes rather than compliance. She explains that the purpose of reactive auditing is to identify recurring problems in real time, detect emerging risks, highlight variations in practice and close the gap between organisational assurance and patient experience.

Before I turn to committee members and ask for their views on the petition, I invite Jackie Baillie to say a few words on the petition.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Thank you, convener. I start with an apology. As I have stepped away from another committee meeting, I will be very brief so that I can resume my duties there.

I have little to add to the eloquent and powerful submission from Elizabeth Crammond. As you acknowledged, she is in the public gallery, and her presence is welcome. She describes her experience, but I have to say that she is not alone. There are lots of examples of lack of access to care and lack of continuity of care. Effective safeguards seem to be absent, and she is one of a considerable number of women who have experienced what I can only describe as trauma with miscarriage care as it currently operates across Scotland.

The petitioner has highlighted—as you did, convener—an exchange that I had with the First Minister, in which he acknowledged that the maternity framework is not functioning as it should be. The Scottish Government's response, which I have read several times, is a little complacent, in my view, and I say that respectfully. For example, there is no mention of the review by Professor Christine McCourt. Maybe that is because the review appears to be quite limited in scope.

There is considerable disquiet out there, not just about miscarriage support, but about the whole range of gynaecology, maternity and neonatal support in Scotland.

As you know, we have mothers and fathers demanding a public inquiry because of the loss of their babies as a result of a serious adverse event. There is a huge dissatisfaction, and it is clear that women's health is not the priority that it should be. I respectfully suggest to the committee that it might ask Professor Christine McCourt whether she would explicitly consider miscarriage support and many of the issues that are raised in the petition.

The Convener: Thank you. I appreciate your taking the time to attend. I turn to members of the committee to express any further views.

Cara McKee: I think that we need to keep the petition open. We could take it forward for future consideration. I wonder whether we could have a thematic evidence session on women's health.

We could also write to the Scottish Government to establish what actions it has taken or intends to take to address the concerns and experiences that are set out in the petition, following the First Minister's acknowledgement to Jackie Baillie on 10 September that the maternity framework has not achieved its intended purpose. We could also look for some clarity on how auditing and duties on GPs may change with the merging of the health boards. Jackie Baillie's suggestion that we contact Professor Christine McCourt is also useful.

The Convener: I agree. I am content with those proposed actions. Are there any further proposals?

David Torrance: I think that that is adequate.

The Convener: Noting that we have several petitions on women's health, and given the proposal to create petitions debates, this would certainly be a likely candidate for an early debate in the committee's work, in addition to the evidence session that was mentioned. That is a set of worthwhile actions.

I thank Elizabeth Crammond for taking the time to attend today.

Access to Justice (Legal Services Payment Orders) (PE2241)

The Convener: Our next petition is PE2241, lodged by Dr Jurgita Koechlin and published on 4 August, which calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to consult on and introduce legislation to create legal services payment orders in Scottish family law, so that courts can stop financial control or economic abuse preventing fair access to legal advice, representation and justice.

The Scottish Parliament information centre briefing refers to an inquiry that was conducted by the session 6 Social Justice and Social Security Committee, which heard that the Scottish Legal Aid Board can flexibly apply financial eligibility criteria in situations including economic abuse but that there appeared to be little awareness of that among solicitors. The briefing explains how the legal services payment order system works in England and Wales. It adds that it is possible to apply for interim financial assistance from the other party during divorce proceedings, but the law in that area is still being developed.

The Scottish Government indicates that it has no specific plans to address the issue that has been raised by the petition, but it is actively engaged in a programme of legal aid reform, including a recent consultation, which closed last month. The Government states that the responses will inform the development of a legal aid bill and future policy decisions.

The Government explains the role of the Scottish Legal Aid Board in assessing merits and financial eligibility tests, and the Government notes that the board currently funds two projects to support women who are facing violence and domestic abuse.

The Government notes that, once it is commenced, the Regulation of Legal Services (Scotland) Act 2025 will increase access to justice by enabling innovative service delivery models that meet the needs of a modern and diverse society.

The petitioner notes that both the Scottish Government response and the Scottish Parliament information centre briefing recognise that economic abuse exists and can prevent victims from accessing family finances, but neither suggests a reliable remedy. She also recognises the point that is referred to in the Parliament briefing that, even if legal aid is approved, representation may not be available in practice.

The petitioner acknowledges that the two projects funded by the Scottish Legal Aid Board are valuable specialist services, but she argues that they are not a general court-based mechanism that is available throughout Scotland and that the Government does not show that they can secure sustained representation in every complex or urgent case. She suggests that the evidence supports further examination of the petition, and she asks the committee to continue its consideration and seek a substantive response from the Scottish Government to the points that are set out in the final paragraph of her submission, which is paper PE2241/B.

Do members have any comments or suggestions for action?

10:30

David Torrance: I wonder whether the committee would consider keeping the petition open and writing to the Scottish Government to invite it to respond to the points that the petitioner makes in the final paragraph of her submission. The committee might also wish to establish when the Scottish Government expects to publish a response to its recent consultation on legal aid reform and its anticipated timescale for introducing the legal aid bill. I wonder whether the committee would also like to write to stakeholders, including the Scottish Legal Aid Board, the Family Law Association and Scottish Women's Aid, to ask for their views on the action called for in the petition.

Cara McKee: I agree with all of that, and I would like to add the Scottish Women's Rights Centre legal project to the stakeholders that we ask for input.

The Convener: Are we content with that course of action?

Members *indicated agreement*.

The Convener: I thank the petitioner for her submission, and we will take those actions forward.

Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 (Repeal) (PE2242)

The Convener: Our next petition is the first of two lodged by Andrew Muir. PE2242, which was published on 4 August, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to repeal the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003. The SPICe briefing notes that the 2003 act, as amended by the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 2015, is the main mental health legislation in Scotland. It followed the 2001 report of the Millan committee, which reviewed earlier legislation and recommended that law and practice relating to mental health should be driven by 10 principles focused on minimising interference in people's liberty and maximising the involvement of service users in their treatment.

The Scottish Government submission states that it would not recommend repealing the 2003 act, noting that it is based on rights and principles and provides rigorous safeguards to ensure that human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled when compulsory treatment is necessary. The Government further states that it is committed to modernising Scotland's mental health and capacity legislation, including the 2003 act, to better reflect international human rights standards in line with the findings of the Scottish Mental Health Law Review, which was published in 2022.

The petitioner's submission sets out their concerns in relation to the 2003 act, including what they consider to be the low success rates of treatments carried out under its provisions, the potential side effects of drugs used in treatments, and what they consider to be a lack of safeguards in place during treatments.

Do members have any comments or suggestions for action?

David Torrance: In light of the evidence that is before the committee, I wonder whether the committee would consider closing the petition under rule 15.7 of standing orders, on the basis that the Scottish Government does not recommend repealing the 2003 act. The Government's response notes that the 2003 act is based on rights and principles and provides rigorous safeguards to ensure that human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled when compulsory treatment is necessary.

The Convener: Do members have a different view, or are we content?

Cara McKee: It is clear that reforms are needed to the 2003 act, and I would be interested in following up with the Scottish Government on what any such reform might look like. However, repealing the act would clearly not be a sensible thing to do at the moment.

The Convener: I think that closing the petition is a reasonable suggestion, particularly in light of the Government's comments on the Mental Health Law Review and its intention to take action on that. I invite the petitioner to consider what engagement they could have with that process.

I think, therefore, that we will close the petition on that basis. Are we agreed?

Members *indicated agreement*.

Legal Expenses (Refunds) (PE2243)

The Convener: Mr Muir's second petition, PE2243, which was also published on 4 August, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to refund legal expenses for those acquitted of a crime.

The Scottish Parliament information centre notes that, although it is possible to recover legal costs in criminal cases in England, that is not part of the Scottish legal system.

The Scottish Government's submission states:

"Any reimbursement in circumstances such as those outlined by the petition would not necessarily constitute retrospective legal aid. Rather, it would be more closely aligned with the principle that expenses may follow success in civil litigation. The nearest equivalent in Scotland would be an award arising from a malicious prosecution claim, although the threshold for such claims is high."

The Government states that, although it has no specific plans to address the issue that the petition raises, it has engaged on a programme of legal aid reform, with a public consultation having recently closed.

The petitioner's submission highlights the long-term impact of being accused of a crime, even after acquittal. He notes that

"the person can try to rebuild their life, but the punishment largely remains; the expenses, the stress, the time spent. In extreme cases the person can become bankrupt or even die from the cumulative stress."

Do members have any comments or suggestions for action?

David Torrance: In the light of the evidence that is before us, I wonder whether the committee would consider closing the petition under rule 15.7 of standing orders, as the Government has no specific plans to address the issues that the petition raises. If the committee chooses to close the petition, we could write to the Government to ask when it will publish a response to its recent consultation on legal aid reform and for an anticipated timescale for introducing a legal aid bill.

The Convener: In light of the fact that such legislation is due to be introduced in this parliamentary session and a consultation on legal aid reform recently closed, I think that that is a reasonable course of action. The petitioner can engage with that process and, if he is not satisfied, he is welcome to return to the committee in due course to seek a remedy.

Do members agree to close the petition?

Members *indicated agreement*.

Perimenopause and Menopause Care (PE2244)

The Convener: PE2244, which was lodged by Lynn Stewart and published on 25 August, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to establish women's health hubs in general practices across Scotland to improve the assessment, diagnosis, treatment and ongoing support of women experiencing perimenopause and menopause.

The Scottish Parliament information centre's briefing explains that women who feel that they need support to manage their menopausal symptoms are advised to contact their GP in the first instance. It notes that each mainland NHS board offers a specialist menopause clinic, which is situated in secondary or community care settings. The clinics are usually accessed via a referral from a GP.

The Scottish Government's submission states that general practices operate as independent contractors and that the Government cannot direct practices to establish or deliver further services, such as women's health hubs in general practices, beyond those that are required under the core general medical services contract. However, the submission notes:

"the GP contractual framework does contain mechanisms, including enhanced services and Directed Enhanced Services, through which further services can be agreed, specified and funded."

The submission states:

"Menopause is a priority within the Women's Health Plan and the Scottish Government continues to focus on how to improve women's experiences in their engagement with healthcare services, as well as the support and information they need to be able to help them to manage their symptoms."

The petitioner's submission calls for the central issues that the petition raises to be addressed consistently across Scotland and seeks

"a clear, accessible primary-care model providing trained professionals, earlier recognition, specialist knowledge, mental health support, psychological therapies, clear referral pathways and continuity of care."

The petitioner sets out various points that the committee might wish to explore further with the Government, including in relation to the pilot schemes that are noted in the Scottish Government's written submission, the training that is offered to GPs and other primary care professionals, and the integration of mental health support in menopause care.

Do members have any comments or suggestions?

Cara McKee: Clearly, this is a big issue that affects women across the country, so it is important that we keep the petition open and seek further written evidence from the Scottish Government on the points that are raised in the petitioner's written submission.

The issues include the contractual and practical barriers that prevent the creation of a nationally supported women's hub model or an equivalent service with minimum standards across Scotland; the pilot schemes that are noted in the Scottish Government's written submission, including information on how the schemes will be evaluated, whether they will be implemented on a wider scale across health boards and the timetable for doing that; the training that is offered to GPs and other primary care professionals on menopause-specific issues, including information on the uptake of such training and how it is monitored; how mental health support is integrated into menopause care in primary care; how younger women are supported to obtain timely recognition and appropriate investigation; how easily women can access specialist services, including whether referral criteria and waiting times vary; and how primary and specialist services are connected.

It is also worth writing to the Royal College of General Practitioners, and any other organisations that members think it would make sense to contact, to seek views on the action that is called for in the petition. It would be useful to have an evidence session on women's health and perhaps a debate in the chamber.

The Convener: I think that those are all reasonable actions. Does any other member have views?

David Torrance: I agree with that, convener—let us have an evidence session.

Marie McNair: It is important to do everything to ensure that women are heard. I must declare an interest as a perimenopausal woman. I am heartened to hear that we will have a debate, too, as that is important.

The Convener: We have mentioned a thematic evidence session and a potential committee debate. It would be good to take the specific actions that have been mentioned on correspondence with stakeholders and the Government, and to consider a future debate. I am happy with that.

Police Scotland (Data Collection) (PE2247)

The Convener: PE2247, which was lodged by Joanna Kerr and published on 25 August, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to require Police Scotland to collect data on nationality, religion, ethnicity, gang-based abuse—which is defined as abuse involving two or more perpetrators—and asylum status.

The SPICe briefing notes that the petitioner believes that collecting and communicating such data reliably would enable cases involving grooming gangs to be more effectively investigated and prosecuted, and would also be relevant with regards to other group-based child sexual abuse networks that are involved in trafficking.

The briefing refers to Baroness Casey's report on the national audit on group-based child sexual

exploitation and abuse and the establishment of an independent inquiry into grooming gangs in England and Wales, which was announced in December 2025. In February this year, the Scottish Government announced that a Scottish inquiry will be led by Professor Alexis Jay.

The briefing notes that several reports investigating the issue in England and Wales have made recommendations relating to data collection. Those include the Casey report and the report of the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse, which was chaired by Professor Jay and which produced its report in October 2022.

The Scottish Government's submission explains that responsibility for the policing of Scotland rests with the chief constable of Police Scotland, who is accountable to the Scottish Police Authority and not to the Scottish ministers. The submission refers to the requirements of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2016, which do not include a requirement for an arrested person to disclose their ethnicity, immigration status or religion, and it notes that Police Scotland does not hold coded data on those characteristics.

The Government sets out in detail the strategic groups, reviews and other approaches that are being taken to address the issues that are raised in the petition. Those include a short-life working group that is chaired by the chief statistician and which is looking specifically at improving data in the area. The Government indicates that the short-life working group will publish an interim report by the end of this year.

In her written submission, the petitioner states that Police Scotland has indicated to her that it intends to take no action regarding flagging gang-based markers—that is, when there are more than two alleged perpetrators. She asks how Police Scotland can begin to profile organised crime groups or assess risk if it does not collect that basic data. She argues that data is fundamental to basic police work and that it is something that every person is used to being asked about.

Do members have any comments or suggestions for action?

David Torrance: In light of the evidence that is in front of us and the ongoing inquiry, the committee should consider closing the petition under rule 15.7 of standing orders, on the basis that the Scottish Government has highlighted a number of groups and reviews that have been established to address the issues that are raised in the petition, including the national child sexual abuse and exploitation strategy group, which includes a short-life working group on data, the interim report of which is due to be published at the end of this year, as well as the independent statutory inquiry into group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation, which was announced in February 2026 and is to be chaired by Professor Alexis Jay.

The Convener: Do members agree to that suggestion?

Members *indicated agreement*.

The Convener: In noting the closure of the petition, I point out that the interim report of the Scottish Government's short-life working group on data will be published by the end of the year, and we can ensure that the petitioner is furnished with that report. If there is a further need to address the issue, the petitioner is welcome to return to the committee.

Meeting closed at 10:45.

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