

PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 25 April 2000
(*Afternoon*)

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body 2000.

Applications for reproduction should be made in writing to the Copyright Unit,
Her Majesty's Stationery Office, St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BQ
Fax 01603 723000, which is administering the copyright on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate
Body.

Produced and published in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body by The
Stationery Office Ltd.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office is independent of and separate from the company now
trading as The Stationery Office Ltd, which is responsible for printing and publishing
Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body publications.

CONTENTS

Tuesday 25 April 2000

	Col.
NEW PETITIONS.....	344
CURRENT PETITIONS	387
CONVENER'S REPORT	396

PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE

7th Meeting 2000, Session 1

CONVENER

*Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab)

*Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP)

*John Scott (Ayr) (Con)

*Mrs Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD)

*Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS ALSO ATTENDED:

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP)

Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP)

WITNESSES

Neil Kay (Toward Primary School)

Bill Welsh

Marie Galbraith (Sheltered Housing Owners Confederation of Scotland)

Mrs Margaret Reid (Sheltered Housing Owners Confederation of Scotland)

Brian Anderson (Organophosphate Information Network)

Janet Ogg (Royal College of Nursing)

Jean Charsley (Hillhead Community Council)

Lionel Hawes (Kingspark and Croftfoot Community Council)

Sibylle Alexander

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Steve Farrell

ASSISTANT CLERK

Jane Sutherland

LOCATION

Committee Room 2

Scottish Parliament

Public Petitions Committee

Tuesday 25 April 2000

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:08*]

The Convener (Mr John McAllion): I welcome everyone to the seventh meeting of the Public Petitions Committee in 2000. I also welcome members back from the recess—I hope that they had an enjoyable break from the Scottish Parliament.

I extend a special welcome to John Scott, the new member of the committee. As members will know, John was the victor in the recent Ayr by-election. Despite what we might have thought about him then, I welcome him warmly to the committee. I am delighted to see him and look forward to working with him in the months and years ahead.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Thank you.

The Convener: I also welcome to the meeting Fergus Ewing, who is here to contribute to the debate on PE148 on organophosphates, and Duncan Hamilton, who is here to support PE175, on Toward Primary School. Margaret Ewing may join us later to speak to PE171.

We have received apologies from Helen Eadie, but I think that everyone else is here—we are almost at full complement.

As members will see, the petitions have multiplied during our absence. We have 33 petitions on today's agenda and seven requests from petitioners to speak to the committee. We also have a number of MSPs who wish to contribute to the meeting and 11 responses to current petitions. Therefore, we have a heavy work load. If members wish to contribute to the discussion of a petition, I appeal to them to keep their contributions as brief as possible. In particular, when we are hearing from petitioners, members should ask questions and should not make speeches, as that leads to hours and hours of—

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): That takes the fun out of it.

The Convener: It might take the fun out of it, but we will get through our business only if we are as brief as possible and contribute to the debate only when we feel that it is absolutely essential.

New Petitions

The Convener: Bearing those warnings in mind, we will turn to new petitions. I wish to ask for a change to the order in which we will discuss new petitions, as we have received a request to bring to the top of the agenda PE175, which we were meant to deal with at the end. The petitioner has come from Oban and has particular difficulties getting home, given the timing of this afternoon's meeting. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I ask Mr Neil Kay, who wishes to speak to PE175, to come forward.

Neil Kay (Toward Primary School): Thank you.

We are petitioning against the school closure programme that Argyll and Bute Council is pursuing. We argue that the consultative process unfairly biases the arguments in favour of school closure, which is likely to prejudice the chances of interested parties receiving a fair hearing. The council ignores recent educational research that indicates that such school closures might have adverse educational effects. It neglects the social and economic consequences that school closures might have for communities and does not recognise that the uncertainty created by the continuing programme of school closures might create a form of planning blight for many rural schools and communities beyond those affected directly.

The council misrepresents relevant information. For example, it has cited General Register Office for Scotland predictions and Accounts Commission for Scotland recommendations in support of its closure programme, when no such predictions or recommendations were issued. It also practises a policy of divide and rule, which is designed to pit community against community and school against school. It warns schools that are not threatened with closure that if the closures do not go ahead, their budgets will be cut, and announces, each time, that it is issuing more closure proposals that it intends to enforce. That approach is designed to encourage threatened schools and communities to expend their energies competing against one another, rather than against the closure programme itself. Much bitterness remains in Argyll and Bute, left over from the previous round of closures.

We need an inquiry and an investigation that are independent of the council. We do not believe that the council is capable of reviewing objectively its programme without outside intervention. The director of education was apprised of almost all the arguments contained in the petition, but stated publicly that he is not inclined to advise the council

to stop his closure programme on the basis of what he has heard.

We hope that Parliament will inquire into Argyll and Bute Council's school closure programme and then take appropriate steps to protect the public interest. We also respectfully request the Public Petitions Committee to instruct the council to defer further decisions on its school closure programme until Parliament has had an opportunity to review and consider the issue. We cite as precedent the committee's consideration of the petition on the siting of a medium secure unit at Stobhill hospital.

Finally, we note the statement made by Mr Campbell Cameron—the chairman of the council's education committee—in *The Herald* on Friday, that

"if there is a potential for closure, something is not right with the community".

Mr Cameron has responsibility for deciding potential for closure, but he is also assuming responsibility for deciding that

"something is not right with the community".

In effect, he is blaming the community for the closure. We think that such comments, coming from an elected official, are arrogant and irresponsible, and contrast them with the socially sensitive and caring policies of Highland Council, which were outlined in the same article. If any one statement can be taken as evidence that we might not receive a fair hearing, it is Mr Cameron's.

14:15

The Convener: Thank you. I must inform you that the committee is not in a position to instruct any council not to do something that is within that council's powers. Your petition asks Parliament to investigate the school closures programme, and that is within its powers.

Christine Grahame: Which other schools are under threat?

Neil Kay: The schools at Bridge of Orchy, Drumlemble, Ulva, Newton and Glassary are under threat.

Christine Grahame: Have there been other closures of rural schools in the recent past?

Neil Kay: Yes. In the past two or three years in south Cowal, the schools at Rashfield and Ardentinnny have been closed. There have been a number of other closures, although they have been sporadic. We expect that more will follow.

Christine Grahame: What has been the impact of previous closures on the communities served by those schools?

Neil Kay: The effect on the communities before and after closure is a feeling of helplessness.

People felt that they could do nothing before the closures and after them. There are no means of resistance once the council has made up its mind.

Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I would like to make one or two brief points. I support the petition and what it represents in terms of rural school closures. I would like to take further what Mr Kay said about where we go from here. Although the committee does not have the power to stop councils doing certain things, it might be useful if John McAllion, as convener, wrote to the council to make it aware that as the committee's business progresses, it will not be useful for it to pre-empt an inquiry by Parliament by making a decision. The consultation period is nearly at an end and a lot of nerves in the local community would be settled if the people knew that Parliament was examining the matter and that that took precedence over the council's actions.

It is fair to say that the consultation process is undermined by the fact that educational considerations—which Mr Kay has examined in great depth—have not been properly analysed by the council. There has also been misrepresentation of statements allegedly from the Accounts Commission—that would undermine any consultation process, which is why the Education, Culture and Sport Committee might want to examine the matter.

The Convener: For members' information, another petition on Argyll and Bute Council's school closure programme is in the pipeline. It is not yet available for consideration, but it will be considered by the committee.

As members know, we dealt at our meeting on 1 February with a similar petition on the closure of Boharm Primary School. We referred that petition to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee for further consideration, so we should also refer this petition to that committee for its consideration. We must, however, consider Duncan Hamilton's request, and the request from Mr Kay, that we write to the council asking it to postpone consideration of the closure until the committee has had a chance to consider the matter.

Christine Grahame: I would like to suggest that it would also be appropriate for the Deputy Minister for Children and Education to be advised of these matters.

I support the proposal from Mr Kay and from Duncan Hamilton that we write to the council to ask it to defer its decision until the consultation period is over and until the Education, Culture and Sport Committee and Peter Peacock have had the opportunity to consider the import of the petition and the programme of closure.

Neil Kay: Mr Peacock is one of the regional MSPs, so we have informed him fully of the

grounds for the petition, and we have kept him informed. He wrote us a four-page e-mail, which was helpful. However, it says that although he is monitoring the situation with interest, at this juncture he can say nothing because he might—under certain circumstances—be required to take action if there are appeals against school closures. He is fully aware of what is happening at the moment.

The Convener: The clerk has just drawn it to my attention that the Education, Culture and Sport Committee is in the middle of an inquiry into rural schools and their future, so it would be pertinent for it to consider that.

I am not sure whether it should be the Deputy Minister for Children and Education. Just because Peter Peacock comes from the Highlands does not mean that I should pick on him. I do not see why we should not keep the Minister for Children and Education informed, as the responsibility rests with him.

Is it agreed that we refer the petition to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee?

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): Mr Kay mentioned the closure of Stobhill. When we write to Argyll and Bute Council, can we suggest that it delay any decision regarding school closures until we have seen the other petition that might come in?

The Convener: If it is agreed, I will write to Argyll and Bute Council, indicating that we have referred the petition to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee, that there is another in the pipeline and that we ask it to delay any closure until that committee has had a chance to consider those issues.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): The reason for asking the council to delay its decision is that the Education, Culture and Sport Committee is investigating the issue of rural schools. You are correct to point out that there is a precedent for our doing that. However, we should continue to set the right precedents; we are setting a further precedent by taking a second decision to do that. If we do this today, we will be asked to do it in other circumstances.

We have to be clear about our reasons for writing to the council, the particular reason being that there is an investigation. That is a special reason of which we should make particular mention in the letter. We should ask the council to hold off for that reason.

The Convener: The committee will not make any recommendation about school closures; that is a matter for the Education, Culture and Sport Committee, which will decide whether to recommend for or against closure. All we are

doing is drawing it to the attention of the authority that those petitions have been referred to that committee and that it is considering them. We would ask the authority not to go ahead with any closure until that is done.

John Scott: A wider issue is at stake, that when small rural communities lose any vital services such as schools, churches, banks or post offices, it starts a downward spiral effect. There is a bigger issue than just the loss of a school. It is a loss, potentially, of a community. The convener will advise me whether the Rural Affairs Committee is the right committee to refer that problem to.

The Convener: It is open to the committee to copy anything that we send to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee to the Rural Affairs Committee, for its information. It is up to that committee how it wishes to respond.

Mr Hamilton: It might be useful if it was suggested to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee that it should take evidence, perhaps jointly with the Rural Affairs Committee, or representatives from that committee, about the impact—

The Convener: That is a matter for the Education, Culture and Sport Committee. We are already getting cries of pain from the various committees of the Parliament about the petitions that we refer to them. We have to walk a tight line; we should refer the petition to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee and leave it to its good sense how it deals with it.

Is it agreed that we refer the petition to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee, copy it to the Rural Affairs Committee and write to the convener of the council, asking him to hold any decisions until the committee has had a chance to consider the petitions?

Christine Grahame: A courtesy to members who attend is to provide them with a copy of the letter that goes out to whomsoever; the convener can monitor from his point of view and from that of the petitioners.

The Convener: Are you referring to Duncan Hamilton or to all the new members?

Christine Grahame: No, as a general rule to the members who have spoken to a particular petition, and also to the petitioner.

The Convener: We will do that.

Thank you, Mr Kay.

I welcome John Swinney, who has arrived unexpectedly.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): I shall stay just briefly—I hope to hear one of my constituents address the committee later.

The Convener: I thought that we were becoming very popular all of a sudden. You are welcome.

There are four related petitions—three from Mr Frank Harvey and one from Mr J McNeil, on behalf of Partick community council—about Greater Glasgow Health Board's proposals for the reconfiguration and rationalisation of health services in Glasgow. The petitions suggest various actions by the Scottish Parliament, from ordering a public inquiry, to rejecting all the plans of the health board, to making the health board more accountable to the Scottish Parliament.

The suggestion is that we copy these petitions to Greater Glasgow Health Board, requesting that it respond directly to the petitioners explaining why it is carrying out that reconfiguration and rationalisation of services. The petition should also be copied to the Health and Community Care Committee for information. Does anyone oppose that line of action?

Ms White: That is the proper way to proceed. We should also tell the petitioners that if they contact the health board, they will be given a list of meetings that have been held in their local area about the so-called rationalisation.

The Convener: That is agreed.

The next petition, PE145, is from Mr William Welsh. It calls on the Scottish Parliament to take a range of actions with regard to medical conditions that might arise from the vaccination programme instituted by the Government. Mr Welsh is here to address the committee.

Bill Welsh: Thank you for allowing me to give evidence. I should say that I am usually referred to as Bill Welsh.

Two weeks ago, the United States House of Representatives held a full day's congressional hearing on autism and the possibility of a connection between autism and vaccination. The hearing was arranged as a result of the concerns voiced by hundreds of thousands of American citizens about what has been described as an epidemic of autism in the United States of America. I firmly believe that those concerns are being experienced by a growing number of Scottish citizens and that the issue should be debated urgently in the Scottish Parliament.

Just over 10 years ago, autism was considered to be a rare childhood condition affecting perhaps as few as one child in every 10,000. Today it is common, affecting as many as one child in 400 under the age of 12 in Scotland. It is not easy to establish statistics for autistic children, because the Minister for Health and Community Care and her department do not keep any statistics. However, my research indicates that, every week

for the past 10 years, between three and four Scottish children have been diagnosed as autistic. Do not doubt that fact. Autism has increased by a massive amount since the introduction of the triple measles, mumps and rubella vaccine in the UK in 1988.

The vast majority of the children we are talking about were golden, Scottish children who were developing normally, meeting all the milestones set, and talking. After vaccination, they slowly withdrew into their own silent autistic world. They developed bowel problems, constipation and diarrhoea, high toxin levels, permeable guts, poor sulphation, yeast overgrowth in the gastrointestinal tract, allergies, sleeplessness, tantrums, hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder and countless food intolerances. In addition to autism, some children developed dyspraxia and others epilepsy, and many may have ulcerative colitis.

When one tells a doctor that such a dramatic change in a child dates from vaccination, he says, "It's coincidence." When one tells a doctor that the condition cannot be rare, as there are four such children in the local playgroup, he says, "It's better recognition." When one tells a doctor that there are 1,800 such children under the age of 12 in Scotland, he says, "We have widened the parameters of diagnosis."

I personally witnessed the United States congressional hearing, and watched a succession of scientists stand up in front of senators and say that vaccination is implicated. The excuses that we are being given by our doctors are no longer acceptable.

With your permission, I intend to bring to the appropriate committee of this Parliament—or, better still, the Parliament itself—leading experts, including a leading epidemiologist, an honorary consultant in gastroenterology and an international consultant in pathology, who will present compelling evidence that vaccination is implicated in the human tragedy that is striking our children. It is not acceptable that children who were developing normally and who then withdraw—probably in pain—are thrown on the scrap heap at the age of two, sacrificed on the high altar of a flawed vaccination programme.

When politicians are elected, they are given our trust. I am afraid that that trust is being betrayed. The following demands will be made of the Scottish Parliament: a complete review of vaccination policy; the reintroduction of single vaccines; a medical protocol to aid autistic children who have been damaged; and the setting up and monitoring of a register of autistic children. Finally, I ask Parliament to recognise the urgency of the issue. This is the first step towards avoiding any further prolonged suffering by those autistic children.

14:30

The Convener: Thank you very much, Mr Welsh. I thank you also for the background information papers that you made available to the committee; they are clear, comprehensive and helpful.

You mentioned several possible side effects of the triple vaccine programme—including arthritis, diabetes and Crohn's disease—but the purpose of the petition is to establish the link between the triple vaccine and autism.

Bill Welsh: Most parents recognise the link, and have moved on to medical treatments for these children. After what happened in the United States Congress, it is astonishing that we are still vaccinating our children with multiple vaccines such as DPT—diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus—and MMR.

It has become pretty clear that a series of events is occurring, which is damaging our children. I would rather emphasise the problems that the children have in their bowel area, as that has been proven to many parents in Scotland, although they cannot get any treatment for those children. We are talking about 1,800 Scottish children who, when they are diagnosed as autistic, cease to receive medical treatment or intervention. No help is provided for those children; they are pushed aside and thrown on the scrap heap.

Does that answer your question?

The Convener: I am just trying to get the focus right. Is the triple vaccine programme implicated in all cases?

Bill Welsh: You mentioned arthritis, among other conditions. The incidence of all those conditions in children has increased over the past 10 years—that is a fact—and the increase seems to have coincided with the introduction of the multiple vaccine MMR.

Mrs Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): I read this petition previously, as the convener of the Health and Community Care Committee. You sent the petition to me, and my office is trying to arrange a meeting with you.

Bill Welsh: Indeed, I sent you the petition. I now know who you are.

Mrs Smith: You say that in some cases you feel that there is definitely a link, while in others there is enough anecdotal evidence from parents to suggest that we should be concerned about the possible reactions to the triple vaccine, although you cannot prove the link conclusively. Could you clarify the difference between the situation following the introduction of the triple vaccine MMR and the situation following the use of single vaccines?

I asked a supplementary question of the Minister for Health and Community Care, a couple of months ago, about whether the Scottish Executive had any plans to introduce single vaccines, on the back of this concern. Her response was that it did not. Have you made contact directly with the Scottish Executive, and has the Executive's response to you so far been the same as the Department of Health's response on the matter?

Bill Welsh: I have made contact through my local member of the Scottish Parliament, and have received responses from Susan Deacon with regard to the vaccination issue and the possibility of connections between vaccination and autism and other problems in children. I regret to say that the responses that I received from Susan Deacon were exactly the same as those that we received from Westminster a year ago. Nothing seems to have changed, including the fact that the facts that are given by the Minister for Health are not facts at all: the same misinformation is being presented at Westminster, with regard to the history of the issue.

I have forgotten what your first question was.

Mrs Smith: Is there any link between autism and the single vaccination, or could you tie down the increase in autism to the introduction of the triple vaccination?

Bill Welsh: I can cite the view of the world's leading expert on research into autism, Dr Bernard Rimland, who is the director of the Autism Research Institute in California. He says that there is no plausible alternative; multiple vaccination is deeply implicated in the upsurge—the epidemic—of autism in the United Kingdom and the United States.

You are asking me questions, but I am an ordinary citizen, not an epidemiologist, a doctor or a scientist. The change in society and in our kids has happened since the introduction of multiple vaccination. The science being developed at the moment suggests that the children perhaps had a stressed immune system. Had we not given them the challenge of multiple vaccination, it is possible that the children would not have slipped into the autistic world. Had we given them a single vaccination—perhaps the measles vaccination on its own—it would not have happened to them. That is the thinking.

The Convener: I warn members that we are not here to debate the issue. That will be a matter for the Health and Community Care Committee.

Mrs Smith: Can I just ask—

The Convener: We have a heavy programme, so members should be as brief as possible.

Bill Welsh: The member should carry on. She can ask me as many questions as she likes.

Mrs Smith: I welcome the opportunity to consider the petition further and to ask more questions at the Health and Community Care Committee.

Bill Welsh: It is my desire to bring scientists and doctors who are experts in the matter and who have made presentations to the United States Senate before the committee, so that Scotland receives the same information.

Christine Grahame: I want to get clear exactly what it is that you are asking, because I do not think that you answered the convener. You raise a number of consequences of the MMR injection, but the petition focuses on autism. If we refer the petition to the Health and Community Care Committee, do you want the committee to focus on obtaining documentary and oral evidence on whether there is a connection between the multiple vaccine and the increase in autism, which you say exists? The second part of the petition says that the Parliament should

"Put in place a medical protocol to aid children diagnosed autistic."

You focus on autism. We must be clear that that is what you want the committee to consider.

Bill Welsh: I do focus on autism, but you must understand the nature of autism.

Christine Grahame: That is not the problem; I do understand about autism—I was a teacher for many years and encountered autistic children.

Bill Welsh: You must understand the nature of what we are talking about now. These children are not autistic in the classical sense of the word. They have drifted into autisms—as we call it—because they have physiological problems. It is part of a package. Those children are not autistic because they were born autistic. Those children are perfectly normal, but they are sick.

You are asking me whether I want the committee to consider only autism. That is too easy; too simple. The children have myriad physical problems that have been identified, although not by the medical fraternity in this country, I must say—we have had to go to America to seek alternative medicines. It is an important subject, which affects every child born in Scotland. You ask whether we should concentrate on autism. I will settle for that, but it is a wider issue than that.

Christine Grahame: I am not telling you that that is what we will do. I was asking, convener, because I still do not think that my question has been resolved.

The Convener: To be fair, this is a substantial matter, but the Health and Community Care Committee will set the parameters for its

investigation. We must decide whether there is enough evidence to suggest that we should refer the petition to the Health and Community Care Committee. I think that there is.

Christine Grahame: I am not challenging the documents. I just want to clarify that we should focus on autism, even though there may be ancillary effects.

My second question is about the British Autistic Society. I hope that that is the correct name.

Bill Welsh: It is the National Autistic Society. There is also the Scottish Society for Autistic Children.

Christine Grahame: Are they aware of the petition?

Bill Welsh: They are. Interestingly enough, two weeks ago, the National Autistic Society issued a press release—as a result of the Washington experience—questioning for the first time the Westminster Government's policies on vaccination. I do not think that any of us ever expected that to happen. I spoke about the petition to the chairman of the Scottish Society for Autistic Children, who was very supportive and hopes that something positive will come out of it. All of us held a march in Edinburgh a few weeks ago.

Christine Grahame: I just wanted to know that they were cognisant of it.

John Scott: In one sentence, what is the position in America? What is the Food and Drug Administration doing about it, if anything?

Bill Welsh: I do not know about the FDA. Our Medical Research Council was a bit concerned. There is a congressional hearing into this matter. Evidence has been presented to the hearing and it is being sifted through and looked at but, like all political matters, we do not know when we will have a definitive report. No result has been issued.

The Convener: We have heard and read the evidence. Is it agreed that we pass this petition to the Health and Community Care Committee? The convener of that committee has indicated that she would be happy to receive it.

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The next petition is PE146 from Mr McInnes, on behalf of the residents of Main Street, Golspie, which requests a variety of actions from the trunk roads network management and maintenance division of the Scottish Executive with regard to the upgrading work on the A9 trunk road in Golspie. He is concerned about structural problems and on-going noise and vibration nuisance. Previous approaches to the Executive and to Highland Council resulted in unsatisfactory responses, and Mr McInnes is now calling on the

Scottish Parliament to ask for all kinds of things from the Executive.

We can either pass this petition straight to the Transport and the Environment Committee for further consideration, or we can pass it to the Minister for Transport and the Environment, seeking her comments. Given the work load of committees, my preference is to send it to the minister. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The next petition is PE147 from Marie Galbraith, on behalf of the Sheltered Housing Owners Confederation of Scotland executive committee. Marie Galbraith is here to speak to the petition.

Marie Galbraith (Sheltered Housing Owners Confederation of Scotland): May I start with an apology? I did not realise that it would have been helpful if I had sent copies of our petition. You can have copies later if you wish.

The reason for our petition is that our organisation, which is the only one representing owner-occupiers of private sheltered and retirement housing in Scotland, was not granted an interview with the ministers Iain Gray, Jackie Baillie or Wendy Alexander, as we requested, prior to the launch of the voluntary framework code of management practice for owner-occupied sheltered housing. Although we had two representatives on the working group for the code, it was felt that their voices did not carry the same weight as those who have a vested interest in the management of complexes such as ours.

You have before you the considered opinion of this code of the solicitor John McCormick. You will see that the code is of no value to us because, when the chips are down, the deed of conditions is the only enforceable contract in law. In other words, the deed of conditions takes precedence over any code of practice. You must remember that SHOC, and SHOC alone, speaks for many frail elderly people who are not fit or are too afraid to speak for themselves.

In February 1991, Age Concern Scotland set up SHOC because of the volume of complaints that owner-occupiers had been bringing to it. Those pensioners had already contacted their management companies, and had been so badly treated that they sought help from Age Concern. When various agencies such as Scottish Homes and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations were approached, the universal answer was, "See your lawyer." I can assure you that most of our members are not the fat cats of society. In fact, as the years go on, the money at their disposal diminishes. Many are not in a position to contemplate the expense of going to law.

Our hopes were raised when the Scottish Office, as it was then, set up a working party to come up with a solution to our problems, only to have those hopes dashed when we discovered that that solution was to be a voluntary code of management practice that in no way addresses or solves the many problems that are being experienced by our members. That is why we have brought the petition today. We know that the code has been produced, but to whom can we turn in future to make sure that the next lot of legislation regarding feudal tenure and real burdens will not become a similar minefield? We have great problems with that. The reason that we came here today is that we felt that our voice had not been heard. Thank you for listening.

The Convener: Thank you. In your letter to Iain Gray, you make the point that other participating agencies have had the chance to put forward their views individually. Can you give us an idea of which organisations you mean?

Marie Galbraith: Mrs Reid has suffered almost more than I have.

Mrs Margaret Reid (Sheltered Housing Owners Confederation of Scotland): I was a member of the working party, representing SHOC. To begin with, a range of organisations was represented on the working party—the Law Commission, the Law Society, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, the Scottish Consumer Council and Scottish property managers, builders and housing associations—but at the preliminary meeting there was only one representative of SHOC. I joined the working party in 1997, because of the ill health of another member, but by that time the pattern had been set and those who had a vested interest in this area had things pretty well sewn up. Although I presented complaints about my complex, there is nothing in the code that will solve those problems, which still exist.

14:45

The Convener: The minister concerned was not a member of the working group, so you did not have a chance to speak to him at the meetings.

Mrs Reid: No. This working party was set up in July 1996.

The Convener: Under the former Scottish Office.

Mrs Reid: Yes. However, people are still experiencing problems. In my case, those problems have been going on for 11 years.

The Convener: So you want the Parliament to help you arrange a meeting with the minister, to put across your views on the voluntary code.

Mrs Reid: Yes. We want a meeting with the minister so that we can put our side of the story.

Christine Grahame: Was the minister ever shown the correspondence from your solicitor, John McCormick? It raises issues relating to the operational use of the code.

Mrs Reid: SHOC engaged the services of the solicitor, whose findings were sent to the Scottish Executive prior to finalisation of the code.

Marie Galbraith: We assume that it went to the minister, but we do not know that it did.

Mrs Reid: We certainly sent in the documents.

Mrs Smith: You say that you raised many of these issues at the working group. Did you find that you were a lone voice in raising your concerns, or did other people on the working group agree with you about the issues that you raised?

Mrs Reid: There were two representatives from SHOC who raised the same issues. We were able to draw on personal experience, as well as the experience of SHOC's membership. We expressed our fears at the time and said that the voluntary code was of no value. A voluntary code does not require people to do anything.

Mrs Smith: Were people on the working party representing other organisations or groups generally supportive of the points that you made, or was that support restricted to you and the other SHOC representative?

Mrs Reid: We were the only people representing the owners of this type of housing.

Mrs Smith: I am not an owner of sheltered housing but, as a representative of people who are, I know that there are a number of concerns, some of which I share. I am trying to get a sense of whether you were the only people on the working group who had such concerns. Did any of the other groups say that you had a point?

Mrs Reid: We had referred the problems to Scottish Homes. Age Concern was also represented on the working party. These are organisations that we first contacted about the problems 10 or 11 years ago. They acknowledged that there were problems because they too were receiving letters. At the same time, they finally agreed to the voluntary code of practice.

Ms White: How often were the meetings held? Was it once a month or every two months? Was there any representation from this Parliament—in other words, from the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee or from the Executive—at those meetings?

Mrs Reid: The meetings were not held on a regular basis; there was no pre-arrangement.

There was just notification of when the next meeting would take place, perhaps after a draft code had been issued and comments were asked for. No ministers were present. Scottish Executive staff led the working party.

Marie Galbraith: Could we just put in an extra plea with regard to the Abolition of Feudal Tenure etc (Scotland) Bill? I live in Glasgow. We have obtained our own superiority, which has cost us almost £1,000. We do not know where we will stand after that bill is passed. We are getting mixed signals. Some say that the superiority will be abolished altogether; others say that, in our case, it will be transferred to the owners.

At the moment, we in McLaren Court are all superior people, but we are not certain how to use our superiority. We have a deed of conditions, which is the one that comes in tablets of stone. Will you abolish deeds of conditions when you pass the bill? I do not know, and we have not been able to find out. Many people around Scotland are writing to various MSPs, and we get a number of different answers.

We are not a large body of people. We are getting old and done—you will be that way yourselves some day. We are a growth industry, but the trouble is that sheltered or retirement housing is a minefield. It can be frightening.

Pauline McNeill: This committee has no remit to give you a reply on that, but I urge you to write to the convener of the Justice and Home Affairs Committee, of which Christine Grahame and I are members. You will need to get your answer there.

Marie Galbraith: We have already attended meetings of that committee to try to understand what was happening.

Mrs Reid: The code of practice does not supersede the deed of conditions. Therefore, there is a conflict. If there is something in the deed of conditions that is not in the code, the housing association, which, in my case, is also superior and the self-appointed factor, can choose whether to use the deed of conditions or the code of practice. It is a difficult matter which we pointed out at the very beginning. We are the people at the sharp end.

In my complex, what the code gives we have already received, through an arbitration award in 1996. The housing association is refusing to implement that. I have been through court proceedings, and I have spend 12½ days at an arbitration, whose award is not being implemented despite being in line with my deed of conditions. There are many problems to consider, and we do not want any of the committees of the Scottish Parliament treating this matter lightly.

The Convener: I can assure you that that will

certainly not happen. This committee does not treat anything that comes from petitioners lightly. We do not, however, have a remit to deal with this. It is a matter for the Justice and Home Affairs Committee, and we can give you the contact for that committee. You can write to them about these issues, and you will, I hope, get a response that way. Indeed, you could submit another petition, asking specifically for us to do that.

Marie Galbraith: That is an idea.

The Convener: We will pursue this petition very seriously, and I thank you very much for the time that you have taken to explain the situation to the committee. Thank you very much for describing us as being old and grey some day—some of us are there already. [*Laughter.*]

Marie Galbraith: You look just like boys and girls to us.

The Convener: You can come back any time.

Let us deal with the substance of the petition, which asks for a meeting with Iain Gray. The suggestion is that I, as convener, write to Iain Gray, drawing his attention to the genuine grievance of the group and asking him to arrange a meeting with them to listen to their concerns and to explain the Executive's position in greater detail.

Christine Grahame: The Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee might want to consider some of the matters that are raised in the substance of the petition. There should be a healthy tension between a minister and the committee and this might be an area in which healthy tension is advisable.

The Convener: We could copy the report of this part of the meeting and the relevant correspondence to the convener of the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee. It would then be up to that convener to decide whether to pursue the matter. I am a member of that committee so I will be able to explain the position to the convener. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Petition PE148 comes from William Brian Anderson on behalf of the Organophosphate Information Network. Mr Anderson is here to speak to the petition.

Brian Anderson (Organophosphate Information Network): The petition is about the suffering, hopelessness and helplessness that many farmers in Scotland are experiencing as a result of the totally inadequate facilities for diagnosis and treatment of people who have been exposed to organophosphates. Organophosphate is a nerve agent, which affects the peripheral nervous system, the central nervous system and

the autonomic nervous system. It causes neuropathy and neuropsychological abnormalities.

There are no facilities in Scotland for the treatment or diagnosis of farmers who are suffering as a consequence of exposure to organophosphates. That situation is not unique to Scotland, but exists throughout the United Kingdom. On 1 July 1999, something great happened in Edinburgh—devolution took place. At the same time, a report was published by the Institute of Occupational Medicine, estimating that 20 per cent of farmers who were exposed to organophosphates suffer peripheral neuropathy.

The Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment, known as COT, published a report in November. It accepted that peripheral neuropathy and neuropsychological abnormalities were symptoms showing that a person had been exposed to organophosphates.

In 1998, the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Psychiatrists carried out a study on behalf of the Department of Health. They concluded that the present system of treatment and diagnosis was incompetent and unsatisfactory. They recommended the setting up of centres throughout the United Kingdom, where various specialists of the relevant medical disciplines could come together to diagnose and offer treatment to suspected OP patients. Nothing has happened since 1998.

In August and September 1999, I wrote to the Minister for Health and Community Care, Susan Deacon, asking for a meeting, suggesting that OPIN could co-operate with the health department in setting up such centres. I have not received a reply, despite the fact that one letter was sent by registered post. In December, on the advice of a member of the rural affairs department, I sent a third letter to the secretary of the health department. Again, I received no reply. We have submitted our petition to the Scottish Parliament because we have had no response to our concerns about the lack of treatment and diagnosis facilities.

I sincerely hope that Parliament will rectify this situation, in which farmers are suffering the most hideous symptoms as a consequence of their exposure to organophosphates. We sincerely hope that you will take action to ensure that the health department examines the situation and that centres are set up with experts in the disciplines that are required to diagnose and help the farmers who are affected.

The Convener: Thank you for the comprehensive information that you supplied with the petition, which tells a harrowing story of the lack of Government action in response to a

serious problem. Are there any questions?

15:00

Mrs Smith: I wish to make a statement rather than ask questions. I am happy to take action if, as is suggested, the petition is passed to the Health and Community Care Committee. I think that the petition should also be passed to the Rural Affairs Committee for its information and so that it can comment on it. The matter is very much within the remit of the Health and Community Care Committee, but members of the Rural Affairs Committee will probably want to comment on it. They will probably have anecdotal information on the matter from rural communities.

Pauline McNeill: Is it correct that you have received no reply from ministers to your letters to the health department?

Brian Anderson: That is correct.

Pauline McNeill: When did you write to the health department?

Brian Anderson: I think that you have copies of the letters. I believe that I wrote to the health department in August, September and December. I am a sufferer so I have a very bad memory.

Pauline McNeill: Did you receive an acknowledgement of any kind?

Brian Anderson: I received nothing. However, to be fair to the health department in Scotland, I will say that OP sufferers in England experienced exactly the same response from the Department of Health in London.

Christine Grahame: Is the report that the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Psychiatrists published in November 1998 a substantial work? I would like to ask the Scottish Parliament information centre to obtain a copy.

Brian Anderson: It is not a large report; it probably has about 80 pages.

Christine Grahame: This is a serious issue, which appears to have been sidelined in an extraordinary manner. I will certainly ask the Parliament's researchers to obtain that report for MSPs. I also think that the Rural Affairs Committee should take a proactive role. The petition should not be just for its information.

Brian Anderson: The seriousness of the issue arises from the fact that farmers were compelled by law to use this hideous chemical and that during the period in which its use was compulsory they were not given guidance on the proper protective clothing to wear. I have recently returned from London, where I had been invited by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to take part in a workshop on the issue of OP

involving all the leading medical and scientific researchers in the UK. The lack of understanding of the issue among civil servants attending that workshop was frightening.

From my own research, I have discovered that there seem to be two different types of illness. One is the chronic form, from which I suffer, which involves peripheral neuropathy, autonomic neuropathy, central nervous system damage and neuropsychological abnormalities. I contracted these symptoms by drinking water that was polluted by OP rather than by farming. I found that new cases of people complaining about the serious chronic, rather than the acute, effects of OP exposure stopped in 1993.

In my own research, I found that, in 1993, a chemical called phenyl was removed from organophosphate products. It seems to have been the additives to the OPs that have caused the real problems. When the Veterinary Products Committee and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate asked the chemical companies for safety data on OPs with phenyls, rather than submit the data, the chemical companies withdrew the phenyls from the products.

The VPC and VMD just accepted that, without any investigation. I do not know if that was deliberate or accidental, or whether it was incompetent. However, it seems fairly obvious to me that it was the phenyls that were causing the added problems and the chronic ill health. According to research in America and the United Kingdom, such additives can multiply the toxicity of the organophosphates by a factor of 100.

John Scott: As a farmer and a sheep dipper for 20-odd years, I back up what you are saying. I believe that these are very dangerous products. Government has had a fear of discussing such issues in public. The fact that phenyls were withdrawn and nothing put in their place is frightening. Without wishing to pre-empt what the Rural Affairs Committee will say, I am certain that its members will agree that this is a health issue. It has been swept under the carpet but it should be considered.

The Convener: Fergus, would you like to come in?

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): Thank you, convener. I am grateful for the opportunity to attend this committee. My colleague John Swinney was unable to stay, Brian, as he had another engagement.

This matter was raised by a constituent of mine, Hugh MacColl, a fellow sufferer whom I believe Brian knows.

Brian Anderson: Yes.

Fergus Ewing: I was very moved by the account that you gave today and I was impressed, as were the members of the committee, by the detail of your submission.

Has the experience of sufferers in England been better than in Scotland?

Brian Anderson: No. In London, there is a facility for diagnosis at Imperial College. The leading expert in the world in OP illness is a Dr Jamal. He has a colleague called Dr Peter Julu. They carried out their initial research at the Southern general hospital in Glasgow, before transferring to London. However, the diagnosis is not available on the national health service. That was made clear to Baroness Hayman at the workshop in London four weeks ago. The diagnosis is available only privately, and costs thousands of pounds.

Fergus Ewing: The report of the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Psychiatrists, which, as you said, was published in November 1998, stated that existing clinical services for patients with symptoms associated with OP sheep-dip exposure were unsatisfactory. It went on to say that referral to a specialist might be needed, as would more help and information for general practitioners. As far as you are aware, has any progress been made in dealing with the recommendations in the report?

Brian Anderson: None at all. Central Government's health spokesman has sent out a circular, but it does not give proper guidance to GPs. It does not help them to understand all the symptoms or to understand that there are many variations of symptoms, which reveal themselves at different times. At certain stages I have felt stronger in regard to one symptom and weaker in regard to another and that has been reversed at other stages. No real guidance has been given to GPs—my GP has had no guidance that would help him to diagnose exposure to organophosphates, which can take place over a long period.

There are two different types of exposure, one of which is acute exposure. An example of acute exposure from about 18 months ago is the case in which a huntsman in the Borders was given a drink of what he thought was whisky. It was, however, pure, unadulterated organophosphate sheep-dip, which had been mistaken for a bottle of whisky. He died and was brought back to life in a Borders hospital.

In the second type of exposure, chronic ill health is built up over a period—it is incremental, as John Swinney has said—and that ill health must be treated. There is a school of thought that believes that acute cases can be healed by immediate treatment, but that chronic ill health is irreversible

and that those who suffer it have had their lives destroyed.

I deal with sufferers on a daily basis, who telephone for help. Because I am a sufferer myself, I can understand what they are going through. I had a call the other day from a woman who was ready to leave her husband because of his rages and irritability. I know how he feels; that a great deal of blackness surrounds him and that he has no hope. One feels totally helpless and that nothing can be done because the problem cannot be treated. My only advice to that woman was that she should say not a word to him until he came through those experiences. No matter how supportive someone is, his or her presence can provoke great rage in the sufferer.

The Convener: Thank you. That was an excellent contribution.

As has already been indicated by members of the committee, the matter is mainly for the Health and Community Care Committee as the lead committee, so we should refer the petition to it. Should we send the petition to the Rural Affairs Committee for its comments and for information or should we ask the Health and Community Care Committee to pass the petition to that committee?

Pauline McNeill: We should send it for comment to the Rural Affairs Committee and the Health and Community Care Committee.

I am concerned that there has been no reply from the health department since August. I know that MSPs complain about the length of time that it takes to get replies from ministers, but it should not take that long. That department should, at least, have sent an acknowledgement of receipt of the letter. It is possible that the letter was lost, but I would like to know one way or the other. Could we write to the health department to find out why a reply was not received?

The Convener: Yes. We could write to Susan Deacon to ask why there has been no response to the two letters.

Christine Grahame: There should not be an excuse for that. Two letters were sent—one by recorded delivery.

The Convener: Is it agreed that we will send the petition to the Health and Community Care Committee and the Rural Affairs Committee and that we will write to Susan Deacon to ask why there has been no response to the correspondence?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The next group of five related petitions is to do with Fife Acute Hospitals NHS Trust.

Since the meeting's agenda was drawn up, we

have received two additional petitions on the topic, from the local members of the Royal College of Midwives and from the Manufacturing, Science and Finance union members who are employed by the trust.

Janet Ogg, from the Royal College of Nursing, will speak to the petitions.

15:15

Janet Ogg (Royal College of Nursing): Thank you for allowing me to speak. I speak on behalf of the staff-side organisation of the joint staff forum of the Fife Acute Hospitals NHS Trust.

One of the clear intentions when car-parking charges were introduced was to support service delivery. That is in direct contravention of the guidelines that were issued by the NHS management executive in February last year. The concerns that we have raised are that the consultation was hurried, that it took place over the festive period and—despite the obvious concerns that were raised by members of staff, Fife Health Council, Fife Health Board, Fife Primary Care NHS Trust and Fife Council—the decision to introduce car parking charges was ratified by the policy and planning committee in February and by the trust board in March.

The staff side held meetings in three hospital sites between 1 mile and 14 miles apart. The response at those meetings was overwhelming in its opposition to car parking charges. The joint staff forum then asked a member of the executive team to attend a public meeting. That request was declined, despite the fact that it was made three times.

The green travel group was set up in August, with a remit to examine environmental issues. For example, spaces for bicycles were provided to encourage the healthier option of cycling to work. A member of our joint staff forum was on that committee and in October the staff newsletter contained a paragraph stating that the green travel group was considering car parking at the three hospitals, but charges were never mentioned.

Despite that, the green travel group has negotiated discounted public transport with, for example, the rail and bus links. Hospital staff work throughout each 24-hour period and no public transport can accommodate that. We are a rural community, not a city hospital where parking difficulties might be an issue. Copies of all the correspondence that has been received and sent by the joint staff forum have been forwarded to the committee, with a request for a moratorium on the charges. We have been supported by Fife Council and the trade council and health councils. Newspaper groups throughout Fife have taken our concerns on board and have given us their

support. They have sent out petitions, which are being collated and must be in by Friday. The petitions that the joint staff forum issued to members of staff and members of the public who attended the hospitals were also sent to our director of operations.

We oppose in principle the use of the surplus income from the parking charges for support of service delivery. We also abhor the effect of the charges on people on low incomes, patients who must attend daily for treatment, the low paid and part-time staff. No effort has been made to reduce charges for access to car parking spaces for those people. There are 1,830 members of staff but only 430 spaces, so staff are not guaranteed a space. A pay-and-display area is accessible, but the charge for that is £1. There is only limited parking space available throughout the hospital and that might impact on housing in the vicinity of the hospital.

There is also poor access to public transport for the staff and community staff of the three hospitals. Moreover, public transport is not always the best option. Medical records often have to be taken from hospital to hospital and, if a member of staff does not have the use of a car, the privacy of those records could be compromised.

In conclusion, the staff side asks the Scottish Parliament to investigate the plans of Fife Acute Hospitals NHS Trust to introduce car parking charges, the extent and result of any consultation that is undertaken by the trust and the use of any public moneys that were intended for patient services to provide car parking facilities. Thank you for taking note of the petitions. I hope that the committee can act on them.

Fife is in the middle of an acute services review that is considering the reorganisation of services throughout the hospitals. We expect a report in September, and ask for a moratorium that will give us time to consult and find out what the prospects of the reorganisation are.

The Convener: Thank you for that clear explanation of the concerns behind the petition. The petitions obviously have a broad base of support in Fife.

Pauline McNeill: I will say something later about what the committee should recommend, as the matter affects probably not only Fife, but the whole country. Do you also speak for patients?

Janet Ogg: Professionally, I am a clinical nurse specialist in a dermatology unit. We provide care for patients on an outpatient basis over a seven-day period, and many of them have raised similar concerns with me.

Ms White: The petition makes us realise that the health service is not actually free. Apparently,

part of the proposed revenue will be used for funding clinical development, but it seems that securing the safety of staff at bus stops will require capital expenditure.

Your petition mentions that staff will be charged £60 for car parking. Would that be a one-off payment, or would payments be staggered throughout the year?

Janet Ogg: Staff were given that choice on their payslips at the end of March, when they had to complete an application form including how they proposed to pay the charge. The charge would then be taken from their salaries.

Ms White: If someone agrees to pay the £60 in one go, are they guaranteed a parking space?

Janet Ogg: No.

The Convener: We shall now turn to consideration of the petition itself. Members will be aware that we had an almost identical petition about car parking charges at St John's Hospital in Livingston. At that time, we decided to write to West Lothian Healthcare NHS Trust, whose reply—which has been handed out to members this afternoon—suggests a very different experience from the situation in Fife. The West Lothian trust refers to Scottish Executive policy, its own widespread consultation on car parking charges and its eventual decision to rent additional off-site car-parking capacity, which is free of charge to patients and visitors. Indeed, even the on-site parking in West Lothian will remain free of charge to disabled drivers, low-paid staff, volunteers and users of the pharmacy. Those are very different circumstances.

We could agree to Fife Acute Hospitals NHS Trust's response and consider it along with the response from West Lothian Healthcare NHS Trust. That will, however, create problems with time, because an acute services review is under way and the matter is urgent. Perhaps we should just refer the West Lothian Healthcare NHS Trust response and the petitions to the Health and Community Care Committee, because this new departure for the NHS seems to be taking root throughout Scotland.

Pauline McNeill: Although I do not want to deprive Margaret Smith and the Health and Community Care Committee of another petition, there is a sense of urgency about the matter. A precedent is being set that is contrary to guidance from the health department. As a result, we should copy the West Lothian Healthcare NHS Trust response and this petition to the Minister for Health and Community Care and ask her what action the Executive intends to take, given that Fife Acute Hospitals NHS Trust seems to be contravening the management executive's guidance. However, I will defer to Margaret

Smith's view on the matter.

The Convener: I am the convener of this committee.

Christine Grahame: I agree with Pauline's suggestion. It has taken a month to get a reply from West Lothian Healthcare NHS Trust—we could write to Fife Acute Hospitals NHS Trust and wait for another month. We should also be cognisant of the Health and Community Care Committee's work load, which has, no doubt, already been scheduled. The minister would probably move more quickly on the matter.

John Scott: It might also be worth asking whether other trusts have plans to introduce similar charges.

The Convener: Tayside Health Board has had car-parking charges for some time; there is no free parking for anyone at Ninewells hospital. There is tremendous inconsistency regarding car-parking charges throughout Scotland.

Ms White: We should send the petition to the Minister for Health and Community Care, including a rider that says that the matter is urgent and that the committee wants a reply as soon as possible. We do not want a repeat of what happened with the previous petition that we sent.

The Convener: I appreciate that copies of the West Lothian Healthcare NHS Trust reply were handed out only as members arrived, but if members get a chance to read the reply, they will find that West Lothian has handled the situation quite differently from Fife Acute Hospitals NHS Trust. West Lothian is, in fact, in compliance with the Scottish Executive's guidance on the issue and still provides free car parking for staff and patients, just off the hospital site. That is altogether different from Fife.

The convener of the Health and Community Care Committee has indicated that that committee might not appreciate having the petition referred to it. In view of that, and bearing in mind the urgency of the matter, we should do as Pauline McNeill suggested and refer the correspondence to the minister and ask for an urgent response to the problem that is developing across Scotland.

Mrs Smith: From the point of view of getting a quick response, and because of the acute services review, it is probably better to go down that route on this occasion. The Health and Community Care Committee is involved in budget discussions and is in the middle of a community care review. This committee has also passed two petitions to it this afternoon—it has quite a heavy workload.

Once the Public Petitions Committee has had a response from the minister, it might like to look again at the matter. There are a number of reasons for hospital trusts throughout Scotland

deciding to introduce car-parking charges. Sometimes, it is done merely to raise funds and sometimes it is because there is not enough parking space and the trusts are trying to find ways of prioritising the available space. Sometimes trusts are experiencing difficulties in their local communities relating to parking on streets and a range of other issues. I certainly had a problem when my local hospital introduced car parking charges, which exacerbated existing problems.

There is an issue, which was touched on by the petitioner, about the role for green transport plans in relation to hospital transport. Perhaps, before trusts introduce parking charges, they should have to introduce green transport plans for their hospitals. Those plans would involve local transport, private bus companies and so on and would take on board the specific transport needs of shift workers in hospitals. There is a wider dimension to the petition, and I would not necessarily want to lose sight of the possibility that we should pass that on to the Health and Community Care Committee at some point. For the moment, urgency is probably the best policy and the petition should be sent to the Executive.

The Convener: Okay. That is agreed. Of course, the petition will stay on our agenda because the reply will come back to the committee. We can consider further whether to send it on to the Health and Community Care Committee with a wider remit.

Do members agree that the West Lothian reply should be sent on to the petitioner?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We can also copy the Fife and West Lothian correspondence to the minister, pointing out the inconsistencies and asking for an Executive response to the growing problem of car park charges.

Christine Grahame: We should also agree to write to the health board in Fife, seeking its response to the petition.

The Convener: We could do that at the same time.

Christine Grahame: Fife's response might be very different to that from West Lothian.

The Convener: It could be useful to compare the responses. We will do that.

Next we have a series of petitions, from a number of individuals, that concern extending the remit of the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute. The petitions are similar to a number of petitions that we received previously. The institute is carrying out research into the economic impact of a ban on fox hunting. The remit of its study has

been extended recently because of the interest of the Parliament and, in particular, the private member's bill that would ban fox hunting. That bill is receiving stage 1 consideration from the Rural Affairs Committee.

I should point out that a further 23 petitions along similar lines have been received but not yet lodged formally. They are duplicates of, or almost identical to, those that we are dealing with today. Previously, we sent such petitions to the Rural Affairs Committee and, on this occasion, it is suggested that the petitions, together with the 23 further petitions, be passed to that committee, with the recommendation that it may wish to seek a response from the Scottish Executive.

Members indicated agreement.

15:30

The Convener: I do not know how to pronounce the name of the next petitioner—Risnidh Mag something—who is petitioning on behalf of the Celtic league.

Christine Grahame: John, that will go into the *Official Report*.

The Convener: I cannot pronounce Gaelic—perhaps I should take classes.

Christine Grahame: All I can say is that you should not go north of Perth.

The Convener: The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to introduce legislation to require local authorities to provide access to Gaelic as a second language, where reasonable demand exists, and to legislate for the provision of suitable courses to allow teachers to gain proficiency in the teaching of Gaelic as a second language. It also asks the Parliament to legislate for the establishment of an independent body to monitor local authority Gaelic education development programmes and, finally, to include those proposals in the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Bill.

We considered a similar petition, which we passed to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee, asking that committee to take into account the issues raised as part of its consideration of the bill. This petition is different—it requests the Parliament to introduce legislation—but it is suggested that we pass it to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee and ask that committee to take the issues raised into account when considering the bill.

Ms White: I go along with that recommendation. The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Bill is a substantial bill. Anyone who is sufficiently interested in the bill to petition the Parliament deserves to have their petition passed to the

Education, Culture and Sport Committee. I hope that we will get it right this time and that we will take on board everything that the petitioner has submitted—well, within reason.

The Convener: Do we agree to pass this petition to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Christine Grahame: I am glad that the Gaels, who have fought so long to keep the language alive, are now winning a few victories on the way. While they are at it, I hope that they are victorious with the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Bill.

The Convener: They will finally triumph if they get me to pronounce Gaelic words properly. If it were Irish Gaelic, I could do it no problem.

Christine Grahame: Oh dear—that is shameful.

The Convener: PE154 and PE156 are from Hillhead Primary School board and Hillhead community council, and relate to a planning decision by Glasgow City Council. Mrs Jean Charsley, of Hillhead community council is here to speak in support of PE156.

Jean Charsley (Hillhead Community Council): We have come to the Parliament because our specific grievances raise issues that are relevant to every planning authority, and because we have no other channel through which to pursue our grievances.

I am chairman of a community council in a conservation area. I will explain briefly our grievances. Glasgow City Council bought the garden behind two former terraced houses in Alfred Terrace for the specific use of the adjacent primary school, and for the use of the community during out-of-school hours. The council decided to sell the garden for commercial development without reference to either the primary school or the community council. We are informed that such a step was illegal and in breach of compulsory purchase powers.

The planning department and committee ignored the council's development policy and guidelines when they granted permission for 14 flats to be built on that small area. The decision was in direct contravention of planning guidelines and of other decisions that had been made about planning in the same terrace and in neighbouring streets. The problems that the decision creates for the school and the community are considerable.

It appears that no remedy is open to objectors—even to a statutory body such as the community council—for ill-founded planning decisions. It makes no difference whether such decisions arise from mistakes on the part of a member of the planning committee, who thought that a voting

convention was in place, or from misinformation laid before the committee by the applicant. It makes no difference whether title of the land, in being sold properly, passes on grant of planning permission to the applicant, or whether the recommendation drives a juggernaut through agreed planning policies for the area.

We ask the Parliament to overturn the decisions on Alfred Terrace—both on the sale of the land and on the grant of planning permission. We want Parliament to consider whether the situation is a serious breach of regulations, with adverse consequences for the school and the community. The decision has also created precedents that could be used by a developer on appeal or in a court of law, to the disadvantage of the whole conservation area. We also ask that Parliament consider what should be done to improve the planning process and make it more scrupulous.

The Convener: Neither this committee nor the Parliament has the power to overturn a planning decision made by a local authority.

Jean Charsley: We realise that.

The Convener: Please be clear exactly what you want the Parliament to do. To be technically admissible, a petition must ask the Parliament to do something that is in its power. It is not in its power to overturn planning decisions.

Jean Charsley: We understand that, using its retrospective powers, Parliament can discuss the matter and agree to do that. We would like the issues to be raised; we think that they are serious. We also consider that it is not sufficient simply to rebuke the council. That would allow it still to carry on and do as it sees fit.

We are also informed that, had we gone for judicial review, which a community council cannot do, the matter would also have been sent back to the council for consideration. The Scottish Executive, against whom we have raised a grievance, discusses the matter only with the planning authority, not with objectors. We had no response to our objections until we received a letter dated 11 April, which arrived a week after that date. It said that no planning policies had been contravened, but that clearly is not the case.

Pauline McNeill: I start by declaring an interest: Alfred Terrace is in my constituency and I have been dealing with the matter. It is the street that I used to live in, and the street behind my house, so I know quite a lot about the case.

The convener is quite correct. It is a sad fact that our powers are pretty limited. Sandra White and I questioned the Executive about this matter and were told that it has nothing to do with Parliament. On a technicality, that is true, but there are some points that are worthy of consideration. An

omission in the law has led to a group of objectors being completely frustrated in the process. No matter how many people object, there is still no provision to consider the case.

Without going into too much detail, there are many reasons why the planning application could have been reconsidered. The land was compulsorily purchased by the council. We are talking about the largest primary school in Glasgow and there are safety issues to consider. The flats are close to the school. The roads department objected on those grounds, but was ignored, as other objectors have been. There needs to be a re-examination of planning law, so perhaps the petition could be reworded to call for that—saying so might be outwith my authority, but it is a hint that could send the petition in the right direction.

Ian Jenkins has lodged a motion, which some of us have signed, on involving third-party objectors in planning law. The Executive should be asked why it was not considered appropriate to investigate the matter, given that the roads department objected and the land was compulsorily purchased and sold without the knowledge either of the school—which I find astonishing—or of the community council. I understand that there is a statutory obligation to keep community councils informed.

The flats will be built directly on the garden area. As Jean Charsley pointed out, it is a conservation area, so there are environmental issues to consider. The nub of the matter is that the effects of the case will be more widespread than for Alfred Terrace or the residents of Hillhead. Anyone who knows about the west end of Glasgow knows that developers can make a killing in the property market there. The area is under immense pressure. We want reasonable development in the area, but we must ensure that we get the balance right. If we have no mechanism to examine what is happening in planning, areas such as Hillhead and other conservation areas in the country will suffer.

I am sorry that that was so long-winded. I want the committee to consider the possibility of raising some of the issues with the minister.

The Convener: The clerk has drawn to my attention the fact that we have had petitions on the rights of third parties to appeal, which we have referred to the Transport and the Environment Committee. It would be in order for us to refer this petition similarly.

Mrs Smith: That is the point that I was about to make. This is about our old friend, or old enemy, of common justice—the lack of a third-party right of appeal in the planning system.

Members keep coming up against this issue, whether in the Public Petitions Committee, in their

surgeries or in anecdotal evidence. The planning system is not there to help or to give justice to the individual or even to a community council, which has a statutory position in the system. The issue is wider than Alfred Terrace and Hillhead. Anything that the Public Petitions Committee can do to highlight the consistent call for justice on the matter—from people who petition the committee or contact members—will help.

The petitioners may have set a precedent by highlighting what might happen in Alfred Terrace, Hillhead and other conservation areas, but we must start setting a precedent in Parliament by saying that just because we did not have the powers in the past to challenge decisions that were taken behind closed doors by the Secretary of State for Scotland, it does not mean that we are happy to accept that in future. There is a need for us to pursue the issue and, I believe, to change the law on the matter.

Has the petitioner taken her concerns to the ombudsman?

Christine Grahame: That is what I planned to ask.

Mrs Smith: I am sorry to take everyone else's points.

You mentioned judicial review, but that means going through the system. Could you afford that? Have you been to the ombudsman?

Jean Charsley: We have written to the ombudsman, because we have just been advised to do so. We have complained to Mr McKinnon and someone else, whose name I have forgotten, in the Scottish Executive, listing our objections. It took two months for us to receive any sort of response.

Mrs Smith: You are complaining to the people who made the decision. The ombudsman and judicial review are the independent routes that you can take.

I want the petition to go to the Transport and the Environment Committee.

Jean Charsley: Community councils are disadvantaged more than ordinary objectors. We cannot go to the Court of Session to ask for an interdict, so we went to the Lord Advocate to ask for an interdict against work progressing on the site until the committee had heard the petition. The Lord Advocate cannot issue an interdict and we are advised that, as a community council, we cannot go to the Court of Session, because we are not a directly affected individual, even though we represent the community.

Christine Grahame: I have two questions on the specifics of your case and one general question. I had local government ombudsman

down as one of the ports of call, to check whether the local government was operating properly within its powers. You also mentioned judicial review. I presume that you took legal advice and were told that, as a community council, you could not sue. However, you may want to pursue an option to operate judicial review through a straw man or straw woman—an individual seeking review of the law. You should pick somebody who has no money, who will get advice and assistance. That is one way to get an interdict in your case. That will be £100 for that advice, please. [Laughter.]

On the general point, we have received other complaints from third parties about the failures of the planning system. There were loads of objections about the A701 at Penicuik, but people got nowhere. John Scott could no doubt go on about the Carrick Street Halls in Ayr, which is another example. There are many pertinent examples, and while local authorities should have some democratic operation, I think that the planning laws must be examined. I am not quite sure which committee would deal with planning—I would have thought that it would be the Local Government Committee.

15:45

The Convener: It is the Transport and the Environment Committee.

Christine Grahame: Subject to the committee's agreement, I suggest that the Local Government Committee, which would be affected, should also be made aware that we are concerned about planning, and that more and more issues are being raised with us by constituents and through petitions that indicate that people are being let down. People might not win, but at least they would have a hearing and an opportunity that do not appear to be available now.

Jean Charsley: May I ask a question?

The Convener: We are supposed to be asking you questions, but yes.

Jean Charsley: I wish to raise a planning issue and a breach of local government powers. The case is one where a council has purchased land for one purpose; it is not allowed to sell it for another purpose without reference to the people for whom it was purchased in the first place. That council is in breach of the law, is it not?

The Convener: That certainly sounds like something that we could refer to the Local Government Committee for consideration.

We still have a long agenda after this item, so I ask everyone to be brief.

Ms White: Thank you for coming along and

stating the case. Like Pauline McNeill, I have been involved. Unfortunately, it is a wee bit late for the local government ombudsman, and it is a pity that you were not told beforehand: a public inquiry could even have been instigated, held in the council. Alternatively, a letter could have been written to the local government ombudsman.

We have all said that the situation goes beyond Glasgow, but some of the material is absolutely damning. The decision goes against the west end plan, and there is an admission from councillors that members of the committee voted with the chair because that is what they always do and that is normal practice. That is disgraceful.

I always feel sorry for people who come to us with petitions or concerns regarding planning permission being overlooked by councils—

The Convener: Remember that we are looking for questions.

Ms White: Sorry, convener. The matter should be referred to the Local Government Committee as well as to the Transport and the Environment Committee. For far too long, local government—Glasgow City Council anyway—has run roughshod over people.

John Scott: I agree entirely with what Jean Charsley said. I have to declare an interest in the pylons of Scotland and the Northern Ireland interconnector. There is a similarity here; this is about the use of compulsory powers to benefit Glasgow City Council, in your case by selling the land subsequently in the same way that Scottish Power uses compulsory powers to maximise shareholder gain.

Those uses of compulsory power, I am certain, are incorrect. There should be a review of planning law with regard to such matters.

The Convener: That is clear. We will refer the petition to the Transport and the Environment Committee for the planning issues that arise from third-party appeals. We should also send it to the Local Government Committee because of the problems with compulsory purchase.

We should bear in mind Pauline McNeill's point about writing to the Executive, asking it to explain the decision. Shall we do that?

Mrs Smith: Can we also send the text of today's discussion, to ensure that the Executive knows what we have discussed?

The Convener: The only problem is that the *Official Report* of this meeting will not be available for another week. We could send it in addition, but we will send the other notice.

Mrs Smith: Some of the points that have been made are quite important.

The Convener: Can we move on to petition PE171? Margaret Ewing has been very patient, and I welcome her to the committee. This is becoming a very long meeting. Thank you for being here, Margaret.

The petition is from Mrs Michele Terry, on behalf of the parents and children of Glenrinn Primary School, about its proposed closure.

I do not think that Mrs Terry is here—is it just you, Margaret?

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): Yes. Glenrinn is a long way from Edinburgh. The parents would have liked to come; they hope to appear at another committee, because they want the matter to be deferred until the Parliament's findings on local council policies on the closure and retention of rural schools have been decided.

Glenrinn Primary School is in one of the most remote areas of my constituency, which is probably better known to many people as the Braes of Glenlivet. At present, there are seven youngsters at the school. The school is very effective, and we anticipate growth in the number of youngsters who attend it.

We feel that the petition fits in with the concept of ensuring that our rural communities are given the fullest attention by the Scottish Parliament. I thank the members of the committee who turned up on 29 March to meet the parents and children. We should refer the petition to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee, the Local Government Committee and the Rural Affairs Committee, as it relates to all of them.

The parents in Glenrinn are looking for a clear statement of the Scottish Parliament's policy on the retention of rural schools. I am sure that many members could make vocal points about schools in their areas. I rely on members of the Public Petitions Committee to make the final recommendation, but I feel that the petition relates to so many issues that it should not be dismissed as a small petition from a small community. It raises a significant political issue for us all.

The Convener: We have already discussed today a similar petition against the closure of Toward Primary School, and we debated previously a petition against the closure of Boharm Primary School. We referred those petitions to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee for further consideration, and I assume that we will do the same with the petition that we are discussing now. Margaret Ewing suggests that we also refer it to the Rural Affairs Committee. However, the Education, Culture and Sport Committee is conducting an inquiry into schools in rural communities, so this petition is of particular interest to that committee. Obviously, the Education, Culture and Sport Committee will

consult the Rural Affairs Committee and the Local Government Committee. Do we agree to refer the petition to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee?

Christine Grahame: I notice that the school was built on a plot of land that was gifted for a fee of £50. Was the land gifted for a specific purpose?

Mrs Ewing: It was purchased for £50 for the use of the community; I have no idea what it might be worth now. It should be emphasised that we are talking about not just the school, but the only general asset in the area. There is no post office, no pub and no village shop. The school is the focal point of the whole community. We need to keep that in mind.

Christine Grahame: If the land was gifted for the good of the community, that point could also be made.

John Scott: That made no difference in the case of the Carrick Street Halls. Did we agree to copy the petition on Toward Primary School to the Rural Affairs Committee?

The Convener: I cannot remember, but if we did, we will do the same with this petition. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We will deal next with petitions PE167, PE164 and PE155, as petitioners will speak to each of those.

PE167 is from Kingspark and Croftfoot community council and relates to telecommunications masts. Mr Lionel Hawes is here to address the committee.

Lionel Hawes (Kingspark and Croftfoot Community Council): Good afternoon. These are further details in support of a petition against planning consent 703/97, which relates to the installation of equipment and a telecommunications mast. I will pass round photographs that provide a vivid indication of where the equipment and the mast are located. I have also made four photocopies of a letter from Glasgow City Council, to which I will refer. It is my pleasure to speak for those who have signed the petition, especially for those directly affected by the consent. I present a letter dated 11 May 1999 and some photographs taken about two weeks ago by Mr and Mrs Hughes of 39 Kingsdyke Avenue, who live across from where the mast is located.

The planning authority is Glasgow City Council, and the following points and proposal seek to right a wrong. The mast is very close to the houses on more than one side, and near to a full-up nursery and primary school for King's Park's children. The mast should never have been allowed to be sited

there. The letter says that there is a 2 m high steel fence, but there has never been any steel fence, as has been pointed out to the council and to Vodafone. That constitutes a breach of safety rules. As the mast is sited in a park area, children will play around it, which is dangerous.

Some of those who should have received notices did not, and those who questioned what else would be sited at the locus obtained no guidance at all. When the mast was up, the answer from the council to the residents was, "Surely you knew a mast was going there". That was most unsatisfactory, as is the fact that the TV and telephone reception of several houses that are next to the mast is considerably affected. The residents are not worried just about that, but about the effect that the mast might be having on children and themselves.

I have here a photocopy of a page from the Transport and the Environment Committee's third report. On page 9, points 4, 5, 6 and 22 refer to what we have experienced, including—we very much suspect—a recent improvement, shall we say strengthening, of the equipment. That report was published in March.

The most damning aspect of all is that Glasgow City Council receives £2,250 or more each year for the mast, which is sited on council land. This flawed system, which borders on the corrupt, means that, through the siting of 80 to 90 masts, the city gains a considerable income, with the rider that the council pays for the removal of consented masts. In recent council minutes, two 15 m masts and one 20 m mast on the east side of town were approved just before a year-long moratorium was begun.

We propose that the Parliament use its executive authority formally to request, via the council's chief executive, James Andrews, that the permitted development procedure be carried out again—with "and mast" added after "equipment"—or that the full planning procedure be undergone again. Whichever procedure is used, I am certain that all the residents will give a resounding "I object". They all signed the petition, and there is only one empty property in the vicinity.

The Convener: Thank you. Mr Hawes, I would like you to clarify your position. You know that the Transport and the Environment Committee has published a report and is awaiting a response from the Executive. Why are you not content with that report in respect of this particular mast?

Lionel Hawes: As I understand it, that report considers changing planning controls for all future masts.

The Convener: It does not consider positioned masts?

Lionel Hawes: It will not affect existing ones from which adults and children are in probable danger. We all know the history of private companies pushing their wares and not caring a button about the population. I am slightly changing the request in the petition, as there would be difficulty in changing any planning arrangements that have been agreed by the democratically elected councils. However, we feel that there is a strong enough case, as a breach of safety and trust has occurred.

The system whereby the planning authority gains financially from agreeing to the masts should be changed. Glasgow City Council is continuously crying out that it is underfunded, and will take any opportunity to make money. We think that that is an unsatisfactory system. Sites should be agreed by an independent organisation. I do not know whether you know, but equipment has been purchased to enable checks on hot spots that are reckoned to come from such masts and which can be of possible danger to people. As the photographs show, people live right around the mast. There are children in those houses, yet the residents had no say in the matter—and this is supposed to be a democracy.

The Convener: I have to inform you that this committee can deal only with the petition, which relates to whether the report from the Transport and the Environment Committee should be applied retrospectively.

16:00

Lionel Hawes: Yes, but the petition asks for a retrospective change to be made. That is why I have said that the chief executive, James Andrews, should be formally requested to reconsider the matter. People were tricked by a discredited system that was set up by Westminster, which was pushing a new technological system without a care in the world about what the effects on people might be. The council should be required to go through the process again so that people can get a proper understanding of what the hell it is all about.

Ms White: Was the neighbourhood notified about the fact that the mast was to be erected? Did the community have time to object?

Lionel Hawes: The company that erected the mast, James Barr and Son, sent a letter informing us of planning consent for the construction of access steps and the erection of an entrance gate and a hand rail. I did not think too much about the letter as there already are steps into the park. People really had no inkling of what was happening.

Ms White: The company notified the community that steps and so on would be constructed, but did

not mention the mast.

Lionel Hawes: Yes. Some people—I think about three houses out of the 15—did not even receive that letter. The way that the system operated in this case, and probably in others, was totally unsatisfactory. My community is taking a very democratic approach. Another community took direct action and broke up the mast.

Christine Grahame: No, that was witches of Carlops.

Lionel Hawes: I am asking this committee to get James Andrews to go through the process again as it was entirely faulty, breached safety regulations and did not tell people anything. We cannot go to anybody else for help.

Ms White: Convener, could we pass this to the Local Government Committee as well? I am concerned about the fact that there does not seem to be any legislation on neighbourhood notification or on the height of telecommunications masts. It does not seem right that planning permission is required for a 6 ft high fence, but not for a mast that is more than 15 m high.

Lionel Hawes: The mast that I am talking about is 12 m high.

The Convener: The report deals with issues such as height and planning permission. The initial recommendation on this petition was that we should pass it to the Transport and the Environment Committee and ask the committee to explain why it did not say in its report that the new laws should apply retrospectively. We should do that, but I do not think that we can involve other committees at this point. We can certainly write to the council enclosing a minute of this discussion, asking it to explain why it failed to take the necessary steps; then we could consider which committee to send the petition to.

Ms White: I would be happy with that.

Christine Grahame: Would it be better for us to go straight to the Executive, as it is already considering what the Transport and the Environment Committee said, and ask it to consider retrospective planning controls? There has to be a level playing field if the Executive changes planning controls for those masts that are already there. We can inform the Transport and the Environment Committee, or would that upset that committee?

The Convener: If I was the convener of the Transport and the Environment Committee, I would be upset.

Christine Grahame: We have upset enough people, John. I am with you there.

The Convener: If we refer the petition to the Transport and the Environment Committee, we

can ask it to explain why it did not include retrospective application of the new law.

Lionel Hawes: But would the committee not come back to you and say, "We can't change what has been a planning consent?"

The Convener: It may, but when it does it will be for this committee to decide whether it is happy with the response. In the meantime, we should write to the council, explaining our concerns about the situation.

Lionel Hawes: People would be happy with that.

The Convener: Once we get a reply from the council, we can decide what to do.

John Scott: We should decide what to do in conjunction with the response from the Transport and the Environment Committee. That is the obvious thing to do.

The Convener: Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Lionel Hawes: May I leave these photographs with you?

The Convener: Give them to the clerk.

We now turn to petition PE164 from Sibylle Alexander. This petition deals with the ages for starting nursery and school.

Sibylle Alexander: Good afternoon. I am happy to be here. It has been a fascinating afternoon. My father was a judge in civil law in Hamburg, and he had a lot of similar questions, so I have found this meeting interesting.

The Convener: Thank you.

Sibylle Alexander: I hope before I am dead that the children of Scotland have the same practical experience as do children in Europe, who start school at six or seven. Their vitality is far greater. They have a much more broad education. The health service in Scotland would save millions of pounds.

I can give you examples. When children start school at four or five, boys are bored. They want to kick or tramp or climb trees. They want to experience life. At school, they are going to sleep. Our doctors have found that after six months in school, children no longer have any deep breathing. That means that they have shallow breathing in their chest. They have bronchitis. Do you know how many hours are lost because of bronchitis and asthma in Scotland alone? Little girls are diligent. Even at four they can usually hold a pencil. They are writing. But what happens? They get arthritis. A doctor told me, "Four at school, 40 in a wheelchair." We have 40,000 wheelchair users, and it is completely

unnecessary.

A child who starts school at six or seven will learn reading, writing and arithmetic far more easily. Childhood is development in phases. The first seven years are needed to build a strong body. Children need plenty of movement and fresh air, good food and no pressure. They need time, leisure and rich verbal input. I am a writer. Here you can see my book of Scottish and Irish stories. A wealth of oral tradition in Scotland is lost because people use the most stupid readers—excuse that expression—in primary schools. Children are too small to read reasonable things. They cannot read, content-wise, anything that is meaningful. That leads to what I have termed frustrated beginners.

Why do people play truant? Because they are bored. What is given to them is wrong. They are absolutely right to protest against school at four. I put my petition to our Borders Liberal Democrats, and I was amazed. It had 100 per cent support. Fathers said, "Our daughter is ruined because she started school at four and a half." You cannot repeat what you have lost in the early years of childhood.

School should start at six, but in a way that is rhythmical, that is rich in oral work and that still gives a lot of movement. That is why I do not call it a nursery but a kindergarten—a garden for children, where they can be outside, where they can have a sandpit, where they can get to love this earth on which we work, where they can have a swing to really experience courage and where they can have the circle time, the story time and the social interaction. I believe that that would make Scotland a very much happier place. As I said, before I am dead I want to see it.

I have here some interesting work that was done in Nordrhein-Westfalen on kindergarten workshops. *Naturspielräume* means creating in a very small space. A small child is quite happy in a small space with a Wendy house, a little hill for running up and down, a few trees and shrubs and a sandpit. They do not need much space, but the children should be outside for a lot of their time. I hope that all of that will come. If it does not come now, it will come. Parents are already writing to Brussels. There is a fantastic organisation called A Right to Childhood. This is a human rights issue: we need to delay formal learning. That is my spiel.

The Convener: Thank you very much. We have also received two letters in support of your petition. Your petition is fairly radical, although perhaps not as radical as ideas that I heard when I was at teacher training college in the 1970s.

Sibylle Alexander: I was at Moray House for 20 years.

The Convener: Some people called for the

abolition of schools altogether.

Sibylle Alexander: No. I believe in good schooling and strict discipline.

Christine Grahame: I have a lot of sympathy with what you say. Like John, I am a former schoolteacher, although I have since become a lawyer. This is an interesting issue to be raised for the Education, Culture and Sport Committee. It is refreshing to consider what our European neighbours achieve. You are talking about another kind of education before the age of formal education, a more natural and child-centred education.

Sibylle Alexander: If children learned more of the important social skills, we would not need all the dustbin men. Switzerland is clean. Children learn in kindergarten to be aware of their surroundings and to be proud of the country.

Christine Grahame: It is very interesting, and there is European practice that we could look at to see whether a better generation of children could come out of it.

Sibylle Alexander: May I read an amendment of the Scottish National party Inverness conference in September 1999?

Christine Grahame: I do not know whether John wants to hear it.

Sibylle Alexander: Would you like to hear it?

The Convener: There are only two SNP members here so the rest do not know what it is.

Sibylle Alexander: It has only four lines.

"In order to decrease inequalities and failure at an early age, Conference calls on the SNP group to work towards changing the starting age of formal education to 6 years in line with our European neighbours and in line with the increasing body of research in this area".

Christine Grahame: I had forgotten that.

The Convener: You are probably in danger of losing the support of the majority of the committee.

Sibylle Alexander: I am not SNP, I am quite liberal. Mr Jenkins fully supports my petition. Is anyone interested in looking at some of our beautiful stuff? Probably not, but shall I leave it?

The Convener: Yes, by all means. Thank you.

Sibylle Alexander: These articles contain some modern ideas, because they are still learning in Germany too.

The Convener: Anything that can improve Scottish education is worth while. The recommendation is that the petition should be passed to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee for its consideration.

The next petition is PE155. A petitioner, the

Reverend James Stewart, was scheduled to speak to the committee in support of the petition, which is about the retention of section 2A of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1986. Unfortunately, he cannot be here.

Since petitions PE155, PE161 and PE162 were received, we have received a further petition from the Keep the Clause campaign, which was handed to members on arrival at the meeting today. The petition contains 120,000 signatures. It is suggested that it be grouped with the others that deal with section 2A. It has also been suggested that we refer this to the Local Government Committee to note, and to take into account with the other evidence that the committee is taking in respect of the bill that is currently before Parliament. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

16:15

The Convener: Petition PE160, on health and safety, is from Ian Allen, on behalf of the joint trade union safety representatives at the Trades Union Congress occupational health and safety course at Stow College. It sounds like it may have been a college exercise. The petitioner suggests that in the light of the increase in workplace accidents, there is a need for a safety culture to be developed from secondary school level. The petition asks the Parliament to pursue that. It is suggested that we refer the petition to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee for its consideration.

Pauline McNeill: I am not against sending the petition to that committee, although I am conscious of the number of petitions that we are sending there. I recollect that Cathy Jamieson has lodged a motion on health and safety. I cannot remember what it says, but many people signed up to it. As quite a few MSPs have signed the motion, it might be an idea to send a copy of it to the petitioners, to show that we take the matter seriously already. Although health and safety is a reserved matter, we can take on board the point about creating a health and safety culture.

John Scott: It is an especially good idea, so it should go somewhere where it can be addressed positively.

Christine Grahame: Rather than giving the petition to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee—although it could be sent to that committee for information—I would send it only to the Minister for Children and Education for comment. He may wish to respond to it as an idea. That would spread the load a bit for committees and ministers.

The Convener: We could agree to send a copy

of Cathy Jamieson's motion to the petitioner. I should sign it before it is sent. I tend not to sign motions.

The other action is to send this petition to the minister, asking for a response, with a copy to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee for its information.

Christine Grahame: Just to note.

The Convener: Are members agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The next petitions are PE163 from Owen Connelly and PE166 from Strathmartine Women's Rural Institute, on the closure of sub-post offices. We have had a number of petitions on this matter, and they should go to the Rural Affairs Committee. We received a letter from Alex Neil, suggesting that this petition should also go to the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee. I have no problem with that, but Alex Neil is a member of that committee and he should raise the matter with it. The request should come from the committee rather than from individual members. We should suggest that to Alex; otherwise, members of every committee will do the same.

Petitions such as this generally go to the Rural Affairs Committee and the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, because they are actively considering these issues. Are members agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The next petition is PE170 from Mr McNeil, on behalf of Partick community council. This petition relates to Glasgow City Council creating a new bus lane corridor through Dumbarton Road, Partick. We have already had a similar petition on this issue from the Partick Traders Association. That petition has been referred to the council, which is taking it into consideration as part of the process of consultation. It is suggested that we send the petition as quickly as possible to Glasgow City Council so that it can also be taken into consideration by the council as part of its bus corridor consultation. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The final petition today is from the residents of Ballater, with 360 photocopied signatures. It is about the proposed closure of the Ballater area council office. That is one of the cuts arising out of the problems that Aberdeenshire Council is having, trying to get within expenditure guidelines. The petitioners are upset that the council wants to close down the office. It is suggested that the clerks should write to Aberdeenshire Council, requesting its comments on the matter. Once we have a response, we

could pass it on to the petitioner. The correspondence could be copied to the Local Government Committee for its information. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Thank you for your patience.

Current Petitions

The Convener: We have a number of responses to current petitions to consider. The first is a response from the clerk to the Local Government Committee in relation to PE26 from the Bridge of Allan Public Interests Association, which called for local authorities and other agencies to recognise and record the views of individuals who have expressed their opinions through petitions. The Local Government Committee has considered the petition several times and consulted the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the City of Edinburgh Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council, Highland Council and Stirling Council. The committee notes that the responses indicate that the number of petitions received by those councils is relatively small, that the petitions are subject to a process of scrutiny within each council and that members of the public can express their views to councils through other means, such as deputations and delegations. The Local Government Committee agreed to note the petition and agreed that the way in which petitions are dealt with is a matter for individual councils.

I have also received a letter from the Bridge of Allan Public Interests Association in response to the decision of the Local Government Committee. The petitioners are very unhappy. They point out that I addressed the nation not so long ago—I do not remember doing so—in an extremely robust and positive manner, saying that never again would the people's petitions be ignored. They ask: "What happened?"

"The Local Government Committee decided, having failed to comprehend the terms of the petition, that local authorities can, if they wish, totally ignore public petitions and even deny the existence, number of signatories and objective of a petition. In view of Parliament's decision, what purpose does Parliament think your committee is all about and inasmuch as you do receive petitions do you intend to ensure that they are recorded on file and details of any petition passed can be accessed by the public, Parliament or any inquiry should the need ever arise? Whilst the decision arrived at by the Local Government Committee is not your responsibility, it clearly is your responsibility to explain your public rhetoric. I have no desire to put you on the spot, because I judge you to be honest and sincere in what you say. None the less, there is clearly support in Parliament for the view that the public need to be protected from their own opinions on those occasions when such opinion varies from that of the authority it is directed at. Please advise if this is the formal view of Parliament. Please also consider the human right

for all people to have opinion, for such opinion to be recorded or registered in any manner of the individual's choice that has led to the delegation of public petitions. Also there is a clear conflict of opinion between the legitimacy of an enormous X on a ballot paper and the suppressed legitimacy of one's own signature and address on a petition form. In view of the shameful, deplorable and outrageous decision taken by the Local Government Committee on behalf of the Scottish Parliament, I reserve the right to copy this letter to Sir David Steel and/or any other with an interest in seeking ethical standards of honesty and decency in a civilised, democratic country."

They were not very happy with the decision of the Local Government Committee. What do members think that we should do?

Pauline McNeill: That letter draws to my attention the need for a review of the way in which the committee operates. We must strike the right balance between listening to petitions and pursuing them. That will not be the only letter from a frustrated petitioner who has gone through the process only for nothing to happen. We need to focus on subjects, on how many petitions we send to committees, on how we pursue them and on ensuring that, whenever possible, something is done. As John Scott suggested, we should agree to set aside some time at the next meeting to review how we operate, rather than have that discussion today.

Christine Grahame: There are other issues in the pipeline and in the correspondence that lies ahead of us. I agree with Pauline—we should consider having a private meeting next week so that we can, as a group, discuss and review our position with regard to petitions and what we ought to be doing. Other committees do that in relation to their future business—the Justice and Home Affairs Committee certainly does.

We should have a free discussion on how we deal with petitions and how we ensure that they do not block the Parliament. I am aware that some committees and ministers receive many petitions. We can talk also about other matters that have arisen. We need to take a step back and consider how we deal with petitions; what we do with them, how we report progress on them and whether we should deal with progress reports at the same meetings at which we deal with new petitions. Our workload is getting quite heavy. I suggest that the committee meet in private next week to discuss those questions.

Ms White: The letter proves that we desperately need a Public Petitions Committee. People are not unhappy with the committee. The group that wrote the letter is unhappy with the Local Government Committee's decision rather than with our decision. We should be careful not to overreact to one letter. The letter is not a complaint; it expresses the concern that, although we have done our job, the Local Government Committee

has not done its job. At least people can be heard by this committee, but they are not being heard by committees such as the Local Government Committee or by councils. The onus is on the Local Government Committee—it could have made a change that would make life better for people.

We receive so many petitions because we are the only committee that is interested enough to take them and pass them on to other committees. The Local Government Committee did not grasp the nettle. Petitions will always come to the Public Petitions Committee because we are the only committee that pays attention to them.

John Scott: I have nothing to say except that Fergus Ewing has gone with my papers—is there a spare set?

Christine Grahame: We should step back and consider our structure. We should not prohibit petitions, but we should consider the way in which we deal with and distribute them. We have operated responsively and responsibly but we must now examine matters. I am aware that the conveners of some committees are concerned about their committees' workloads. Although we do not want to kow-tow, we do not want to upset conveners or ministers unnecessarily or inadvertently. There are other matters arising on the agenda that seem to cry out for us to sit down and think about petitions.

The Convener: The clerk intended to produce a paper that would draw together the lessons that the committee has learned from its experience. Next week is too soon to have that paper ready, but the clerk thinks that he might be able to prepare it for the committee's meeting on 9 May. We could then convene a meeting in private—perhaps in the following week—to consider the paper and address all the issues.

One problem is that we continually find ourselves in conflict with local authorities. People come to us after they have experienced poor decisions by local authorities. One way to address that problem is to persuade the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to set up its own public petitions committee, to which we would pass local authority issues. There are other issues to be addressed, such as whether the committee should act as a screen for the quality of petitions. We must get the balance right between people's right to access to the Parliament and the role of the committee. The clerk's paper might address many issues and if the paper is available by 9 May, we can hold a special meeting in private in the following week to discuss those issues.

Christine Grahame: I suggest that we have a discussion before the clerk writes his report. We might want to air issues that could be incorporated

into that report, which might assist the process. The matter needs to be dealt with pretty quickly.

The Convener: I am available next Tuesday but I do not know whether other members are.

Pauline McNeill: I think that what Christine Grahame has said is true. I have quite definite ideas about where I think that the committee should go, but it is an issue that I think we should kick around in a brainstorming session. I cannot do it next week. I would be prepared to submit my ideas to Steve Farrell. At the meeting of 9 May, I think that we must organise the agenda so that we can have a discussion afterwards, at 3.30 perhaps.

Christine Grahame: I think that we need an hour.

Pauline McNeill: Christine Grahame is right. It has come to the point where this committee has meandered through different procedures and different ideas. We must focus on where we want to go. I agree that we must do that soon.

The Convener: Will we try to set a meeting up for next Tuesday?

Christine Grahame: I would prefer it if Pauline McNeill—and indeed as many members as possible—could be there, so that we could bounce our ideas off each other. A paper would be more difficult for us to consider. We must get to the nub of several matters.

16:30

The Convener: If we do not meet next Tuesday, the committee will meet the following Tuesday, 9 May, when we will consider a draft paper, which can be supplemented, taken away and brought back again.

Christine Grahame: As long as we get plenty of time to address this matter once and for all.

Pauline McNeill: I propose that we should organise the agenda so that the business is finished by no later than 3.30, when we can have a private session.

The Convener: Any petitions that we cannot deal with at that meeting in that time, we cannot deal with at that meeting. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Christine Grahame: I was thinking about this earlier and I suggest that if people are going to make submissions, we should take them first. That would be one of our operating principles.

The Convener: The second response that we have had is from Margaret Smith about the petition received from the Scottish Socialist party, concerning a referendum in the Lothians about the

method of funding the new royal infirmary. She is concerned that petitions should reflect factual situations and should not use inaccurate and misleading language. Her committee's contention would be that this petition misrepresents the situation. This is the kind of issue that should be discussed in the paper on the role of this committee. Can we refer consideration of that response to the clerk to include in the paper?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The next response is on petition PE70 from the Troon Against Pollution group. It is a letter from the Scottish Executive, which gives details of its decision not to intervene in the proposals to develop a freight terminal at Troon harbour; it is just for our information. A public local inquiry is taking place there, so the petitioners will have the chance to raise their concerns through that inquiry.

John Scott: The public inquiry will deal only with the harbour revision order. I understand that it will not deal with any other aspects.

The Convener: So it does not deal with the substance of the petition.

John Scott: What was the substance of the petition?

The Convener: It asked for an inquiry into the development of a freight terminal at Troon harbour.

John Scott: I do not think that it will deal with that.

The Convener: The Executive has responded to the petition; it is just a courtesy to tell us this. The question is whether we want to take the matter any further. I do not think that there is anything that we can do about it.

Christine Grahame: Do those responses all go out to petitioners?

The Convener: Yes.

Pauline McNeill: Do you want our comments before the next meeting?

The Convener: Steve Farrell will be producing the paper.

Steve Farrell (Senior Assistant Clerk): Yes.

The Convener: The next response is one from the convener of the Rural Affairs Committee, Alex Johnstone, about one of the petitions that we referred to it from Mr Frank Harvey. The Rural Affairs Committee is concerned about the quality of the petitions that are coming through and asks us to apply a quality check before we refer them to another committee. This is the kind of issue that will be addressed in the paper that we will discuss at the next meeting.

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The next response is the response on petition PE107 about saving Overtoun park. South Lanarkshire Council has written a long and detailed response to that petition, in which it explains why the improvements to the park could be financed only through the sale of parts of the park and the reinvestment of money into the park. It details the consultation process followed by the council, which seems on the surface to have been satisfactory. Council officials are currently preparing a report on the proposals for elected members, taking into account all the comments received, including the objections.

What do members think should be done with this petition, given that we have had this response from South Lanarkshire Council? It seems to be a matter for the local authority, with no real locus for the Parliament to intervene. It is suggested that the petitioner's interests might best be served if the petition were formally passed to the council so that it can take the petition into account with the other representations that it has received.

Ms White: Will the council actually consider a petition?

The Convener: I hope so.

Is it agreed that we pass the petition to South Lanarkshire Council asking them to include it in their consideration of the matter?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The next response is to petition PE115, from Julia Clarke, on the rerouting of aircraft at Edinburgh airport.

Christine Grahame: You have missed your letter of commendation, dated 1 April. You can read out the good news in the penultimate paragraph.

The Convener: There has been a letter from Mr Whittet about his experience of petitioning the Scottish Parliament. The final paragraph says that he found the convener and all the members of the committee courteous and considerate in their approach and that he asks that those sentiments be reported to the members at the next meeting.

Ms White: It is nice to know that we are doing something right.

The Convener: Going back to Julia Clarke's petition on the rerouting of aircraft at Edinburgh airport, we have had a detailed reply from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. It indicates that the matter of noise preferential routes is for each airport to determine in consultation with the various parties that might be interested, and that it is for the management of Edinburgh airport to provide adequate consultation with interested parties, including local residents

organisations, about matters concerning the management or operation of the airport that affect their interests.

We are still awaiting a response from the Edinburgh airport consultative committee, which I think will be critical. I suggest that, in the interim, the operators of Edinburgh airport, Scottish Airports Ltd, should be asked to comment on the issues raised in the petition, and to provide details of the consultation procedures that it has followed. Do members agree to that course of action?

Christine Grahame: Being able to forward petitions to outside bodies is a great strength of the committee. It is a good way of obtaining information and responses.

The Convener: Do we agree to write to Scottish Airports Ltd, the operators, asking it to comment on the petition and to provide details of the consultation procedure that it has followed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We have had a response from the North of Scotland Water Authority to petition PE118, from Dr Ronald Crawford, on water charges. Members have a copy of the response, which has been forwarded to the petitioner. Are there any comments?

Ms White: I have a disparaging comment to make, but I shall refrain from making it.

The Convener: As someone who pays NOSWA water charges, I am none too pleased myself.

Do we agree to note that response?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: South Ayrshire Council has sent a full response to petition PE130, on Carrick Street day centre in Ayr. It indicates that the day centre will stay open for a further six months to allow discussions about alternative accommodation to take place with the amenities committee. The response is encouraging and I suggest that we copy it to the petitioners for information. Do members want to do anything beyond that?

John Scott: The information is slightly misleading. The centre will not be providing lunches, nor will it provide anything other than refuge for two hours in the afternoon.

The Convener: That is not clear from the correspondence.

John Scott: No, it is not. However, I understand that what I have said about the lunches is correct. There is a feeling of less than satisfaction with that position.

The Convener: What do you suggest we do about it?

John Scott: I am not experienced enough to know what to suggest.

Christine Grahame: We should ask John Scott, Adam Ingram and other members of all parties to comment. Many of the facilities have already been taken out of the centre, so that lunches can no longer be provided.

John Scott: Lunches are definitely not being provided now.

Christine Grahame: If this letter is misleading, we must comment on it. Perhaps John Scott could check.

John Scott: I do not think that the content is misleading—it is what it does not say that is misleading, although that might be unfair.

The Convener: It might be useful if I wrote to the council to say that the committee understands that the level of service that is available through the centre has been significantly reduced, and that the committee would like the council to respond, specifying the reductions in services.

John Scott: We could also ask what plans, if any, they have for those people in future. There might be other initiatives and there is a feeling in the community that something must be done for them.

The Convener: I will write the council to ask what plans it has to compensate the people who are affected by the reductions in services.

Christine Grahame: It might also be useful to point out to MSPs that if they want to follow up responses to petitions, it is up to them to contact the clerk, because that information is not available on the web. There might be pressure exerted by MSPs who are unaware that responses have come through. Is that a step too far?

The Convener: We could circulate information to MSPs indicating that responses are held and that any MSP who wants to pursue a petition can get in touch with the clerk if they want to see those responses.

John Scott: Are the responses confidential?

The Convener: They are public property. We would not otherwise be saying this in a public meeting.

The final response to consider is the response from the Scottish Prison Service on behalf of the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs to Longriggend Residents Association's petition. It appears that the Prison Service is firmly of the view that the share of the maintenance responsibility for the roads was conveyed to each purchaser of the former Prison Service staff quarters. It is reported that, despite that legal responsibility having been discharged, the

residents have never fully accepted that position. The SPS has advised that the street lighting will not be turned off as claimed and that it agreed with residents at its last meeting to review the position and report back.

The question is whether the committee wants to pursue the matter further, other than to pass this information on to the petitioners. I think that we should do that, in the first instance. If they want to respond, they can. It must be pointed out that there seems to be a legal dispute between the petitioners and the SPS. The committee must be careful to not become involved in either side of that dispute. The matter might have to be settled by the courts. We should, however, pass the information to the petitioners and we can ask the Prison Service to keep us informed of its review. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: That is it, thank God.

Christine Grahame: Are not we dealing with Duncan Hamilton's letter?

The Convener: No. The letter arrived only today. We will consider it next week.

Convener's Report

The Convener: The final matter is the convener's report. Members will have seen from their e-mail that the European ombudsman, Jacob Soderman, is visiting Parliament on 3 May at 10 am. He particularly wants to meet the Public Petitions Committee. Unfortunately I cannot meet him, because the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee is considering the first draft of my housing report. Pauline McNeill should, however, attend, and other members who are available should let the clerk know.

I thank members for their patience and fortitude throughout this lengthy meeting. We will have to find a way of bringing meetings to a speedier conclusion.

Meeting closed at 16:43.

Members who would like a printed copy of the Official Report to be forwarded to them should give notice at the Document Supply Centre.

Members who would like a copy of the bound volume should also give notice at the Document Supply Centre.

No proofs of the *Official Report* can be supplied. Members who want to suggest corrections for the bound volume should mark them clearly in the daily edition, and send it to the Official Report, Parliamentary Headquarters, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh EH99 1SP. Suggested corrections in any other form cannot be accepted.

The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

Monday 15 May 2000

Members who want reprints of their speeches (within one month of the date of publication) may obtain request forms and further details from the Central Distribution Office, the Document Supply Centre or the Official Report.

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

DAILY EDITIONS

Single copies: £5

Annual subscriptions: £640

BOUND VOLUMES OF DEBATES are issued periodically during the session.

Single copies: £70

Standing orders will be accepted at the Document Supply Centre.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT, compiled by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre, contains details of past and forthcoming business and of the work of committees and gives general information on legislation and other parliamentary activity.

Single copies: £2.50

Special issue price: £5

Annual subscriptions: £82.50

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS weekly compilation

Single copies: £2.50

Annual subscriptions: £80

Published in Edinburgh by The Stationery Office Limited and available from:

The Stationery Office Bookshop
71 Lothian Road
Edinburgh EH3 9AZ
0131 228 4181 Fax 0131 622 7017

The Stationery Office Bookshops at:
123 Kingsway, London WC2B 6PQ
Tel 020 7242 6393 Fax 020 7242 6394
68-69 Bull Street, Birmingham B4 6AD
Tel 0121 236 9696 Fax 0121 236 9699
33 Wine Street, Bristol BS1 2BQ
Tel 01179 264306 Fax 01179 294515
9-21 Princess Street, Manchester M60 8AS
Tel 0161 834 7201 Fax 0161 833 0634
16 Arthur Street, Belfast BT1 4GD
Tel 028 9023 8451 Fax 028 9023 5401
The Stationery Office Oriol Bookshop,
18-19 High Street, Cardiff CF1 2BZ
Tel 029 2039 5548 Fax 029 2038 4347

The Stationery Office Scottish Parliament Documentation
Helpline may be able to assist with additional information
on publications of or about the Scottish Parliament,
their availability and cost:

Telephone orders and inquiries
0870 606 5566

Fax orders
0870 606 5588

The Scottish Parliament Shop
George IV Bridge
EH99 1SP
Telephone orders 0131 348 5412

sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

www.scottish.parliament.uk

Accredited Agents
(see Yellow Pages)

and through good booksellers