

PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 20 March 2007

Session 2

£5.00

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body 2007.

Applications for reproduction should be made in writing to the Licensing Division,
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 RR
Donnelley.

CONTENTS

Tuesday 20 March 2007

Col.

CURRENT PETITIONS	3093
Institutional Child Abuse (PE535 and PE888)	3093
Fire Control Rooms (PE765 and PE795)	3094
Speech and Language Therapy (Agenda for Change) (PE768)	3095
G8 Summit (Peaceful Protest) (PE871)	3095
G8 Summit (World Poverty) (PE874)	3095
Dementia Treatment (PE886)	3097
Dalkeith Northern Bypass (PE900)	3098
Dalkeith Bypass (PE928)	3098
Urban Regeneration (PE911)	3098
Hospital Patients (Spiritual Care) (PE923)	3099
Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002 (PE930)	3100
Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (Scotland) Regulations 1999 (PE934)	3100
Public Health Services (Consultation) (PE938)	3101
Plagiocephaly (PE960)	3101
Citizens Advice Bureaux (Funding) (PE973)	3103
Accountant in Bankruptcy (PE974)	3104
Protection of Health Care Professionals (PE980)	3105
Neuropsychological Provision (PE981)	3106
Railway Infrastructure and Services (Inverness, Thurso and Wick) (PE894)	3106
NHS Dental Services (PE920 and PE1018)	3107
NHS Dentistry (Remote and Rural Areas) (PE922)	3107
Forth Road Bridge (Tolls) (PE921)	3108
Tolled Bridges (PE921 and PE925)	3108
Forth Road Bridge (PE942 and PE943)	3109
Skin Cancer (PE931)	3110
Supporting People Funding (PE932)	3111
Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (PE977)	3112
Building Warrants (PE979)	3113
Microchip Implants (PE983)	3114
Plants (Complaints) (PE984)	3115
Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PE985)	3116
Broken Glass (PE986)	3117
Home Loss Payment (PE988)	3118
Nuclear Power (PE989)	3119
Local Plans (Environmental Designations) (PE975)	3120
Leisure Facilities (PE990)	3121
Pingat Jasa Malaysia Medal (PE991)	3122
Christian Sabbath (PE992)	3124
Statutory Religious Observance in Schools (PE993)	3125
Succession (Scotland) Act 1964 (PE994)	3126
Drug-related Deaths (PE995)	3126
Nuclear Accidents/Incidents (Schools) (PE996)	3127
Carers of Children (Support) (PE998)	3128
School Clothing Grants (PE999)	3128
Cheap Alcohol (Health) (PE1000)	3129
Mesothelioma (Prescribing) (PE1006)	3131
ANNUAL REPORT	3133

PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE

4th Meeting 2007, Session 2

CONVENER

*Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*John Scott (Ayr) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)

*Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab)

*Mr Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)

*Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP)

*Campbell Martin (West of Scotland) (Ind)

*John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)

*Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)

Colin Fox (Lothians) (SSP)

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con)

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED:

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

David McGill

ASSISTANT CLERK

Richard Hough

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Public Petitions Committee

Tuesday 20 March 2007

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:03*]

Current Petitions

The Convener (Michael McMahon): Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the fourth meeting in 2007 of the Public Petitions Committee. This is the last meeting of the committee in this session of Parliament. We have a full agenda and a lot to go through. I have received apologies from John Scott, who hopes to join us shortly. Apart from him, we have a full house.

Members will have noted that we have an extensive amount of paperwork before us. I record my thanks to Eileen Martin not only for compiling this huge amount of paperwork, but for hand delivering it to us last week to allow us to read it in advance of today's meeting.

Institutional Child Abuse (PE535 and PE888)

The Convener: The first petitions to be considered are PE535 and PE888, by Chris Daly. In PE535, the petitioner calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to make an inquiry into past institutional child abuse, particularly in respect of children who were in the care of the state and under the supervision of religious orders, to make an unreserved apology for said state bodies and to urge the religious orders to apologise unconditionally.

In PE888, the petitioner calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive, in the interests of people who have suffered institutional child abuse, to reform Court of Session rules to allow Court of Session court hearings in personal injury cases, to review implementation of the Prescription and Limitation (Scotland) Act 1973 and to implement the recommendations of the Scottish Law Commission report on limitation of actions.

The committee agreed at its meeting on 30 October 2006 to seek an update from the Scottish Law Commission on its progress with consideration of the time-bar issue, and clarification on the operation of the fast-track rules, and to seek the petitioner's views on the response that was received.

Responses have been received from the Law Commission and from Mr Daly, copies of which have been given to members.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): It is clear that the Law Commission report on personal injury actions is still to be published and that the Executive's independent expert has yet to report, so I suggest that we keep the petitions open pending receipt of those reports.

Members indicated agreement.

Fire Control Rooms (PE765 and PE795)

The Convener: Our next petitions are PE765, by Jim Malone, and PE795, by Drew McFarlane Slack. The petitioners call on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to ensure retention of the current eight fire control rooms in Scotland.

At its meeting on 19 January 2005, the committee agreed to link PE765 and PE795 and to consider responses to PE765. The committee also agreed to pass copies of the petitions and the response from the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association to the Scottish Executive for it to include in its deliberations, and to keep the petitions open pending the Executive's decision on the fire control rooms.

The petitioner and his colleagues are in Parliament this morning, although they may be in committee room 3—I think we have an overflow. Do members have comments on the petitions?

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): The decision on fire control rooms is important and has been with us for some time. I spoke earlier to the Fire Brigades Union in committee room 3—it is obviously concerned about the decision. I want to keep PE765 open and to seek the Executive's views on what the expert group might come up with. I believe—I think all committee members have expressed this view—that to reduce the number of fire control rooms from eight to the recommended three would put lives in danger.

This is an important issue and we must ensure that the Executive response is the right one, not only for the Fire Brigades Union but for the people of Scotland. Much new legislation has emerged that has increased fire brigades' work and made it more difficult. If the number of fire control rooms is reduced, that could unfortunately result in more lives being lost. I certainly want to keep open PE765 and to seek the views of the Executive and the Fire Brigades Union.

Jackie Baillie: I do not necessarily agree with the basis for Sandra White's seeking to keep open the petition, but I agree that we should keep it open and seek an update from the Executive on progress on the issue.

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): The on-going debate on the issue between staff, unions and the local authorities will run for some time yet.

The Convener: It is right to keep open PE765 so that we can keep an eye on progress and allow our successor committee to do the same and make a decision at some point in the future. Do members agree?

Members indicated agreement.

Speech and Language Therapy (Agenda for Change) (PE768)

The Convener: Our next petition is PE768, by Susan Bannatyne, which calls on the Scottish Parliament to consider and debate the implications of the proposed agenda for change legislation for speech and language therapy services and service users in the national health service.

At its meeting on 19 April 2006, the committee considered a response from Amicus and agreed to keep the petition open until further information became available. An update has been received from Amicus, copies of which have been circulated to members. Do members have any comments?

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): The committee's position has always been to seek the views of petitioners, but the response from Amicus was late and the petitioner does not appear to have had sufficient time to respond to it. It might be appropriate, therefore, to seek the petitioner's views on Amicus's response. We should also note that all health boards are expected to have their staff assimilated into the agenda for change's pay scales by the end of March 2007. We should seek an update on that from the Scottish Executive.

The Convener: Yes—just to ensure that the assimilation has happened.

Ms White: I agree entirely with Helen Eadie. I am rather concerned that health boards have not implemented the new pay scales. Can we write to health boards and ask why there is a delay, given that the pay scales were to be implemented by March 2007?

The Convener: We can ask that specific question. We need to know whether things are moving forward. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

G8 Summit (Peaceful Protest) (PE871)

G8 Summit (World Poverty) (PE874)

The Convener: PE871, which was lodged by Rosemarie McIlwhan, calls on Parliament to express support for peaceful protest during the G8 summit. PE874 was lodged by Shauna McIntyre and calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the First Minister to follow the advice of Sir Bob Geldof to lobby the G8 heads of state on world poverty.

At our meeting on 21 September 2005, the committee agreed to send a reminder to the First

Minister. However, despite the reminder, no response was received. I invite comments from members.

Jackie Baillie: I suggest that we close both petitions because the G8 summit took place in 2005, which is some time ago. The petitions served a good purpose when they were lodged in that they raised awareness in advance of the summit. I have no doubt that global poverty was firmly on the agenda. There is no point in keeping the petitions open.

Campbell Martin (West of Scotland) (Ind): I agree with Jackie Baillie. The summit took place a long time ago, so there is no reason to keep the petitions open. However, the fact that the First Minister did not respond to a committee of Parliament is a matter of concern.

The Convener: Yes—we should record that. We have in the past criticised ministers when they have not responded to us. There is nothing we can do about the petitions; what could have been done at the time of the summit is history. However, a committee is entitled to a response when it requests one.

Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP): It is pitiful that the First Minister did not see fit to respond to the committee. Although the G8 summit in Scotland is history, Rosemarie McIlwhan made a good point. We have a right to protest and we should bear that in mind in the context of Trident and other issues that will arise in the future. Parliament should ensure that the right to protest is upheld, so it would have been good if the First Minister had expressed a view.

Jackie Baillie: We wrote to the First Minister in particular about PE874, which sought to ensure that global poverty was firmly on the agenda. The theme of the G8 summit was making poverty history. I remember demonstrating in Edinburgh, with others, in support of that theme, although I do not know where other members of the committee were that day. It is bizarre to criticise the First Minister for not responding to a letter that was sent in September 2005 that referred to an event that had happened in July of that year.

Let us not confuse the issue with what is happening at Faslane, where people who are protesting, albeit peacefully, are denying my constituents the right to go about their lawful business and making them late for school and work—

Ms White: Convener, I object—

The Convener: I will let you in when Jackie Baillie has finished making her point.

Jackie Baillie: Given that the issue was raised, it is appropriate that I have put that on the record.

Ms White: I let other members comment on the lack of a response from the First Minister, given that the G8 summit is finished business, but I object to Jackie Baillie's comments about the freedom to protest. Members of Parliament are in a fortunate position; perhaps the protesters are taking up the matter in the only way they can. When we think about Westminster and how the Scottish Labour MPs voted against—

The Convener: We do not need to turn this discussion into a debate on Faslane—

Ms White: No, we do not, but Jackie Baillie's disgraceful comments should not have been allowed—

Mr Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): I suggest that members leave their electioneering to outside the committee. If not, we will be here all day. We have many other important issues to consider.

The Convener: I was going to say that. There are 40 petitions on our agenda: if every discussion deteriorates into an election campaign, it will take a long time to get through them.

The G8 took place nearly two years ago. We are disappointed that we received no response from the First Minister. We could have left it at that—I ask members to bear that in mind, so that we can get through the agenda more quickly.

Ms White: We certainly will.

Dementia Treatment (PE886)

The Convener: PE886 was lodged by James McKillop, who is the chairman of the Scottish dementia working group. The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive and NHS Quality Improvement Scotland to ensure continued availability on prescription of medications such as donepezil, rivastigmine, galantamine and memantine for treatment of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. At our meeting on 19 April, the committee agreed to write to the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, NHS QIS, and Irene Oldfather MSP, who is the convener of the short-term working group on Alzheimer's disease. Responses have been circulated to members.

Helen Eadie: I suggest that we write to the Scottish Executive to seek its views on the adoption by NHS QIS of the NICE recommendations, given that there is strong opposition to the recommendations.

In her letter to the committee, Irene Oldfather said that the Scottish intercollegiate guidelines network recommends

“that donepezil, rivastigmine, galantamine should be available as treatment options at the mild and moderate stages”

of Alzheimer's disease. I record my appreciation for the hard and tenacious work that Irene Oldfather and the short-term working group have done in raising awareness of the issue. I congratulate them for that work and hope that the committee will agree to my recommendation.

10:15

The Convener: Do members agree with Helen Eadie's recommendation?

Members indicated agreement.

Dalkeith Northern Bypass (PE900)

Dalkeith Bypass (PE928)

The Convener: Our next petitions are on the Dalkeith bypass. Petition PE900, by Jade Allison on behalf of the save Dalkeith park campaign, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to ensure that the proposal for the Dalkeith northern bypass is comprehensively and properly assessed with data from 2005 and that the results are published and consulted on before any contract is let. Petition PE928 by Margot Russell calls on the Scottish Parliament to support the Scottish Executive's proposal to build the bypass.

At its meeting on 6 September 2006, the committee agreed to seek the views of the petitioners on the responses that had been received. Further correspondence has been received from Jade Allison, who submitted petition PE900, but no response has been received from Margot Russell.

Helen Eadie: Given that the contracts for work on the bypass have been let and work has commenced, I suggest that no further action can be taken on the petitions, so we should close them.

The Convener: Do members agree that we should close the petitions?

Members indicated agreement.

Urban Regeneration (PE911)

The Convener: Petition PE911, by Paul Nolan, calls on the Scottish Parliament to consider and debate the implications of the Scottish Executive's support for market-led urban regeneration projects and for the operation of privatised urban regeneration companies and, in particular, to consider the mechanisms through which local communities can influence and hold such companies to account.

At its meeting on 6 September 2006, the committee considered responses from the Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum, Communities

Scotland, the community planning network, the City of Edinburgh Council, Promoting and Regenerating Craigmillar and the Scottish Executive. The committee agreed to seek the views of the petitioner—his response has been received and circulated to members. Do members have any views on the issue?

Ms White: It is a pity that, as with the two previous petitions, the issue that the petition raises is now basically a done deal. However, the petitioner has suggested that the Executive should respond to him directly on his suggestion about the legislative framework on urban redevelopment. If the committee agrees, we should ask the Executive to do that.

The Convener: We can ask the Executive to comment on the petitioner's suggestion. Are members happy with that?

Members indicated agreement.

Hospital Patients (Spiritual Care) (PE923)

The Convener: Petition PE923, by Ben Conway, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to promote pastoral and spiritual care in hospitals to ensure that the physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs of patients are properly addressed.

At its meeting on 27 September 2006, the committee considered responses from the Scottish Inter Faith Council, the University of Aberdeen, NHS Scotland and the Scottish Executive. Copies of those responses are enclosed. We agreed to seek the petitioner's comments on the responses. Further correspondence from Helen Eadie, who has an interest in the petition, has also been circulated.

Do members have any comments?

Helen Eadie: Again, I pay tribute to the hard work that has been done by my constituent, Ben Conway from Kelty. I note the current legal position—which I have been very aware of throughout the process—on the legality of people obtaining information under data protection legislation. As a committee, we should consider supporting the chaplains' professional association's campaign for chaplains to be designated as part of the clinical team so that they gain the right to access appropriate relevant information. I suggest that we seek views on the petition from the information commissioner for England and Wales and from the Department of Health. Therefore, we should keep the petition open.

The Convener: Are members happy with that suggestion?

Members indicated agreement.

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002 (PE930)

The Convener: Our next petition is PE930, by Lucy Johnson McDowall. It calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to amend the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002 to bring all aspects of local authority administration under the remit of the public services ombudsman, without exception or exemption, and for the ethics and professionalism of local authority officials to be included in the remit of either the ombudsman or the Standards Commission for Scotland.

At its meeting on 4 October 2006, the committee considered responses from the Scottish public services ombudsman, the Auditor General, Unison Scotland and the Scottish Executive, and agreed to seek the petitioner's views on those responses. A response has been received and circulated.

Helen Eadie: There was very little support from the respondents for the aims of the petition. Given that much of the petitioner's response is in legal terms, and the fact that the committee is not a court of appeal or arbiter between competing views, I recommend that we close the petition.

The Convener: Do members agree?

Members indicated agreement.

Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (Scotland) Regulations 1999 (PE934)

The Convener: Our next petition is PE934, by Dr J W Hinton. It calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to review the Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (Scotland) Regulations 1999 to ensure that local authority consultation on traffic orders is full, meaningful and democratic.

At its meeting on 4 October 2006, the committee considered responses from the Scottish Executive and Glasgow City Council and agreed to seek from the petitioners comments on those responses. Comments have been received and circulated to members. The petitioners have also submitted information about a meeting that they had with the Scottish Executive's roads division, which has also been circulated to members.

Ms White: I met Dr Hinton and others regarding the petition. I note the late arrival of the letter about that meeting, which includes 10 basic points. The petitioners ask whether the committee could contact the Executive official to whom they spoke. Could we keep the petition open to get Glasgow City Council's views on the 10 points?

The Convener: Is everyone happy with that?

Members indicated agreement.

Public Health Services (Consultation) (PE938)

The Convener: The next petition is PE938, by Dr Patrick McNally, which calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to ensure that clear, transparent and meaningful public consultation takes place when changes are proposed to public health services. At its meeting on 4 October 2006, the committee considered responses from the Scottish Consumer Council, Citizens Advice Scotland, the Scottish health council and the Scottish Executive, and agreed to seek the petitioner's views on those responses. Members are invited to comment on the response that has been received from the petitioner.

Helen Eadie: The petitioner has welcomed the Scottish health council's

"clear determination to ensure a transparent process and their plan to work pro-actively with the health Boards to ensure this."

He is also seeking more clarification on whether the organisation will be able to challenge a board's proposal if it thinks the proposal is flawed. I do not think that the current set-up in the national health service provides for that. Parliament might want to turn its attention to that in the new session.

The petitioner is also seeking a firmer commitment from the Executive on ensuring that truth and consequences are the cornerstone of patient and public involvement in developments in the NHS. The petitioner has raised his concerns and he has received a productive response from the organisations concerned. We could close the petition for the time being, but those are issues that will undoubtedly raise their head in the next session of Parliament.

The Convener: Are members happy with that?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Plagiocephaly (PE960)

The Convener: Our next petition is PE960, by Claire McCready. It calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to ensure that cranial abnormalities in babies, such as deformational plagiocephaly and torticollis, are properly recognised and treated by evaluating babies at birth and at six weeks; that appropriate advice, including repositioning advice, is available to parents; and that cranial remoulding therapy is available free of charge from the NHS.

At its meeting on 17 May 2006, the committee agreed to seek views on the petition from Headstart4Babies, NHS Quality Improvement Scotland, the Scottish Cot Death Trust, the British Association of Paediatric Surgeons, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, the Royal College of Midwives, the Community Practitioners

and Health Visitors Association and the Minister for Health and Community Care. We also agreed to seek the petitioner's views on the responses once they had been received. Responses have been received and circulated to members. Members may be aware that yesterday the Executive published a leaflet for parents containing further information on the condition. The leaflet was created in partnership with NHS Scotland and other NHS stakeholders and copies are available at the back of the room for anyone who is interested.

Do members have any comments?

Helen Eadie: I note that the majority of the responses support the view that further research should be done. It seems that no research into plagiocephaly has been done in Scotland. Until the position becomes clearer, it is impossible to say who is right and who is wrong. We should write to the Executive and ask whether research can be undertaken. Some of my constituents and some people I know in Fife have suffered from the condition, which is a real concern to them. It would probably satisfy the petitioner if we got that research under way.

Ms White: The response from Headstart4Babies calls for research to be undertaken. NHS Quality Improvement Scotland also calls for research, but it says that it cannot intervene. In her written response, the petitioner asked when the leaflet would be published—it is now available, so that question has been answered—and mentioned that Yorkhill hospital in Glasgow is carrying out a small-scale trial. I would like to know what comes of that research, so we should keep the petition open. I do not know whether we can send it to the Health Committee—perhaps the clerk can advise us on that. The leaflet has been published, but I would like to know how it will be distributed, and I would like to know more about the small-scale trial. Can we keep the petition open in the meantime?

The Convener: I have an idea about that, but we will hear what other members have to say first.

Jackie Baillie: Sandra White might be astonished to know that I agree with her, in part. I suggest that, rather than pass the petition to the Health Committee, we keep it with the Public Petitions Committee. We should keep it open and ask the Executive whether it will commission research on the back of the early evaluation of the small-scale trial at Yorkhill.

The Executive is to be commended for its leaflet, which is easy to read and gives clear advice to parents, but I hope that the Executive will commission some research in due course. I would prefer to keep the petition open and write to the Executive accordingly.

Campbell Martin: I agree. Almost all the responses said that there has been no research. We cannot establish the actual position until research has been done, so I agree that we should keep the petition open and seek a commitment from the Executive that such research will be done.

The response from the British Association of Paediatric Surgeons is a wee bit patronising. It states that acquired skull abnormalities rarely cause problems

“other than to anxious parents”.

Of course parents are anxious if their baby’s head is misshapen.

I commend the petitioner for the amount of work that she has done to raise awareness of the condition.

The Convener: Absolutely. If we hold on to the petition, we can ask the Executive whether it intends to commission research. If its response is unsatisfactory, the petition can be sent to the committee that has responsibility for health in the next session of Parliament.

The fact that the Executive has published advice is at least a partial success for the petitioner. The fact that the leaflet came out just before the committee considered the petition again today might be significant. Information that we were told was not available when we first considered the petition is now available. That is a step forward, but there is a lot more work to be done. The leaflet is welcome, but it falls far short of the action that is required on such an important matter.

Is that approach agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Citizens Advice Bureaux (Funding) (PE973)

10:30

The Convener: Petition PE973, from Aileen Orr, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive, following the recent closure of four citizens advice bureaux in the Scottish Borders and the cuts in the opening hours of a further four centres, to ensure that adequate resources are provided to prevent cuts in services both in the Scottish Borders and elsewhere in Scotland. At its meeting on 26 June, the committee agreed to seek views on the petition from Scottish Borders Council, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Citizens Advice Scotland and the Scottish Executive and to seek the views of the petitioner on the responses. Responses have been received and have been circulated. Do members have any views on the petition?

Jackie Baillie: I recommend closure of the petition, not least because of the interesting selection of responses that we have received. Scottish Borders Council, which cut the money, said, “Of course, if the Executive gives us more money, we will pass it on.” Citizens Advice Scotland, tellingly, said that it did not petition the Parliament and would prefer to focus its attentions on the on-going negotiations with Scottish Borders Council. That is absolutely right and proper, as that is where the decision was made. Other local authorities throughout Scotland manage to fund their citizens advice bureaux properly, so it is a question of political priorities. I would close the petition.

Helen Eadie: I have a concern about the petition that relates to an issue that has not been apparent in any of the papers or in previous discussions. When the Scottish Parliament took the step of abolishing the health councils in every area, the agreement between the Scottish Executive and the Minister for Health and Community Care was that citizens advice bureaux would take over the role that the health councils previously had. As we all know, the health councils were active advocates for people who had health issues or complaints against health boards. The disbursement of money into the local areas to ensure that that advocacy role still exists has been a matter of on-going discussion in which I have been involved. It now appears that, in some areas, there will not be citizens advice bureaux to fill the vacuum that was left by the abolition of the health councils in those areas.

I do not disagree with Jackie Baillie’s recommendation, which I think is right. However, I would like us to write a letter to Scottish Borders Council, stipulating clearly that it was the expectation of the Minister for Health and Community Care that funding would be made available to the citizens advice bureaux throughout Scotland to ensure that they could take up the role of the health councils. The letter should also state that Scottish Borders Council would be letting the people in the Borders down badly if it did not continue to fund the citizens advice bureaux in its area.

The Convener: Are members happy for us to do that and close the petition?

Members indicated agreement.

Accountant in Bankruptcy (PE974)

The Convener: Petition PE974, from Jesse Rae, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to review the operation of the Accountant in Bankruptcy to ensure that the rights and well-being of debtors and their families are fully considered during the sequestration process

and to place all aspects of the sequestration process within the remit of the Scottish public services ombudsman. At its meeting on 26 June, the committee agreed to seek views on the petition from the Scottish public services ombudsman, the Accountant in Bankruptcy, Money Advice Scotland and the Scottish Executive and to seek the views of the petitioner on the responses once they had been received.

All the responses have now been received and have been circulated to members. Yesterday, the petitioner faxed to us a detailed response on the submissions, which has also been circulated to members. In particular, he seeks a review of the way in which the Accountant in Bankruptcy distributes cases to private insolvency practitioners, claiming that the balance of 70 per cent handled privately to 30 per cent handled by the AIB is wrong and should be reversed. Do members have any comments?

Helen Eadie: Of course, everyone is concerned about the length of time for which the petitioner has been conducting his case, but the Parliament has recently legislated in this area, so it might be appropriate to make the petitioner aware of that fact and to close the petition.

The Convener: Are members agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Protection of Health Care Professionals (PE980)

The Convener: Petition PE980, from Mev Brown, on behalf of the NHS First Party, calls on the Scottish Parliament to adopt the yellow card, red card policy drafted under the Department of Health's zero tolerance guidelines on the treatment of violent and abusive patients and to amend the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004 to allow hospitals and other national health service facilities to apply for antisocial behaviour orders against such patients.

At its meeting on 6 September 2006, the committee agreed to seek views on the petition from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Unison, the Royal College of Nursing, the British Medical Association and the Scottish Executive, and to seek the petitioner's views on the responses received. Do members have any comments?

Helen Eadie: Given that none of the organisations that you have listed supported the points that were made in the petition and that, despite a number of reminders, the petitioner has not responded to the letters from the committee clerk, I recommend that we close the petition.

The Convener: Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Neuropsychological Provision (PE981)

The Convener: Petition PE981, from James Japp, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to ensure that the recruitment and appointment of psychologists to NHS Scotland is based entirely on skills, competency and experience, and to initiate an independent review of neuropsychological provision in NHS Scotland.

At its meeting on 6 September 2006, the committee agreed to seek views on the petition from Neuropsychologists UK, NHS Education Scotland, the British Psychological Society and the Minister for Health and Community Care, and to seek the petitioner's views on the responses received. Shall we send the petitioner's response to the Minister for Health and Community Care and request a response to it, so that we can keep updated on the matter?

Members indicated agreement.

Railway Infrastructure and Services (Inverness, Thurso and Wick) (PE894)

The Convener: Petition PE894, from S Gordon, on behalf of the association of Caithness community councils, calls on the Scottish Parliament to consider investment in infrastructure, rolling stock and timetabling as part of a strategic root-and-branch review of the provision of rail services between Inverness, Thurso and Wick, with unrestricted thinking on how best to shorten journey times and to ensure the future of the railway to those destinations. The petition also calls for thought to be given to ensuring that the communities of the Lairg loop are provided for.

At its meeting on 15 November 2006, the committee considered the petitioner's comments on the responses received. We agreed to seek information from the Scottish Executive on how the specific needs of the far north rail line will be considered as part of on-going work, and to seek the petitioner's views on that response, when it was received. The Executive's response has now been received and circulated. Members' papers also include a submission in support of the petition that has been made by the Caithness west community council.

Helen Eadie: The petition is getting some support from others, especially the Caithness west community council. I recommend that the committee write to the Highlands and Islands strategic transport partnership seeking information on the outcome of its consultation process and, specifically, on its position on the Dornoch rail link. We could also invite comments on the petition from the Caithness Partnership and the Caithness transport strategy group.

John Farquhar Munro: I support that recommendation.

The Convener: Would Rob Gibson like to comment on the petition?

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am happy with the recommendation that has been made. This is a live issue and the petition must be kept live, because we are in the process of trying to create a strategy. The committee's involvement is helpful.

The Convener: We will keep the petition live.

NHS Dental Services (PE920 and PE1018)

NHS Dentistry (Remote and Rural Areas) (PE922)

The Convener: The next three petitions concern NHS dentistry. Petition PE920, from Helen Smith, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to commit further resources to the provision of NHS dentistry, especially for the recruitment of NHS salaried dentists to provide emergency and comprehensive care, and for the provision of dedicated NHS dentistry facilities. Petition PE922, from Peter Thomson, calls on the Scottish Parliament to consider implementing a model that is different from the current plan, to ensure that NHS dentistry is available in remote and rural areas in the medium to long term. Petition PE1018, from Keith Green, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to restore NHS dental services throughout Scotland.

At its meeting on 13 December 2006, the committee agreed to link the petitions and to await the petitioners' comments on responses before deciding what further action to take on the petitions. Responses have been received from Helen Smith and Peter Thomson.

Helen Eadie: Like a number of other parliamentarians, I have been heavily involved with the issue. I warmly welcome the fact that the Minister for Health and Community Care has announced that well in excess of £30 million will go towards the establishment of health service dentistry throughout Scotland.

Helen Smith is a constituent of mine from Inverkeithing. I am pleased to tell the committee that that area will get one of the five centres that are being built in Fife. Between six and eight salaried dentists will be employed in each centre. At the beginning of last year, not long after the petition was lodged, it was announced that Fife would get about £4.25 million. Many meetings to discuss the issue have been held in Fife as well as the rest of Scotland. There are still issues in other areas, but I am pleased to report that progress is

being made in Fife. We have purpose-built facilities, which I think addresses Helen Smith's concerns. However, given that the petitioners' responses raise other issues, perhaps we should invite the Executive to comment on them.

Rosie Kane: Although the Executive is implementing some measures to address the crisis in NHS dentistry, some of the petitioners think that that is taking too long and the measures have not resolved the fact that in many places, half the population still do not have access to NHS dentists. Can we ask the Scottish Executive whether it will introduce a statutory obligation to provide dental care on the NHS so that people can get what they deserve and need?

The Convener: It would be legitimate to ask that specific question. Do members agree with that suggestion?

Members indicated agreement.

Forth Road Bridge (Tolls) (PE921)

Tolled Bridges (PE921 and PE925)

The Convener: Our next petitions concern tolled bridges. Petition PE921, from the Rev Ross Brown, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive not to increase the tolls on the Forth road bridge. PE925, from George Campbell, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive not to extend the tolling regimes on the remaining tolled bridges—the Erskine, Forth and Tay bridges—but instead to take over the bridges and their approaches as part of the national road system and remove the tolls forthwith.

At its meeting on 27 September 2006, the committee considered responses to both petitions and agreed to seek the petitioners' views on them. The petitioners have written back to us.

Helen Eadie: The Rev Ross Brown, who is one of my constituents, sent me an e-mail to apologise for not being here today, because he has some serious family health issues. He would have liked to have been here to hear what we had to say. He is pleased to note that, although the Liberal Democrat Minister for Transport suggested initially that the tolls be increased to £4, he subsequently withdrew that suggestion, so there is no need to pursue the point any further.

The other petitioner has apparently not responded to any of the messages that have been sent to him, despite our sending a number of reminders. Perhaps we should just close the petitions.

The Convener: I should have said that the petitioners had not responded. That was my mistake. We do not have any responses to

consider, so we have to close the petitions. That was the point that I was trying to make, but I got it wrong.

Jackie Baillie: In closing petition PE925, I point out that the petitioner got one out of three, which was to remove the tolls on the Erskine bridge.

Helen Eadie: I do not know whether I will be re-elected—I am hoping and praying that I am—but, if I am, I will bring back my bill to abolish the tolls on both the Forth and Tay bridges.

The Convener: Sandra, you might as well get in now, too.

Mr Gordon: Do you want me to tell you everything that I have planned for Glasgow Cathcart?

The Convener: Why do not we all just put our manifestos on the table?

Ms White: It is all right, convener. I will not be mischievous.

The Convener: Do we agree to close the petitions?

Members indicated agreement.

Forth Road Bridge (PE942 and PE943)

10:45

The Convener: We are still on bridges. PE942, from Bill Cantley, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to desist from spending taxpayers' money on preparing for the construction of a second Forth road bridge before having at its disposal all the facts regarding the condition of the existing Forth road bridge, on the ground that any such expenditure would be both environmentally irresponsible and fiscally imprudent. PE943, from Mark Hood, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to consider the need for a new Forth road bridge.

At its meeting on 27 September 2006, the committee considered responses from the Forth Estuary Transport Authority, Fife Council, Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Executive, and it agreed to seek the petitioners' views on those responses. No comments have been received. We therefore do not need to have many comments from members now, but we will hear them anyway.

Helen Eadie: I spoke to Mark Hood last night in my office, and he warmly welcomes the announcement that the Executive has made, as do I. Given the success that we have had with his petition and the fact that there has been no response from the other petitioner, I suggest that we close the petitions.

The Convener: Okay.

Members indicated agreement.

Skin Cancer (PE931)

The Convener: Now, we can move away from bridges. PE931, from Helen Irons, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to review its policy on tackling the growing skin cancer epidemic in Scotland.

At its meeting on 15 November 2006, the committee considered responses from the Scottish Executive, NHS Health Scotland, Cancer Research UK, the Sunbed Association, the Scottish Dermatological Society and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. We agreed to seek the petitioner's views on those responses.

Contrary to what it says in our papers, the petitioner has this morning lodged a response to the views of those organisations. That response has been circulated to members. In summary, she notes the acknowledgement of an increase in the incidence of skin cancer and calls for state-of-the-art education strategies. She requests that the petition be referred to the Health Committee and wishes us to ask both the Health Committee and the Minister for Health and Community Care to review skin cancer prevention and management in Scotland.

Helen Eadie: I met representatives of the Skin Care Campaign Scotland yesterday. They appeal to the committee to note what Professor Ferguson and Polly Buchanan said when they appeared before us, which was that skin cancer is the most diagnosed cancer every year. It can be prevented, but the problem is that we do not have a strategy for education on the issue to be provided in schools throughout Scotland. Recognising that, I hope that the petition can be continued. We need to get word back from the Minister for Health and Community Care about the Executive's plans to ensure that a strategy for educating children is adopted throughout Scotland and that an awareness campaign is included in the training of schoolteachers.

I have a constituent who plays cricket and who was told by his teacher that he could not wear long trousers or a long-sleeved shirt when he was out playing, despite the fact that his mum had suffered from serious skin cancer. That is the sort of thing that we need to get out in the public domain. I hope that we can accede to the requests and recommendations that were made by the campaign, which asks us to refer the matter to the Health Committee. I know that the Health Committee will perhaps not want to get into specific areas of disease, but it might be interested in the education and public health issues. We could proceed from that perspective. I would ask the committee to agree to that recommendation.

Ms White: I would like to see the petitioner's response. I agree with what Helen Eadie has said. We should remind Helen Irons to respond to the responses that we received. I would not mind keeping the petition open. I have great interest in the issue, particularly in respect of unmanned sunbeds. That is the danger area. People may put a pound in a slot and get three or four minutes under a sunbed. I supported Ken Macintosh's proposed bill. I hope that it comes back in the next session and, if it does, I will support it again.

As I said, I agree with Helen Eadie. We should seek a response from the petitioner and keep the petition open. I am sure that the matter will be raised again in the next session of Parliament. We need legislation on sunbeds throughout Scotland, not just in some local authority areas. The arrangements are piecemeal at the moment. Unmanned sunbeds are the biggest danger for skin cancer.

The Convener: I understand that argument and I would be keen for us to keep hold of the petition. However, if we send it to the Health Committee now, we do not know what might get done. It might simply be included in a legacy paper. I do not even know whether the Health Committee is going to meet again this session. It is probably best for us to keep hold of the petition and then see whether Ken Macintosh makes progress with his bill in session 3. I note that the proposal had the support of more than half of MSPs when it was first made. It is very much in the interests of the Parliament to pursue the matter. We should keep hold of the petition to ensure that it gets progressed.

Members indicated agreement.

Supporting People Funding (PE932)

The Convener: Petition PE932, from Stella Macdonald, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to review the supporting people funding arrangements to ensure that vulnerable adults are in receipt of the responsive services that are required to keep them healthy.

At its meeting on 4 October 2006, the committee considered responses from Community Care Providers Scotland, the Scottish Executive, Shelter, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care, and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. It agreed to seek the petitioner's views on those responses.

Jackie Baillie: I ask that we keep the petition open because there is a level of unmet need. The petitioner is asking us to review the formula. Having reflected back on the responses that we have received from the Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations, Shelter and Community

Care Providers Scotland, I think that it would be useful for us to make that request again of the Executive. Rather than close the petition and leave it to a conversation between the Executive and the petitioner, we should give the issue the status that it needs by continuing to involve the Public Petitions Committee in the conversation.

Helen Eadie: I am delighted with Jackie Baillie's suggestion because I was going to ask for something similar. I have worked with the people who are involved in my area and I feel strongly that they have legitimate concerns. I am delighted with Jackie's recommendation.

The Convener: Do members agree to that?

Members indicated agreement.

Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (PE977)

The Convener: Our next petition is PE977, from Paddy Imhoff, which calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to review its proposals for the controversial Aberdeen western peripheral route in light of growing public concern with the project.

At its meeting on 6 September 2006, the committee agreed to seek the views of the north-east Scotland transport partnership, TRANSform Scotland, Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council, the Minister for Transport on behalf of the Scottish Executive and Transport Scotland and to seek the views of the petitioners on the responses received. The responses have been received and I would welcome members' comments.

We might agree that the petitioners have had the opportunity to raise concerns regarding the Aberdeen western peripheral route with the Scottish Parliament and that further opportunities will be provided by the statutory consultation process, which is about to commence.

Rosie Kane: One of the biggest issues that come to the committee is consultation. I would hope that, when it takes place, the consultation will allow full public participation.

I remember the petition because we had a wee laugh about a reference to a meeting with the Minister for Transport on 14 November at which minutes were not taken. The committee will know that the Scottish Socialist Party is careful about minutes, so the petition stayed in my mind because of that. Did we get a response or the situation resolved? It was said:

"In common with many other similar meetings it was not minuted but actions were agreed to be taken forward".

I do not know how we can be sure what those actions were or whether they were taken forward. That comment opened up a wider concern for me.

The Convener: I remember the conversation. If memory serves—we can check this—we asked the petitioners for evidence of the meeting, but it never materialised. I know that the allegation was made that such a meeting had taken place and that they were pretty confident that they could prove that, but I have not seen any evidence to substantiate that allegation. Unless they can provide a bit more information, it will remain an allegation.

I do not know whether we can do much in that respect. I would be very concerned if such meetings and major decisions on the spending of hundreds of millions of pounds were taking place without adequate minutes to record them.

Rosie Kane: When the minister was asked, he said:

“In common with many other similar meetings it was not minuted but actions were agreed to be taken forward by those present.”

The Convener: The petitioners said that the minister had said that—we did not get evidence of that. That is my recollection and, as I said, it can be checked. However, I remember the conversation when the suggestion was made, and I was particularly concerned about the impression, if nothing else, that such a meeting had taken place at which a decision was taken to spend £X of taxpayers’ money, without any record of the meeting being taken.

The petitioners said that they could provide evidence of the meeting, but they have not done so, so it remains an allegation. It is a concerning one, but it will remain only an allegation unless they contact us with something. As I said, they may be able to produce evidence during the consultation, but that is a matter for them. Anyone would consider it a valid matter for the consultation if a decision was taken behind closed doors and not in a proper manner, but the petitioners would have to show that that took place.

I think that we have to leave it at that. Are members agreed that we will close consideration of the petition?

Members indicated agreement.

Building Warrants (PE979)

The Convener: Our next petition is PE979, from Najem Al Hasan, which calls on the Scottish Parliament to review the Building (Procedure) (Scotland) Regulations 2004 and the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 with the aim of permitting competition between neighbouring local authorities in relation to the provision of building warrants. At the meeting on 6 September 2006, we agreed to seek views on the petition from the Scottish Building Standards Agency, the Scottish

Association of Building Standards Managers, COSLA, the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland and the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform, and to seek the petitioner’s views on the responses. The responses have now been received.

Helen Eadie: We have received responses from several organisations—the convener read out the names of the organisations to which we wrote—but none of them supports the petitioner. In fact, one of the responses states that the difficulties that Mr Hasan experienced are best considered and addressed through the system of audit rather than by allowing verifiers to undertake functions outside their areas. Given the nature of the responses that the committee has received, it would be premature to make changes in the system for verifying that building standards have been followed. We should therefore close consideration of the petition.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I apologise for being late, convener.

I agree with Helen Eadie, but I have a deal of sympathy for the petitioner, notwithstanding the recommendation that we close the petition. To me, many of the responses smack of a closed shop. Competition would improve the situation. I agree with the petitioner that the system is not just bedding in—it is only two years old, but it was the accepted practice of verification before then. We probably have to close the petition, but I have a deal of sympathy with it.

The Convener: Do members agree to close the petition?

Members indicated agreement.

Microchip Implants (PE983)

The Convener: The next petition is PE983, from Raymond Bell, which calls on the Scottish Parliament to ban the use of microchip implants on young people in Scotland. At the committee’s meeting on 4 October 2006, we agreed to seek views on the petition from Health Protection Scotland and the Scottish Executive, and to seek the petitioner’s views on the responses. The petitioner has asked specifically that the Minister for Health and Community Care and Health Protection Scotland be given the opportunity to respond to the questions that he raises in his response. To facilitate that, the committee may wish to agree to forward, for information only, the relevant response to the minister and Health Protection Scotland, asking that they respond directly to the petitioner. The committee may also wish to agree to note the minister’s commitment that the Scottish Executive will examine closely any measures that are necessary to protect the health of members of the public who might have

such microchip implant devices inserted, and to close consideration of the petition.

Ms White: I agree with the recommendations, but I have one issue to raise. Paragraph 5 of our briefing note on the petition states:

“Although the Minister states that the additional statutory requirements to which medical devices and medical procedures are subject would not apply to microchip implants, the Scottish Executive would examine closely any measures necessary to protect the health of those members of the public who might have such devices inserted.”

I seek clarification on what the Executive means when it talks about protecting people. Would that involve legislation or guidelines? I know that the issue raised in the petition seems like something out of a George Orwell novel, but microchips could be used in the future and people might not know about them. I seek clarification on whether the Executive intends to issue guidelines or to produce legislation that is similar to that which applies to other types of implant.

The Convener: If we kept the petition open and asked that question, we would not add much value or get much more information. However, if we ask the minister to respond to the petitioner and the petitioner finds that there are still outstanding issues, he could submit another petition specifically on those matters. I am advised that the petitioner, who is in Finland, is watching the meeting live. He may take up the offer to correspond with the minister on the issue. Instead of the committee continually trying to weed out small pieces of information from the wider picture, we could suggest that the petitioner would be better off submitting a new petition on any specific issue that remains outstanding. As a result, I invite the petitioner to take the matter forward in correspondence with the minister. Are members agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Plants (Complaints) (PE984)

11:00

The Convener: PE984, by Dr Colin Watson, calls on the Scottish Parliament to introduce legislation to provide local authorities with the power to deal with complaints about vigorous growing trees, hedges, shrubs, vines or other plants. At its meeting on 4 October 2006, the committee agreed to seek views on the petition from Scott Barrie MSP and from the United Kingdom Department of Communities and Local Government, and to seek the petitioner's views and comments on the responses received.

Helen Eadie: Although the consultation on Scott Barrie's proposal for a member's bill closed in February, I am sure that, like all members who

introduce bills, he will be happy to continue to receive responses from the public. His consultation document can still be accessed online on the Scottish Parliament website, at least until dissolution on 3 April. In the meantime, we should pass on to Scott Barrie the response that we have received from the Department of Communities and Local Government; forward to him for information only copies of the responses from the petitioner and the Scottish Executive; and close our consideration of the petition.

John Farquhar Munro: We should keep the petition open because although it has been around for a long time, very little seems to have happened. The forthcoming changes in Parliament might mean that many of us, including Scott Barrie, will not be back, so we need to keep the issue live. If we were to close the petition now, the matter might simply fall.

John Scott: I have nothing at all against Scott Barrie, but I have some sympathy with John Farquhar Munro's comments. The subject of the petition has been a major issue for a long time, particularly in my constituency; indeed, for the past four or five years, I have been writing to people, telling them that Scott Barrie is about to introduce a bill on the issue. I share the petitioner's sense of frustration, and we must ensure that a bill is introduced. If keeping the petition live facilitates that by keeping the pressure on Scott Barrie—or whoever—so be it.

The Convener: Do members agree to keep the petition open and see what progress Scott Barrie's bill makes?

Members indicated agreement.

Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PE985)

The Convener: PE985, by Mick Napier, calls on the Scottish Parliament to congratulate the Palestinian people on their ability to conduct democratic elections while under Israeli occupation; to call for the ending of all sanctions against Palestine; and to invite a Palestinian parliamentary spokesman to speak to the Scottish Parliament.

At its meeting on 4 October 2006, the committee agreed to seek views on the petition from the cross-party group on Palestine, the Presiding Officer and the Parliamentary Bureau; to forward the petition, for information only, to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; and to seek the petitioner's views on the responses received. Those responses have now been received and circulated.

Members might recall that, when we previously considered the petition, there was some support for its aims, but also a measure of concern about

how best to take the matter forward. The parliamentary motion that Campbell Martin subsequently lodged on the issue attracted support, including from some committee members.

Campbell Martin: I thank the members who signed my motion, which expressed support for the people of Palestine and drew attention to what they face every day with their own land under occupation. Although I am disappointed that the Presiding Officer felt unable to invite a spokesperson from Palestine to address the Parliament before the end of the session, I understand why he reached that decision.

By succeeding in raising the issue in Parliament, the petition might well have run its course and can be closed at this point. Perhaps the members who on 3 May are elected to the Parliament for the new session will ask whoever the Presiding Officer is to invite a spokesperson from Palestine to address the Parliament.

The Convener: Are members happy with that course of action?

Members indicated agreement.

Broken Glass (PE986)

The Convener: PE986, by Gillian Purves, on behalf of Woodlands primary school in Cumbernauld, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to take greater action to protect the public and domestic and non-domestic birds and animals from the dangers of broken glass; to promote the use of plastic bottles as an alternative to glass; and to introduce a refundable deposit scheme aimed at reducing the levels of broken glass in public places.

At its meeting on 27 September 2006, the committee agreed to seek views on the petition from North Lanarkshire Council, COSLA, Keep Scotland Beautiful, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and the Scottish Executive and to seek the petitioners' views on the responses. Those responses have been received and circulated, and the petitioners sent us a letter yesterday welcoming them and looking for a nationwide anti-litter strategy.

Helen Eadie: The children of Woodlands primary school brought this good petition to the committee. It is interesting to see all the responses that have been received. Some of them tackle the issue of litter and state that the environment would be improved if we did not have glass lying around. However, the petitioners were concerned about the dangers of broken glass, particularly in relation to non-domestic birds and animals. In that regard, I should point out that, from reading local newspapers and talking to people, it is clear that there is another dimension to the issue. It has

been pointed out to me that broken glass poses a danger to people as well.

We have not written to the people in the hospitality sector and the people who produce whisky, beer, lemonade and so on. Could we keep the petition open? It concerns an issue that is bigger than that of litter and it would be useful to examine the danger that is posed by broken glass. Someone who is in the middle of a fight in the town of Lochgelly, for example, might pick up a broken bottle and slash somebody across the face with it. Because of such issues, it would be useful to keep the petition open so that we could consider the bigger picture and ask for the views of those who produce drinks across Scotland.

The Convener: Are members happy that we should write to such organisations? Of course, we would need to identify the relevant organisations.

Helen Eadie: We could write to Patrick Brown, who is from an organisation that I have forgotten the name of.

The Convener: We can get in touch with the Scottish Licensed Trade Association, which might be able to comment on the issue.

Helen Eadie: Yes, that would be useful. It would also be good to get in touch with an organisation representing the non-licensed drink sector.

The Convener: Do members agree to write to those organisations, once we have identified them?

Members indicated agreement.

John Scott: In the meantime, we should note the Executive's commitment to consider the impact of deposit-and-return schemes. I hope that those schemes are able to continue, as they might be the only positive initiative that can be undertaken in relation to this issue.

Helen Eadie: We should also let the petitioners know about the progress that has been made. It will be encouraging for the schoolchildren to see that there has been some progress and that their petition is making a wee bit of a difference.

The Convener: Will we do that?

Members indicated agreement.

Home Loss Payment (PE988)

The Convener: PE988, by Ian Macpherson, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to increase the home loss payment.

At its meeting on 27 September 2006, the committee agreed to seek an update from the Scottish Executive on its position with regard to the level of home loss payments and to seek the

views of the petitioner on that response. Responses have been received and circulated to members.

Jackie Baillie: I am pleased that the Executive is reviewing home loss payments, but I think that we should keep the petition open until we hear the outcome of that review. The matter is clearly close to the petitioner's heart, but it also has an impact on communities across Scotland.

Ms White: I was going to make the same recommendation. A lot of work has been done on this complicated issue but further work is still going on and we do not know what the Executive's position will end up being. Therefore, I agree with Jackie Baillie's suggestion.

The Convener: Do members agree with the suggestion?

Members indicated agreement.

Nuclear Power (PE989)

The Convener: Petition PE989, by Colin Anderson, calls on the Scottish Parliament to debate the issue of nuclear power and to discuss whether nuclear power stations are necessary in Scotland, given our enormous renewable energy resources; whether funding for nuclear power would be better invested in energy saving and renewables; whether nuclear power is sustainable, with regard to fuel supply and waste disposal; and whether plans exist to consult the Scottish public on the siting of nuclear power stations and waste depositories.

At its meeting on 27 September 2006, the committee agreed to seek an update from the Scottish Executive on its position on the development of nuclear power stations in light of the recent United Kingdom energy review and the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management's review of the long-term management of waste, and to seek the petitioner's views on the response received.

Helen Eadie: The committee will probably want to note the different positions on the petition that have been taken by the Scottish Executive, which is not opposed to new nuclear energy stations in principle, and the petitioner, who is opposed to new nuclear energy stations. We must acknowledge that gulf between the parties.

Obviously, there is an on-going debate—which is coming to a conclusion—in Scotland and the United Kingdom on points (a) to (c) in the petition. The Scottish Executive is committed to identifying potential sites openly and transparently with the involvement of the public and stakeholders. In Finland, rather than building a new nuclear power station, additional reactors have been bolted on to power stations. Perhaps the Scottish Executive

might want to consider that option. However, having done all the work that we have with the petitioner, we should note the petition and close it.

Ms White: Obviously, there is, as Helen Eadie said, a difference of opinion between the Executive and the petitioner, but there is another difference of opinion, given that the Parliament does not have full responsibility for nuclear power stations. We debated such matters when we considered the Planning etc (Scotland) Bill.

I certainly do not agree that other things should be lobbed on to power stations, as I am against nuclear power to an extent. However, I do not think that we can take the petition any further, so we should close it. Its contents have been noted and we have received responses from the Executive. I am sure that the nuclear power debate will crop up time and time again in the next session.

Campbell Martin: I remember the petitioner and Professor Salter coming to the committee and making a knowledgeable and totally convincing presentation against nuclear power. Indeed, their presentation was so convincing that we must conclude that the position of the Government and the Executive is based on something other than logic. That said, we must accept what their position is and that the petition will not bridge the gap between the petitioner and the pro-nuclear Government in London. Unfortunately, we must also accept that consideration of the petition be concluded.

The Convener: We will close it. This is another petition on which everyone can have their say and on which people can agree or disagree, but in an effort to move—

Campbell Martin: I just want to add: vote for independence.

The Convener: You might as well throw that in.

Jackie Baillie: Would the last person leaving Scotland turn off the lights?

Helen Eadie: The lights will be switched off for us.

The Convener: We disagree about the whys and wherefores of nuclear power, but do members agree that the petition should be closed? We cannot do anything more about it, and the nuclear power debate will be on-going.

Members indicated agreement.

Local Plans (Environmental Designations) (PE975)

The Convener: Petition PE975, by Malcolm Ouldcott, calls on the Scottish Parliament to legislate to ensure that local authorities consider all environmental designations—in particular, areas of great landscape value—when they

produce new local plans. At its meeting on 27 September 2006, the committee agreed to seek views on the petition from the Scottish Executive, Scottish Natural Heritage and Historic Scotland, and to seek the petitioner's views on the responses.

Does the committee agree that, as a review of national planning policy guideline 14 is already planned, the case for legislating to ensure that local authorities consider all environmental designations when they produce new local plans does not appear to have been made, and that as the petitioner's primary concern appears to be with Scottish Borders Council's local plan, there is not much that we can do? The petitioner will simply have to argue his corner with the local authority when it is drawing up the local plan.

John Scott: I agree. There appears to be an issue with Scottish Borders Council's local plan, and we should not get involved. As you said, the Executive is reviewing NPPG 14. We should close the petition.

The Convener: Do members agree?

Members indicated agreement.

Leisure Facilities (PE990)

The Convener: Petition PE990, by Colin McCall and Derek Rosie, on behalf of Penicuik Community Education Association, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to review the provision of community leisure facilities throughout Scotland in the light of the proposed closure of Ladywood and Queensway community leisure centres and the Jackson Street community learning centre in Penicuik.

At its meeting on 27 September 2006, the committee agreed to invite the Scottish Executive to say whether it intends to review the provision of community leisure facilities throughout Scotland. A number of reminders have been issued, but no response has been received from the Scottish Executive.

Ms White: Although the petition has come from Penicuik and the Borders, the issue of community education facilities affects the whole of Scotland. It is remiss of the Executive not to get back to us. I would like to keep the petition open and to write to the relevant minister once again to seek an explanation of why the Executive has not got back to us.

11:15

The Convener: As I noted in relation to an earlier petition, it is a discourtesy to the committee if ministers do not respond. We should make that comment and ask the Executive to explain why it has not responded. Unlike the other petition, which

raised issues that were two years old and no longer relevant, this is very much a live issue. It is right that we get an explanation from the minister and a response to the petition.

Members indicated agreement.

Pingat Jasa Malaysia Medal (PE991)

The Convener: PE991, by Andrew Nicoll, calls on the Scottish Parliament to support the right of Scottish veterans to wear the pingat jasa Malaysia medal.

At its meeting on 15 November 2006, the committee agreed to seek views on the petition from the committee on the grant of honours, decorations and medals and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and to seek the petitioner's comments on the responses. Responses have been received and circulated to members. Further information has also been submitted by the committee on the grant of honours, decorations and medals and by the petitioner.

Would Linda Fabiani like to comment? She has an interest in the matter.

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): I would like to hear what the committee has to say first.

Ms White: I am just reading the papers, as we got them only today, although the follow-up response was due in early March. I cannot follow the logic of the Cabinet Office ceremonial secretariat, which continues to say that, although we can allow the veterans to accept the medal, they have no official permission to wear it. When the men came to the committee to give evidence they were asked about the fact that they could wear the medal. They said, "Yes, we could, but we want that to be officially recognised." The correspondence suggests that although the Government turns a blind eye and no prosecutions have taken place of people who wear the medal ceremonially, they still do not have permission to wear it. As the men said, they fought and received a medal; they want the honour of wearing it without fear of being prosecuted. I cannot understand why the Cabinet Office will not give the veterans permission to wear the medal. I do not know what the committee can do about the issue, but I wanted to make that point anyway.

Helen Eadie: Given that the documentation has been tabled only this morning, it is difficult to know exactly how to respond. It is clear that there is concern out there, but the Cabinet Office's letter seems to suggest that there may be misinterpretation and misunderstanding.

I suggest that we send all the correspondence to the petitioner—I do not think that he has received it yet. We should get a response from the

petitioner and keep the petition open in the meantime. That gives us all a chance to read the documentation more fully—we have not had the chance to read it as, regrettably, it was tabled only this morning. That is the only way forward on the petition.

The Convener: The Cabinet Office is due to report in March. It would be worth the committee's while to keep the petition open at least until we see that report. We can look at whatever dialogue there is between the petitioner and the organisations involved, but we must await the Cabinet Office's decision.

Jackie Baillie: The Cabinet Office has made a decision. That information is contained in its letter to us of 12 March. It is basically sticking to its original decision. I also note that it looked over all the rules on acceptance and award of not only the PJM but all foreign medals. I have to say that, although the petitioners have had the opportunity to respond, there is a great deal of detail that we have not had an opportunity to read because it has been presented to us only this morning. It would be in everybody's interests to carry the matter forward.

Linda Fabiani: Unlike the committee, I have not had the benefit of seeing all the papers, but I would like to add a couple of points.

I have stayed in touch with a couple of the veterans, and I would like to relay to the committee the upset and hurt that those men feel. While they can be honoured by an overseas Government for the work that they did in the Malay emergency, they feel that they are being slighted and not honoured by their own Government. They have been treated contemptibly. For example, Mr Nicoll told me that he received a phone call from someone in the Ministry of Defence about a letter that he sent. The conversation was like something out of "Yes Minister". The chap told him that the Queen has not refused permission for the PJM to be worn; she has just not given her permission for it to be worn. In other words, veterans are still not allowed to wear the medal with the honour that is due to them.

I am delighted that members seem to want to keep the petition open. Another matter might be worthy of exploration. The *London Gazette* of 3 May 1968 has been drawn to my attention. It says:

"The QUEEN has been graciously pleased to approve that Orders, Decorations and Medals conferred with Her Majesty's permission upon United Kingdom citizens not being servants of the Crown by the Heads or Governments of Commonwealth countries as defined above, or of foreign States, may in all cases be worn by the recipients without restriction".

I did not bring a copy of the item, because I could not print it, but I am glad to see that members have a copy. Perhaps the committee could ask

what happened to nullify that order, regulation or rule—or whatever the formal term is. I feel strongly that veterans of a war—although it was not called a war, for reasons that we cannot go into—are not being honoured by their country, despite being accorded great respect by the country that they helped.

The response from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association was a wee bit off. We are not talking about

"a matter impacting on two Commonwealth countries";

we are talking about this country's failure to give veterans the honour and respect that they are due from all of us. If the committee's decision is to keep the petition open and consider the matter further, I thank you.

The Convener: I think that our decision has been made. Are members happy to keep the petition open, so that our successor committee after May can consider it and correspond with the petitioner about how to take matters forward?

Helen Eadie: Linda Fabiani drew our attention to a fascinating matter. Can we extract her evidence from the *Official Report*, send a copy to the Cabinet Office and ask it to respond to the point that she made? The question needs to be answered.

Jackie Baillie: Before we do that, members should take the opportunity to read the papers, which contain the answer. The petitioner provided the item in the *London Gazette*, but the papers include a response from the Cabinet Office ceremonial secretariat. Given the detail of the matter, if we are to do the petitioner justice we should reflect further before writing to the Cabinet Office.

The Convener: We will have to keep the petition open.

Ms White: We will have to do that, to be fair to the veterans. Linda Fabiani talked about Cabinetspeak. We have just received the papers and are looking through them as we go along, but I noticed a comment that, although no official permission has been given for the wearing of the medal,

"the wearing of awards by civilians is not policed".

Such language is just not right.

The Convener: We will keep the petition open, to allow proper consideration of new information. I thank Linda Fabiani for her evidence.

Christian Sabbath (PE992)

The Convener: PE992, which was lodged by the Rev Hugh Cartwright, on behalf of the synod of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, calls on

the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to consider and debate the need for a weekly day of rest from work throughout Scotland and to encourage business and commerce to close on that day. The petitioner asks that the day appointed be the Christian Sabbath.

At our meeting on 15 November the committee agreed to seek views on the petition from the Department of Trade and Industry and the Scottish Executive, and to seek the petitioner's comments on the responses. Do members have comments? I do not think that the petition received a warm reception from the DTI. It was worth asking the question, so that the matter could be put on the record, but there does not seem to be much more that we can do.

John Scott: There seems to be no mood to take the matter forward, either in Parliament or in the responses that we received. We must respect the petitioner's views, but by and large they do not reflect the popular view in the country on Sunday trading—perhaps that is regrettable. The petitioner has had his say and I do not see what else we can do with the petition.

The Convener: Are members happy to close the petition?

Members indicated agreement.

Statutory Religious Observance in Schools (PE993)

The Convener: We stay with religious matters for our next petition. PE993, by David Walker, calls on the Scottish Parliament to amend the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to remove the statutory requirement on education authorities to provide for religious observance in Scottish schools.

At its meeting on 4 October 2006, the committee agreed to seek views on the petition from the Humanist Society of Scotland, the Scottish Inter Faith Council, Learning and Teaching Scotland, the Association of Directors of Education, the Scottish Parent Teacher Council, church groups, the Educational Institute of Scotland and the Scottish Executive, and then to seek the petitioner's comments.

John Farquhar Munro: The recommendations in our briefing paper are clear. There is strong support for maintaining the present statutory position and the status quo in Scottish education, and I suggest that we go along with that.

John Scott: Unusually, I am utterly in agreement with the Scottish Executive. Religious observance is important in young and old alike. I am not concerned that taxpayers' money is being used to promote Christian values; in fact, I am glad about that, because they are vital at this time.

The Convener: Shall we close the petition?

Members indicated agreement.

Succession (Scotland) Act 1964 (PE994)

The Convener: PE994, by Margaret McCabe, calls on the Scottish Parliament to review the Succession (Scotland) Act 1964 in relation to the statutory rights of surviving children to part of the deceased's moveable estate.

At its meeting on 15 November 2006, the committee agreed to seek views on the petition from the Scottish Law Commission, the Law Society of Scotland, the Scottish Child Law Centre and the Scottish Executive, and to seek the petitioner's comments on the responses received.

Campbell Martin: I should say first that the petitioner did not receive copies of the responses. There was a valid reason for that, which I will not go into here but will explain to the clerks later.

The whole progress of the petition rests on the Scottish Law Commission's paper on succession, which has not yet been published. We should keep the petition open until the commission presents its findings. We will then know whether to continue with the petition or whether the commission has made a recommendation that will meet the needs of the petitioner.

The Convener: Are members happy that we wait for the review and then reconsider the petition?

Members indicated agreement.

Drug-related Deaths (PE995)

The Convener: Our next petition is PE995, by Robert Patterson. It calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to hold a public inquiry into the high number of drug-related deaths in Scotland.

At its meeting on 30 October 2006, the committee agreed to seek views on the petition from the Scottish Association of Alcohol and Drug Action Teams, the centre for addiction research and education Scotland, the Scottish Drugs Forum and the Scottish Executive, and to seek the petitioner's views on the responses received.

Ms White: This is a very serious issue. I have asked a number of parliamentary questions in recent months, trying to find out exactly how people have died and how the deaths have been recorded. I understand the real anguish of the parents and relatives of people who have died through drugs, but I have never really thought that a public inquiry is the proper way to go about dealing with the issue. The petitioner is involved in another initiative and asks us to note that.

Every MSP, whether they will be back after the election or not, takes this issue very seriously. I am sure that MSPs will push for more debate and more Executive input.

We will have to close the petition, but I have a great deal of sympathy with the petitioner and with everyone else who has been affected. It is a huge issue, but I do not think that a public inquiry would bring any more information to light than the petitioner himself has already done by lodging his petition and getting people to respond to it.

The Convener: Do members agree with Sandra White's recommendation that we close the petition?

Members indicated agreement.

Nuclear Accidents/Incidents (Schools) (PE996)

The Convener: Our next petition is PE996, by Alan MacKinnon, on behalf of the Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to review the preparedness of schools to deal with the consequences of nuclear accidents or incidents, and to introduce guidelines for local authorities on how to deal with such emergencies.

At its meeting on 30 October 2006, the committee agreed to seek views on the petition from the Headteachers Association of Scotland, the Health and Safety Executive, COSLA and the Scottish Executive, and to seek the petitioner's views on the responses received.

It appears that CND acknowledges that there has been a partial recognition of the issue. I will leave it to members' judgment whether they are satisfied with that.

Jackie Baillie: COSLA has gone further than before with its guidance on "Preparing Scotland", which has been acknowledged as a marked improvement.

I note from the Scottish Executive's response that it considers that the matter is for local authorities, but it also states that stocks of potassium iodate tablets are held not at local authority level but at strategic locations. That is probably as it should be, because that is where the risk is best assessed.

On the basis that we should encourage organisations such as CND to continue to engage in dialogue with COSLA and others to ensure that the existing guidance continues to be improved, I recommend that we close the petition.

11:30

Campbell Martin: It might not be necessary to keep the petition open to clarify this, but the

petitioner has asked specific questions about what would happen in the event of an accident involving the transportation of nuclear material and whether the strategic co-ordinating groups that are referred to in the guidance are actually in place. If an answer to those questions can be sent directly to the petitioner, it will not be necessary to keep the petition open.

The Convener: Are members agreed that we should seek answers on those points, pass them on to the petitioner and close the petition?

Members indicated agreement.

Carers of Children (Support) (PE998)

The Convener: Petition PE998, by Moira Lenehan, on behalf of the New Fossils Grandparents Support Group, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to establish a national framework to provide financial, respite, social work and educational support for grandparents, relatives and friends who are carers of children who no longer live with their natural parents.

At its meeting on 30 October 2006, the committee agreed to seek views on the petition from the Social Work Inspection Agency, the Fostering Network, the British Association for Adoption and Fostering, Children 1st and the Scottish Executive, and to seek the views of the petitioner on the responses received. Do members have any comments?

John Scott: I am happy to agree with the Scottish Executive's position that more needs to be done to develop kinship care and I welcome its approach. I particularly agree with the views of Children 1st. In the light of the Scottish Executive's views and actions—the Executive is doing a lot in this regard—I am content to close the petition.

The Convener: Are members happy to close the petition?

Members indicated agreement.

School Clothing Grants (PE999)

The Convener: Petition PE999, by Jim Milne, on behalf of Dundee Anti-poverty Forum, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to review the school clothing grant system.

At its meeting on 4 October 2006, the committee agreed to seek views on the petition from the Child Poverty Action Group, One Parent Families Scotland, the Poverty Alliance, COSLA, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, Save the Children and the Scottish Executive, and to seek the petitioner's views on the responses received. Do members have any views?

Jackie Baillie: Many of us consider education to be the centrepiece of the Parliament's efforts, so it is worth doing anything that will remove a barrier to that opportunity for young people. Given that virtually every response that we have received has supported a review, we should share the responses with the Executive and suggest that we need a national review of the school clothing grant system.

The Convener: Are members happy with that suggestion?

Members indicated agreement.

Cheap Alcohol (Health) (PE1000)

The Convener: Petition PE1000, by Sarah Richford, on behalf of All Saints secondary school, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to investigate the public health implications of cheaply available alcohol.

At its meeting on 30 October 2006, the committee agreed to seek views on the petition from Alcohol Focus Scotland, the Scottish Retail Consortium, NHS Health Scotland, COSLA, the Scottish Licensed Trade Association, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Scottish Executive, and to seek the views of the petitioner on the responses received. The committee also agreed to forward the petition, for information only, to the European and External Relations Committee and the Local Government and Transport Committee. Do members have any comments on the responses that have been received?

Ms White: The petition is very worth while. It highlights what is going on in our country. The problem is not just cheap alcohol but the culture, which is a bigger issue. I thank All Saints secondary school for lodging the petition. The Chancellor of the Exchequer will probably have his chance tomorrow to raise the price of alcohol, so we can perhaps leave it up to him and he can take the blame for making people pay extra for alcohol. The petition has raised awareness of what is happening in Scotland and perhaps even in Britain as a whole. However, I think that we can now close it.

Campbell Martin: We have reached the stage where the petition can be closed, because the petitioners have achieved what they set out to do, which was to highlight just how cheaply alcohol can be purchased. There was a debate last week or the week before on tackling alcohol misuse, in which I referred to the degree of hypocrisy that permeates discussions on alcohol misuse and the price and sale of alcohol.

I note from the responses that we received that the Scottish Retail Consortium said that the main problem lies in pubs, and the Scottish Licensed

Trade Association said that the greatest problem is in off-sales and supermarkets. Perhaps they should open their eyes a bit more and see that the main problem is the cheap price of alcohol, whether it is bought in pubs or supermarkets.

I congratulate the petitioners on raising the issue and on highlighting the problem, which is what I think they were trying to achieve.

Jackie Baillie: I take a slightly contrary view. Although the petition is about raising awareness, I am conscious that we have a raft of new licensing laws and the Executive has introduced a variety of measures. As we have witnessed today, the problem has not gone away, despite our having had an alcohol action plan for goodness knows how many years. I hesitate to give work to another committee, but I wonder whether perhaps the Health Committee should take a much closer look at the robustness of all the measures that are in place and hold an inquiry. I am in two minds about whether we need to keep the petition open, but my inkling is that there is a body of work to do on which the petition touches directly. Perhaps we should not close the petition, but forward it to another committee or keep hold of it ourselves, because the issues that it raises have not gone away.

Helen Eadie: I agree strongly with Jackie Baillie. The petition could go to the Communities Committee, the Health Committee or even the Enterprise and Culture Committee, because it raises issues of trade, the impact on communities and health. There is no doubt in my mind that alcohol misuse is a serious issue. I was delighted to learn yesterday that we have had our first successful prosecution in Fife as a result of the test purchasing scheme. That delights me no end, because when people sell alcohol to underage young people they must face the consequences. I do not want the petition to be closed, because it raises such an important issue for Scotland. There is no doubt that we have a serious problem and that we need to have a major review, as Jackie Baillie suggested.

The Convener: I am happy to keep the petition open. I am a member of the Local Government and Transport Committee, which considered the licensing regulations that are just about to kick in. A lot of the discussion on them was about tackling the antisocial behaviour that is related to alcohol consumption. Underlying that is the availability of alcohol. There is scope for Parliament to continue to keep the issue on the agenda.

I agree with Campbell Martin: the petitioners have achieved a lot by ensuring that the issue stays on the agenda. We can keep the petition open and reconsider it at some point in the future, once the new regulations have kicked in and alcohol strategies have been considered further.

At some point, we can pass the petition to another committee to examine more closely.

Legislation covering the cost of alcohol might lie elsewhere. We addressed in a positive way the smoking issue and overcame it by considering it as a health issue. We can be as resourceful in addressing alcohol misuse without worrying about the constitutional arguments about where the powers lie in relation to the cost of alcohol. If we consider alcohol misuse as a health issue or a regulatory issue under licensing laws, we can do a lot with the petition. We should keep it open in order that that possibility remains. Do members agree?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Mesothelioma (Prescribing) (PE1006)

The Convener: Our final petition is petition PE1006, by Bob Dickie, on behalf of Clydebank Asbestos Group, which calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to ensure that the current prescribing arrangements for mesothelioma sufferers under which Alimta is made available are continued.

At its meeting on 30 October 2006, the committee agreed to write to the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence and NHS Quality Improvement Scotland, to seek views on the petition from Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board, Lothian NHS Board, Borders NHS Board, Tayside NHS Board and the Beatson Institute for Cancer Research, and to seek the petitioner's views on the responses received. Responses have been received and a further submission has been made by the petitioner, which has been circulated.

Helen Eadie: The petition falls into roughly the same category as the petition on the Alzheimer's drug that we considered earlier. NICE came out with recommendations, but an appeal process is under way. I would like consideration of the petition to be kept open so that it can be reviewed once the outcome of NICE's determinations has been announced. Given that the Scottish medicines consortium has supported the use of Alimta for some time and that patients are benefiting from it, the present scenario is a matter of concern. The result of the appeal process should be awaited before a decision is made on what further action to take.

Jackie Baillie: I agree with that recommendation; I would hate consideration of the petition to be closed while the discussion continues. I record my concern that NHS QIS says that it does not think that there are any contextual differences in Scotland as regards the prescription of Alimta. I ask NHS QIS to reconsider the matter.

The fact that the petitioners have provided us with two supporting letters from leading consultants, both of whom are, I believe, from Glasgow—although I do not know that for a fact—seems to contradict entirely what NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde is saying. If clinical opinion is so divided, the issue must be examined extremely carefully, and I ask NHS QIS to do so again.

Ms White: I concur with Helen Eadie and Jackie Baillie and thank the petitioners for the extra information, especially the letters from the doctors. It is sad that NICE can overrule whatever is said by a Scottish organisation such as NHS QIS. That situation needs to be addressed further down the line. In the meantime, we must keep consideration of the petition open, because it is important that mesothelioma sufferers continue to be able to get Alimta, which is known to help them.

The Convener: On that basis, we will keep open consideration of the petition.

Annual Report

11:42

The Convener: Item 2 on the agenda is consideration of our draft annual report for 7 May 2006 to 2 April 2007. All committees are required to produce an annual report, as I am sure members are aware from previous experience. To ensure consistency, the style of annual reports is agreed centrally and is used by all committees. Do members have any comments on the draft? Are we happy to sign it off?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Before I close the meeting, I thank all members of the committee for their service and hard work in addressing all the petitions that have come before us over the four years for which I have been convener. I also thank former members of the committee for their efforts and put on record my gratitude to the committee's clerks David McGill, Richard Hough and Eileen Martin, who have done a terrific job in keeping us abreast of all the information that we have required and who have tolerated all our requests and demands for more information. We also received tremendous support from the committee's former senior clerks Jim Johnston and Steve Farrell and from Joanne Clinton, who put up with me talking about football at all our preparatory meetings with great grace.

As well as the clerks, I thank the staff of the official report, who have had to sit through our bickering over petitions and who have done their best to put our discussions on the record.

I thank everyone for the work that they have put in and the support that they have given me in my role as convener. It has been a great four years in which we have done some good work. Obviously, we have not satisfied everyone who has come before us, but, given the potential for conflict that exists on the committee, in the main we have managed to act highly consensually. The Public Petitions Committee stands out in the committee system, but it has the potential to be one of the most political committees. The fact that we have had divisions and voted along party lines on very few occasions is something for which we can pat ourselves on the back. Everyone came to the committee with a positive agenda and we have worked hard on behalf of the petitioners who have come before us. I thank everyone for their commitment and support.

John Scott: It would be remiss of members not to congratulate you on your chairing of the committee, convener. The consensual approach that we have adopted has been largely down to your good humour, good nature and good

judgment. We all appreciate that, even though we have not necessarily always agreed with you. You have steered us through what could have been, as you said, shark-infested waters with good grace.

The Convener: Thank you very much.

Meeting closed at 11:45.

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

No proofs of the *Official Report* can be supplied. Members who want to suggest corrections for the archive edition should mark them clearly in the daily edition, and send it to the Official Report, Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh EH99 1SP. Suggested corrections in any other form cannot be accepted.

The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

Wednesday 28 March 2007

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

OFFICIAL REPORT daily editions

Single copies: £5.00

Meetings of the Parliament annual subscriptions: £350.00

The archive edition of the *Official Report* of meetings of the Parliament, written answers and public meetings of committees will be published on CD-ROM.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS weekly compilation

Single copies: £3.75

Annual subscriptions: £150.00

Standing orders will be accepted at Document Supply.

Published in Edinburgh by RR Donnelley and available from:

Blackwell's Bookshop

**53 South Bridge
Edinburgh EH1 1YS
0131 622 8222**

Blackwell's Bookshops:
243-244 High Holborn
London WC1 7DZ
Tel 020 7831 9501

All trade orders for Scottish Parliament documents should be placed through Blackwell's Edinburgh.

Blackwell's 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
0131 622 8283 or
0131 622 8258

Fax orders
0131 557 8149

E-mail orders
business.edinburgh@blackwell.co.uk

Subscriptions & Standing Orders
business.edinburgh@blackwell.co.uk

Scottish Parliament

RNID Typetalk calls welcome on
18001 0131 348 5000
Textphone 0845 270 0152

sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

All documents are available on the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.scottish.parliament.uk

Accredited Agents
(see Yellow Pages)

and through good booksellers