



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 1 June 2010

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**PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE**

**9<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2010, Session 3**

**CONVENER**

\*Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

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

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab)

\*Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)

\*Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP)

\*Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green)

\*Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow) (SNP)

\*Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con)

\*John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

**COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES**

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD)

Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED:**

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Fergus Cochrane

**LOCATION**

Committee Room 1



## Scottish Parliament

### Public Petitions Committee

*Tuesday 1 June 2010*

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 14:01*]

### Current Petitions

**The Convener (Mr Frank McAveety):** Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the ninth meeting in 2010 of the Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions Committee. We have received apologies from Rhona Brankin and from the deputy convener, John Farquhar Munro. I ask everyone to switch off all mobile phones and any other electronic devices in case they interfere with the broadcasting system.

Item 1 on the agenda is consideration of our current petitions. There are a number of petitions on the e-petitions website, which we will discuss at our next meeting on 15 June. We expect to have a much fuller schedule of petitions for that meeting.

### Stewart Committee Report (PE1106)

**The Convener:** The first petition is PE1106, by Jamie Webster, which calls on the Parliament to urge the Government to review those aspects of the Stewart committee report "Keeping Offenders Out of Court: Further Alternatives to Prosecution" that relate to the rights of victims of crime to obtain information on the handling of their cases. The petition has been in front of us before. Do members have any comments?

**Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab):** For a number of reasons, I think that we should close the petition. The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service has concluded its review of the warnings that are issued by procurators fiscal and, in its response to the committee, has set out some of the changes that are to be made to the way in which such warnings are administered. The petitioner has stated that he is happy with the response from the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. On that basis, I think that our job has been done and we should close the petition.

**The Convener:** Okay. Is the committee agreed to recommend, on those grounds, that the petition be closed?

*Members indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** I suggest that we put on hold our discussion of PE1167, as it was intimated to me earlier this month that the constituency member may want to speak to it. She is not present at the moment, perhaps because of other

arrangements. Can we put our discussion of the petition on hold until we check that out?

*Members indicated agreement.*

### Physical Disability (National Reports) (PE1279)

**The Convener:** PE1279, by John Womersley, on behalf of Disability Concern Glasgow, calls on the Parliament to urge the Government to establish processes to ensure that health boards and local authorities fully implement the changes recommended in national reports that are aimed at improving the wellbeing of people with physical disabilities. Again, the petition has been in front of us before. Do members have any comments on how we should deal with it?

**Bill Butler:** I think that we can still do a little. We could write to the Government, seeking a response to some of the specific points that the petitioner raises in his written submission of 22 April and asking whether the Government will take up the suggestions that the petitioner made following his meeting with Alastair Pringle on 30 April. We could also ask the Government to provide us with a note of the meeting with the petitioner that took place on 30 April. We can continue to ask the questions that the petitioner has asked us to pose.

**Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):** I have nothing to add to Bill Butler's suggestions. I would particularly like to know more about the meeting of 30 April.

**The Convener:** We will continue the petition on those grounds. We will seek a response from the Government on that meeting of 30 April and on the specific points that the petitioner raised with the officials in the relevant Government department.

### Education (Scotland) Act 1980 (Parental Choice) (PE1284)

**The Convener:** PE1284, by Graham Simpson, calls on the Parliament to urge the Government to note the successful outcome of a number of legal cases that have been brought by parents against local authorities in relation to placing requests and calls on councils to desist from applying any policy on class sizes that conflicts with the numbers stipulated in law and the statutory right of parents under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to choose the school that they wish their children to attend.

We have discussed the petition previously. Do members have any comments on it?

**Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow) (SNP):** I suggest that we close the petition on a number of grounds: first, the Government anticipates that regulations limiting primary 1 classes to a maximum of 25

pupils will be in place by the autumn; secondly, the Government has committed to keep under review whether further regulations on class sizes are needed; and thirdly, the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee has considered the class size policy on a number of occasions and has agreed to monitor the issue further.

**John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I propose that we continue the petition, notwithstanding that suggestion from my colleague Anne McLaughlin. The paperwork that we have before us states that the Government anticipates that the regulations will be in place by the autumn. As I understand it, the petitioner's concern is about placing requests. For the Government to say that it will introduce the regulations in the autumn negates its responsibility to put something in place prior to the school term. Given that many parents are currently going through the process of making placement requests, if there is no change in the regulations prior to the summer intake, we could end up once again with parents making legal challenges in the courts.

In a recent constituency case of mine, which is on-going, an imminent school closure has resulted in a number of placement requests being made to other schools within the local authority area. If the local authority stipulates that it needs to apply the current legislation on class sizes, we will have classes of more than 25 by law, given that the courts will need to rule as per the current legislation rather than the anticipated legislation to which the Scottish Government response refers. It is incumbent on the Government to give a clear indication of when it expects the regulations to be introduced and to come into force. Otherwise, we could have another summer of discontent, as parents who have made placement requests go to court to challenge the decisions of local authorities, which will say, quite rightly, that they are applying the current legislation.

**Bill Butler:** John Wilson makes an important point. I had thought that we should close the petition, but on second thoughts, having heard my colleague John Wilson, I think that we should continue it. We should at least ask the Scottish Government when it intends to lay the regulations before the appropriate committee, which I think is the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee. If that is not before the summer recess, the consequences that John Wilson described will probably be the result. We should ask the Government whether it intends to lay the regulations before the appropriate committee before the recess. I am glad that John Wilson has raised that important question.

**The Convener:** We have two proposals. Anne, do you wish to withdraw yours?

**Anne McLaughlin:** That is fine. John Wilson raises a good point.

**The Convener:** Thanks very much—that is helpful.

We will keep the petition open, in light of further deliberations and the likelihood of legislation coming forward.

**Bill Butler:** Can we also write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning asking when he will bring the regulations to the appropriate committee?

**The Convener:** Okay. Do members accept those proposals?

**Members indicated agreement.**

### Befriending Services (PE1167)

**The Convener:** PE1167 was considered previously and we have had substantial discussion on it with Christine McNally, who submitted the petition on behalf of Clydesdale Befriending Group and other supporting organisations. The petition calls on the Parliament to urge the Government to recognise and promote the positive impacts that befriending services for adults with learning disabilities have on its “The same as you?” strategy and to ensure the provision of adequate funding to support befriending services and opportunities and promote social inclusion.

I welcome Karen Gillon, who is the constituency member. She has dealt with the organisation and has spoken previously on the petition. I invite her to say a few words about the petition and how the committee should address it.

**Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab):** It is now almost two years since the petition was submitted to the committee. I think that it was when the committee met in Dumbarton that we had input from Christine McNally and from users of the befriending service that operates in my constituency.

The Clydesdale Befriending Group brought the petition to the Parliament because of the funding cycle in which befriending services continually find themselves when getting money from charitable organisations, the lottery or other organisations. The services have difficulty attracting funding from social work departments because they are not identified as core services. The drive behind the petition two years ago was to get the Government to consider befriending services as part of its “The same as you?” strategy. The services are clearly identified within the strategy as being beneficial. The aim was to get the Government to evaluate the services and consider whether they should be part of the core funding system for social work services, as advocacy services are.

Part of the frustration with the dialogue that has taken place is that those core questions about whether befriending services should receive social work funding have still not been addressed. Indeed, the most recent letter that the committee received from the Scottish Government fails even to identify whether befriending services will be part of the evaluation of "The same as you?", as Christine McNally identified in her letter to the committee of 31 March.

The group is on a three-year funding cycle. It lodged the petition at the beginning of that cycle to try to find a way to become sustainable by getting core social work funding, and to develop its services over that period. The group is now almost at the end of that three-year funding cycle but, from the discussions that have gone back and forward with officials, not much progress has been made. We need to up the stakes a bit by getting into a direct dialogue with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing. There seems to be a blockage at official level. I am sure that that is not intended—it is perhaps just one of those official things. If we could get a dialogue going with the cabinet secretary, the issue might move forward more quickly.

**The Convener:** Thank you. Do members have any comments on how to proceed?

**Bill Butler:** Having heard the constituency member, I think that we should continue the petition. The basic question that the petitioner asked almost two years ago, and which Karen Gillon outlined, has still not been answered. I think that we should write to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing to ask whether the review of the strategy in "The same as you?" will consider the specific issue of how befriending services are funded and who provides the funding for them, and when the findings of that review will be known.

The petitioner, acting on behalf of a group, has acted timeously. However, unfortunately, the response has been lacklustre, to say the least. I am sure that Karen Gillon is right when she says that it is simply an official hiccup. That is why I think that we should go straight to the cabinet secretary to see if we can unblock this blockage—I say that because I know that you cannot unblock a hiccup.

14:15

**Anne McLaughlin:** I agree with Bill Butler and Karen Gillon. It seems a shame that, although the petitioners did the right thing in good time by looking ahead, they still do not have much clarity two years later. It would be a good idea to write to the cabinet secretary to ask the specific questions that Bill Butler mentioned, and get a response as soon as possible.

**The Convener:** Your journey was a fruitful one, Karen. We will put together the communication and keep you fully informed. I know that you are in close contact with the petitioners, and we will try to encourage progress on this matter.

### Patient Medical Records (PE1287)

**The Convener:** PE1287, by Elaine Pomeransky, calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to clarify the rights and options of patients once they have accessed their medical records and seen what has been written about them, why and by whom; the guidance that is given to health professionals on what sort of information they should insert into a patient's medical records in terms of the need for the information, the language used and the appropriateness of any comments that could be considered libellous; and how it ensures that a process is in place that provides a right for the patient to have a comment removed from their records.

Do members have any suggestions about how to deal with the petition? I am not convinced that we can take this much further forward. A number of changes have been made to the code of practice, and I am not sure that this committee can add anything to the explanations that we have received.

**Bill Butler:** I agree. As you say, the Scottish Government has already made a number of changes to the code, including references to the public information leaflet about an individual's right to access their medical records and to information about data protection provisions that apply to the recording and retention of professional views and opinions. That is positive, and I do not think that this committee has any further locus.

**The Convener:** Do we agree to close the petition?

**Members indicated agreement.**

### NHS Translation and Interpretation Services (PE1288)

**The Convener:** PE1288, by Dr Godfrey Joseph, on behalf of Multi Ethnic Aberdeen Ltd, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Government to ensure that national health service boards have the structure, funding and capability to provide speedy, accurate and appropriate translation and interpretation services for patients and their families, and that such services are consistent across NHS boards.

Do members have any comments?

**Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP):** I think that there are still some outstanding issues. I commend Dr Joseph for raising this issue, as he

has opened up a slightly bigger can of worms than he started with. I am, therefore, glad that the Government is getting its head around the various interpretation requirements in terms of foreign languages and, with regard to British Sign Language, whether the translation should be done orally or visually.

However, although work is being done on those areas, that work is by no means complete. In the tradition of this committee, I suggest that we keep the petition open while we await developments. I do not think that we should close it until we are clear about where the Government feels it is going on the issue.

**The Convener:** The petitioner has sent us a letter. We could take the core points that he makes and raise them with officials in the relevant departments.

**Bill Butler:** We should ask the Government whether it is going to ask the petitioner to participate in the event that it plans to host at the end of June.

**The Convener:** Do we agree to follow the recommendations that have been made?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

### **Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007 (Fair Trade Products) (PE1290 and PE1292)**

**The Convener:** PE1290 and PE1292 are on broadly similar topics. PE1290, by primary 7 students at Knowetop primary school, is about the ban on sweets in tuck shops and, in particular, the impact that that has on the opportunity to sell fair trade confectionery; and PE1292, by Dyce academy fair trade group, is on a similar topic. We have had a chance to hear from the young people, in particular the senior school students, about the impact that the ban could have on the development of fair trade, and we felt that there was an issue that impacts across policy areas. I invite comments from members.

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** First, I repeat our congratulations to the young people from Dyce, who gave us a very clear and lively presentation.

We need to close the petition now, because the Scottish Government has responded favourably to it and has underlined the fact that exceptions can be made to allow schools to decide for themselves the limited occasions on which products that are not usually allowed, including fair trade confectionery, can be traded. That flexibility existed, but the problems were caused by different interpretations across the country. The Minister for Children and Early Years has written to all directors of education to provide clarity on the

issue. The petitioners behind PE1292 have responded to us saying that they were pleased to receive the update from the Scottish Government and that they have no further comments to make.

**Nigel Don:** Although this is a victory for common sense and I am delighted to see it, we should be clear that this does not take away the need for discretion to be exercised by somebody somewhere. The legislation does not say that schools can sell chocolate—even if it is fair trade chocolate—every day of the week on the ground that it is a cultural experience. Different headteachers could interpret what is reasonable in different ways in different schools. That is entirely fair; I am not suggesting that it is not. The Government is not saying other than that these are exceptions that are allowable. The scope for confusion, precedent and things being done one way in one place and one way in another remains and cannot be removed.

**Robin Harper:** I back up what Nigel Don has said by acknowledging that recent research has proved that diet is a much more important determinant of children's weight than exercise.

**The Convener:** We therefore close the petition on the grounds that were intimated in the discussion and recognise that choices will be made at a local level, but I hope that these choices will be much better and more broadly informed than they have been in the past.

### **Safe Guardian Law (PE1294)**

**The Convener:** PE1294, by Allan Petrie, calls on the Parliament to urge the Government to implement a safe guardian law to allow family members to care for children who may be at risk. Do members have any comments?

**Nigel Don:** I think that we must be fairly near to closing the petition, but I am now a little confused—as I think the petitioner is—by some of the words in the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009. It may well be that they are absolutely right and defensible, but they might not be. Regulation 4 states:

“The local authority must make an assessment of ... alternative courses of action including the possibility of making an arrangement in accordance with regulation 8 or approving a person as a kinship carer”.

However, regulation 8 states:

“A local authority may, in the case of a child who is looked after by that authority in terms of section 17(6) of the 1995 Act, make arrangements for the child to be cared for by—

(a) the child's parents; or

(b) any person who has parental rights and parental responsibilities.”



I am not at all sure that that adds up to what the petitioner wants—I am not sure what it adds up to. His concern was that the extended family, particularly grandparents, should be taken into account automatically when social services consider where a child might be placed for their safety. I am still not convinced that it follows from those regulations that that is what social services have to do. I have a sneaking suspicion that they should be required to consider grandparents, because that will often be appropriate. Of course, social services would be required only to consider that—they would not have to go any further. If that is what the regulations say, I am happy, but I plead ignorance on that. We should inquire further to get clarity on the situation.

**The Convener:** Given those comments, we would wish to continue the petition and to explore those issues.

**Nigel Don:** That is the specific point. The regulations are sensible and have been looked at. I am doing no more than asking a question about something that is not obvious to me or the petitioner.

**The Convener:** We wish to continue the petition and consider those matters, with an understanding that the petition might come back to us with relative speed to be considered for closure.

### **Low-dose Naltrexone (PE1296)**

**The Convener:** PE1296, by Robert Thomson on behalf of LDN Now, calls on the Parliament to urge the Government to make low-dose naltrexone available on the NHS to auto-immune disease sufferers and sufferers of other conditions that are not classified as auto-immune diseases.

We should continue the petition, as there is a series of issues that we wish to explore in relation to NHS prescriptions and requests for LDN as an option within the prescription model. The petitioner presented his case sensibly to the committee. An opportunity for further dialogue with senior Government health officials would be helpful, so we will seek opportunities for that.

### **Amateur Coaches (PE1311)**

**The Convener:** PE1311, by Stephen Koeplinger, calls on the Parliament to urge the Government to review the arrangements that allow individuals who have undergone satisfactory police checks but who do not have a national governing body level 2 coaching certificate to access community resources. The petition has been presented to us and individual members have raised the matter in discussion with the committee. Do members have any comments?

**Bill Butler:** We have no other avenue that we can fruitfully explore, so we need to close the petition. The Scottish Government is satisfied that the current arrangements should be maintained on the basis that the United Kingdom coaching certificate ensures that athletes receive safe training sessions that are appropriate to the participant's level from qualified and competent coaches. The lack of a coaching qualification makes it more difficult to establish whether the coach is using safe and proven techniques or working within the guidelines that are established by the particular sport. Given those two points, there is nothing further that we can do, unless colleagues are minded otherwise.

**Anne McLaughlin:** It is clear from the responses that we have had that there is no support for the petition. However, I have sympathy with what the petitioner is trying to achieve and his motives. I am not sure what the committee can do, but my understanding is that the petitioner will pursue the issue in other ways anyway.

**The Convener:** Okay—we will close the petition and wish the petitioner well in his endeavours.

### **Medal Awards (PE1312)**

**The Convener:** PE1312, by William Leitch, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to make representations to the United Kingdom Government to ask it to investigate the circumstances of the process for awarding medals to those who were involved in the 1949 Yangtze campaign and, in particular, whether that process was corrupted by the exclusion of relevant and important documents that relate to the role of HMS Concord in the Yangtze campaign on 30 and 31 July 1949. Do members have any comments?

14:30

**Robin Harper:** I think that we should continue the petition. The original rejection was based on the premise that

“There is no avenue now available for consideration to be given to amending the qualifying criteria that the appropriate authorities deemed appropriate for the NGSM ‘Yangtze 1949’ clasp at the time this medal was instituted”.

However, no one was asking that the criteria be amended. The point is that the crew of HMS Concord qualified. It has subsequently become clear that people were deprived of the medals due to a cover-up. That was perhaps understandable, as no one wanted an international incident, but it was a cover-up nevertheless. We need clarity from the Ministry of Defence on that.

I suggest that we ask the Scottish Government what communications it has had with the Ministry of Defence since the Minister for Housing and Communities wrote to the previous Secretary of

State for Defence on 18 March 2010. We want to ensure that the new Government is up to date on the issue. We should also write to the Royal British Legion to find out what its response is to the issues that are raised in the petition. In addition, we should write to the Ministry of Defence to ask it to update us both on the investigations that naval command headquarters has carried out and on the MOD's communications with the Scottish Government on the issue since the minister wrote to the previous secretary of state on 18 March. We should write to all three of those organisations and continue to push on the issue.

**The Convener:** We can demonstrate that there is broad support for the petitioner's requests.

I should also mention that some useful archive material has now been posted on to the Public Petitions Committee's blog. I thank the petitioner for his involvement with us on that. I hope that we can continue to make progress on gaining recognition for this important historical issue.

We will keep the petition open and pursue the options that Robin Harper has identified. Is that okay?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

### **Hot Branding (Equines) (PE1314)**

**The Convener:** PE1314, by Rebecca Stafford, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to amend immediately the Prohibited Procedures on Protected Animals (Exemptions) (Scotland) Regulations 2007 and to ban the hot branding of all equine animals. Additional information from the petitioner has been made available on the table this afternoon.

**Bill Butler:** I think that we should continue the petition. We could usefully write to the Scottish Government to ask it to update the committee on what actions it has taken since the consultation on amending the prohibited procedures regulations ended. We should ask the Government what will happen next and when that will happen. On that basis, we could continue the petition in a useful fashion.

**The Convener:** Do other members have any comments?

**Nigel Don:** I would not for one moment disagree with Bill Butler's suggestion, but I just want to put on record that the Government's response states:

"hot branding is only permitted where a specific authorisation has been granted by Scottish Ministers"

As the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment has no intention of giving specific authorisation, hot branding has ceased and will not restart at least under the current cabinet

secretary. That means that the Government has time to get the issue sorted out. At least the practice has stopped.

**John Wilson:** I support what my colleague Nigel Don has said in quoting from the Government's response, but it would be more accurate to say that the response states that the cabinet secretary has not yet made a decision. Once the cabinet secretary makes a decision on hot branding, we can say that no further hot branding will take place.

It might be useful for the committee to ask the cabinet secretary when he intends to lay regulations to ban the practice of hot branding. It is fine to say that the matter is under review but, until the regulations are introduced, the practice could continue if there is authorisation from the cabinet secretary. Given that authorisation may still be granted, when will the cabinet secretary stop granting authorisation and lay regulations to stop the practice completely?

**Nigel Don:** I thank John Wilson for correcting me. If that is what the Government's response means—on reflection, I think that it is—the practice can continue for the term of any current specific authorisation. I must therefore backtrack completely; let us get on with it and ensure that those authorisations are withdrawn as fast as possible.

**The Convener:** You have listened to reasoned argument.

**John Wilson:** I am a reasonable person.

**The Convener:** We will keep the petition open and pursue those matters.

### **Israel (Scottish Parliament Exhibition) (PE1324)**

**The Convener:** PE1324, by Sofiah MacLeod of the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign, calls on the Scottish Parliament to cancel the Israel's contribution to medicine, science and technology exhibition that was scheduled to run in the Scottish Parliament from 27 to 29 April.

The exhibition took place, as planned, but the committee received further submissions from the petitioner on the matter, and I know that organisations such as the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign have written to members about the exhibition.

**Robin Harper:** The Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body said in its response that it does not need to review the criteria for holding events and exhibitions. In light of recent events, I wonder whether that still stands. In other words, would not the SPCB ask for a meeting with the MSP

concerned to talk through the advisability of hosting an exhibition at this time?

We can close the petition, but the issue is still very much staring us in the face. I would like the SPCB to tell us that it will review its criteria in the light of recent events. It should certainly be able to explain what its criteria would be if a proposal for a similar exhibition were to come in tomorrow afternoon.

**John Wilson:** Robin Harper is right. We can close the petition, which relates to an exhibition that has been held. I support doing so, with the proviso that the committee is aware that members have a responsibility to challenge the SPCB or individual members when they bring forward exhibitions that might be seen to offend the general public.

Robin Harper was right to refer to the incidents of the past 48 hours, of which we are now aware. The issue crosses over into international relations. The committee and the Parliament should be fully cognisant of events that take place in the world around us.

The question might arise in relation to any issue. The issue to which the petitioner referred is sensitive. I received e-mails from not just pro-Palestine organisations but other organisations, which challenged comments that I had made during a meeting of this committee. I want to put on the record that I made those comments because there are genuine concerns about the current actions of an existing state against other peoples. No civilised nation or elected member can stand back and allow events such as we have heard about during the past 48 hours to take place without making comment. The Parliament and individual members have the right to comment on situations that they find abhorrent. We have seen the press reports and the United Nations has demanded a transparent and independent investigation into what happened. We should all support that statement and attempts to get to the root of an incident that took place in international waters to stop a convoy of aid entering a region that is being policed by another state.

I just wanted to get that on the record. Although what Robin Harper has suggested relates partly to the petition, it also makes a broader statement about the need to be aware of sensitive issues around the world, no matter where in the world they are.

**The Convener:** Thanks, John. Do any other members have comments to make?

**Bill Butler:** Our thoughts are with all those people and their friends and relatives, who are still waiting for news 24 or 36 hours after the incident. I have already given my support to motions in the names of Pauline McNeill and Sandra White.

Turning to the petition, I think that Robin Harper makes a fair point about asking the SPCB to reconsider its policy criteria. On that basis, I do not think that we should close the petition. If we close the petition, the committee cannot ask for a reconsideration of those criteria on the basis of the recent events to which members have referred—unless you, convener, or the clerk can advise me otherwise. We should keep the petition open and ask the SPCB whether it wants to reconsider its criteria given the tragic events of the past 24 to 36 hours. Other parliamentary avenues will be open to those who want to raise this important issue, but if the committee wants to do so, we should not close the petition.

**The Convener:** In a sense, the incident is an additional aspect to the debate. Do we want to keep the petition open on the grounds that Bill Butler has identified?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**Robin Harper:** Like Bill Butler, I have signed the motions that have been lodged in Parliament. He is correct in saying that we should keep the petition open until we have received a response from the SPCB on whether it will reconsider its policy in the light of recent circumstances.

**The Convener:** That is the agreed view of the committee, so we will keep the petition open on the grounds that have been identified.

## New Petitions (Notification)

14:42

**The Convener:** We have received notification of new petitions that have been submitted, which will be before us at our next meeting. Do we accept those new petitions?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Annual Report

14:43

**The Convener:** The next item is to consider formally our draft annual report. Do members have any matters to raise? It is reasonably accurate. Bill Butler wants to add a couple of points.

**Bill Butler:** Not at all, convener. I simply want to congratulate the clerk and the clerking team on the draft report. It is probably the most detailed one that I have ever seen, and it contains some very attractive colour photographs. It also includes a detailed exposition of the developments that have taken place in the public petitions process, which have led—and, I hope, will continue to lead—to greater participation by the general public. The clerking team is to be congratulated on the report.

**The Convener:** That will definitely be recorded by the clerking team. For the record, there is one addition to the various delegations that we have met through the year to be included in the report.

**Fergus Cochrane (Clerk):** In paragraph 23, there is a list of the delegations that the committee has met over the past parliamentary year. I forgot about the delegation that we met at the end of last year from the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg, in Germany, which was carrying out a research project on e-petitions for the petitions committee of the Bundestag, looking specifically at the Scottish petitioning model. We will add that delegation to that list.

**The Convener:** Okay. Do we accept the draft annual report, which will be published in due course?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** I close the meeting. I thank members for their forbearance and patience during some lengthy sessions. However, with every great pain comes occasional pleasure and today we conclude at 2.45.

*Meeting closed at 14:45.*

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