



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 1 May 2012

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PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE
7th Meeting 2012, Session 4

CONVENER

*David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP)
*Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP)
*Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab)
*Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con)
*John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
Maureen Harkness
Professor Rob Jackson (Leith Links Residents Association)
Jase Kelly (Scottish Emergency Rider Volunteer Service)
Rob Kirkwood (Leith Links Residents Association)
Finn Mackenzie
Donna Scott
Allan Smith (Leith Links Residents Association)
William Telfer

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Anne Peat

LOCATION

Committee Room 2

Scottish Parliament

Public Petitions Committee

Tuesday 1 May 2012

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 14:03*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (David Stewart): Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the Public Petitions Committee. I remind everyone to switch off their mobile phones and other electronic devices because they interfere with the sound equipment. Apologies have been received from John Wilson.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on whether to take an item of business in private. The committee is invited to agree that item 4, which is consideration of a work programme paper, be taken in private. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

New Petitions

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (Local Office Closures) (PE1425)

14:03

The Convener: Item 2 is consideration of new petitions. There are three new petitions for consideration today. The first new petition is PE1425, in the name of Maureen Harkness, on the adverse impact of the closure of Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency local offices. Members have a note from the clerk, a briefing from the Scottish Parliament information centre and the petition.

I welcome our witnesses: Maureen Harkness, William Telfer and Finn Mackenzie. Thank you very much for coming. I appreciate your time and your effort. I invite Maureen Harkness to make a short presentation of around five minutes, after which we will have questions from members of the committee.

Maureen Harkness: Good afternoon, convener and committee members. Thank you for allowing me the time to do this little presentation about the possible closure of all 39 DVLA local offices in the United Kingdom.

On 13 December last year, an online consultation was launched on transforming the DVLA service to customers. Because it was solely online, the consultation had a bias from the outset towards customers who already use the DVLA's online service. The consultation took no account of the views of the general public and people in the trade who use the face-to-face service that is offered by the local offices. Included in the consultation paper was a proposal to close all 39 offices throughout the UK, including the five offices that are located in Scotland—Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Inverness—which employ almost 120 staff. If the proposals go ahead, those staff will have no jobs.

The proposal suggests that motorists and the motor industry will have a greater choice and flexibility to carry out their business more efficiently. How can removing an existing face-to-face service that has an extensive knowledge and years of experience of all the products that are offered by the DVLA give people who do not have access to the internet or telephone a greater choice? How can it be more flexible and more efficient? If anything, it can only be as efficient as the service that is being offered at the moment.

Local offices undertake almost 80 separate functions for their customers, including registering and licensing brand-new vehicles, transferring cherished numbers, registering and licensing

imported vehicles, and issuing tax discs to garages so that they can get brand-new vehicles off their forecourts. They also register the cars that British forces personnel bring back from Germany, and issue duplicate licences when they have been lost, stolen or not received through the post.

The majority of customers who use local offices walk out the door with what they want. That could be a tax disc, general information, or a receipt for an application that requires further processing. Under the proposals, those customers will have to wait, which could be extremely expensive for local garages and car dealers. Most customers who want to buy a vehicle want to be able to drive that vehicle away on the same day. If garages and dealers are unable to obtain tax discs for those vehicles, will their customers be willing to wait? In the current economy, every sale is vital and regular missed sales could lead to staff being paid off and, in severe cases, businesses being closed. If the DVLA services are currently being provided in a convenient location by staff who have no financial interest in who receives a tax disc, why move those services to intermediaries who will have a vested financial interest that could lead to conflict between the legalities of vehicles on the road and sales targets?

The consultation paper said that the centralisation of local office functions will make the DVLA more efficient. In 2010, the Inverness local office was part of a trial whereby all the Inverness mail was forwarded to Swansea for processing. Before the trial began, the Inverness office received the mail, processed it and sent it out to customers on the same day. Initially the mail was redirected via the Post Office but that seemed to cause some problems so it was then sent to Swansea by secure crate delivery. That meant that the mail took at least three days to arrive in Swansea, and only then could the processing system start. It took two or three days to process that mail and send it back to the customer. How can a minimum six-day turnaround be more efficient than a 24-hour one and still be hailed a success story by the DVLA? In fact, one island council had to seek permission from the local police to use untaxed vehicles on the road because the paperwork had been mislaid and incorrectly returned after the due date. Such incidents make me very concerned about what customers are going to do when things go wrong if the office is closed. Where are they going to go to sort out problems that are not straightforward? Where are the people who do not have access to or who do not want to use automated services going to go?

The Inverness local office has about 30,000 customers every year—what are they going to do? I have spoken to those customers every day and know that they want a face-to-face service. They

pay their taxes and they feel that they deserve the first-class service that they get at the moment. They do not want the good service that the DVLA chief executive admits will be given to them if local offices close.

Therefore, I look to the Scottish Government to do its utmost to keep this vital face-to-face service available for the people of Scotland.

The Convener: Thank you very much for your presentation. Thank you also for the briefing that you gave me and the Inverness provost, Jimmy Gray, some months ago.

I have a question to ask and then I will pass over to my colleagues. I was struck by your comment in the petition that the proposals were anti-rural and in contradiction to the big society approach of keeping services rural. In effect, the proposals mean a transfer of 120 jobs from Scotland to Wales. Is that a fair summary of your arguments?

Maureen Harkness: That is what the DVLA says will happen. Rural Scotland does not always have the best broadband access or mobile phone service availability. I know that from living in an area that does not get a lot of service. People in rural areas will be restricted in the services that they can get. Although the DVLA could be available 24 hours a day online or on the phone, if you do not have access to some services, you are not getting a wider choice. It is not as efficient or easy for you to go and see somebody and sort out your problems.

The Convener: In the past, there has been a lot of agreement across the political parties about ensuring that there is a transfer of public sector jobs throughout Scotland and that such jobs should not just be maintained in the central belt. However, the proposal seems to be in contradiction to that because, if many of your staff are not willing to be transferred to Swansea, it is taking jobs away.

Maureen Harkness: It is completely unfeasible for us to move anywhere else. Even within local government in the Inverness area, there is not a lot of choice for moving to another department. There is no doubt that there will be unemployed people.

The Convener: Do any of your colleagues wish to add anything at this stage?

William Telfer: There are 1,213 jobs in the DVLA throughout the UK, of which 120 are in Scotland. The equivalent net gain for the main administration office in Swansea will be only 300 jobs. At the most recent consultation meeting, it appeared that those would be only temporary jobs as the Government looks for online solutions. In the consultation process, it seemed that the

Government was a long way from finding a suitable online solution. The union predicts that the process will be up and running by 2015 to 2017.

Another big issue is cherished number transfers, and the paperwork for private number plates. When a plate is being moved to another car, we sometimes need to inspect the vehicle locally, especially in the case of imports. The exchange rate is not that good at the moment for imported vehicles, but when that changes, far more imported vehicles will come into Scotland. There are moves by the DVLA to get the Department for Transport to lower the bar for inspection. International bodies that fight car crime have criticised the DVLA for that on their websites. I would not want anyone to go to a tabloid and say that this is a dumping ground for dodgy vehicles or car crime, but it could happen if the rules are lowered.

The Convener: That is a useful point. I do not think many members were aware of that.

Mr Mackenzie, do you wish to raise any points at this stage?

Finn Mackenzie: No, not at the moment.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I am very concerned about the proposal because the largest loss of jobs in Scotland will be at West Campbell Street in my constituency. It is reminiscent of the passport office closures proposed by the Westminster Government. Although consultation took place, I would say that the Government's mind had already been made up before the consultation ended. Centralisation is an issue of great concern for me and for the workers in Glasgow.

I note the point that you raise in your submission about impact assessment—nothing has been published on that yet. You gave us the example of the Inverness project, which is a disaster by any account. Have you seen anything about the impact assessment or when it is due to be published?

14:15

William Telfer: I have been directly involved in the consultation. The consultation document was considered a sham by the union. You might be able to see it online. I have been involved in consultations for the likes of the coastguard, and this was one of the poorest that I have seen. The UK Government's guidelines on consultations state that impact assessments have to be done. For example, there has to be an equality impact assessment. There is a duty on the department, although it is not a full legal duty because of the weakness of equalities law. An equality impact assessment for the staff was not done before the

end of the consultation, and the one for the service users throughout the UK, including those in Scotland, has only started to be done. The guidelines state that they should be done as part of the consultation.

I cannot remember the figures off the top of my head, but the union has identified that disabled people are less likely to have internet access. There has been no equality impact assessment for the staff or the users, and no business impact assessment. The guidelines state that a consultation has to put the range of options—the consultation on the DVLA had four options, including an as-is option—and the business case for each option, including what it would save and the pros and cons. That was not done.

Sandra White: That is an interesting point and a pertinent one, considering that, if an MSP introduces a bill, they have to hold a consultation with everyone who is interested. I am sure that other members will pick up the point about the consultation.

You mentioned car dealers and said that, if the proposals go ahead, newly sold cars could be on the road without being taxed. Is that correct?

Maureen Harkness: It is quite possible. At present, there is seven days' leeway, but the DVLA is hoping to change the legislation so that tax discs for new cars are issued from Swansea and not from the local offices, and the period would be increased to 14 days. The owner of a new car that went out without a tax disc would have 14 days to get it. If it did not arrive in the post, it could be another seven days before the customer realised that, if they remembered at all. They would not be able to go to a local office to get a duplicate, so untaxed cars could be on the road for anything up to four weeks. I think that that would impact on people's insurance, as having a valid tax disc is a requirement, along with the vehicle being roadworthy.

Finn Mackenzie: The DVLA was hoping to tack the changes on to the finance bill that has just gone through at Westminster, but it missed that window of opportunity. That put back its plans, and it has not even come to a decision on the consultation. Also, it does not have a plan for what we call automatic first registration and licensing—AFRAL—which is where the 14-day rule was to be implemented. A trial of that is no longer feasible because the DVLA missed the window of opportunity to get it into legislation, so at present it is stuck with the existing period that the police allow for new vehicle licensing, which I think is five to seven working days. The DVLA is on the back foot on that one.

Sandra White: Thank you.

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):

Let us stick with the consultation. I confess that, until I read about the petition, I was unaware that the consultation had happened. I believe that it ended on 20 March. Was it a three-month consultation?

William Telfer: Initially. It was done for the shortest possible period, and the DVLA breached the Government guidelines again, in that the guidelines state that traditional holiday periods should be avoided, but the DVLA did the consultation over Christmas. It was trying to rush it through. If there was a way of doing things wrong in a consultation, the DVLA found it. It has a project team trying to push the changes through, but there is no information about what it is doing. In good old civil service manner, the DVLA has appointed a new project team to oversee the project team, so that has delayed things further. With Westminster going into recess on 25 July, we expect an announcement to be made towards the end of June or the beginning of July. That will set the processes going.

Nanette Milne: It strikes me that, on such a significant issue, just over 900 consultation responses is not many. Was the consultation well publicised? I did not know about it, but that might just have been me.

William Telfer: Quite a lot of the work to publicise the consultation was done by the trade union, which asked its members to hand the consultation over to customers. Until a week ago, the agency was trying to put things online, but it never put the consultation document online. The trade union also issued a questionnaire that was similar, in a lot of ways, to the consultation. It received responses from 1,400 car dealerships from across the UK, which were 8:1 in favour of keeping the local offices open. We are here for the trade union, which is protecting our jobs, but there is also a huge issue for car dealers.

Car dealers are not particularly sensitive to red tape. It is a sweeping statement, but I do not think that they like civil servants. When it comes to pounds, shillings and pence and delays, the car dealerships—especially in remote areas of Scotland—will really be hit by the closures. They will need to send a bit of paper down to Swansea, which could take two or three days to get there and two or three days to come back, with all the expense and whatever. They will have sold a new car to somebody, but the person will not be able to drive it away without a disc—that is why the agency wanted to extend the leeway to 14 days.

Nanette Milne: I appreciate that. Have you and others made representations to the Westminster Government about the flaws in the consultation?

William Telfer: Yes. There is an early day motion in Westminster just now suggesting that the consultation should be extended. Frank Doran MP, from Aberdeen, also secured an adjournment debate on the issue, which concentrated initially on enforcement. At the start, the plans were so poor that not only was the DVLA going to withdraw the local offices, it was going to withdraw enforcement. There are about 30 workers in Glasgow whose job is enforcement. If anybody in Scotland had ended up in court in Scotland for not paying for their tax disc, the procurator fiscal would have wanted a witness from the DVLA and it would have had to fly people up from Swansea. The average case gathers only £150 to £200 and I do not know the cost of flights from Cardiff airport to Edinburgh or Inverness. There is a code for the closure of enforcement cases on the ground of economic efficiency, and such cases would just have been closed off. The *Daily Mail* would then have run a story about road tax cheats getting away with murder in Scotland.

The Convener: That is another important point. It would seem crazy if staff from Swansea had to come up to deal with court cases in Scotland. There would be a huge cost involved in that, as you say.

William Telfer: On the back of that debate, the agency has agreed to enter into discussions with the trade union to see how many enforcement staff it needs to keep in Scotland to send to court. That is a small victory for the trade union.

The Convener: Good. I am glad to hear it.

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP):

I have experience of dealing with the local DVLA office in Aberdeen and the DVLA in Swansea, and I know which one I prefer. I imagine that the office in Inverness is particularly significant for people who live in remote rural areas. Many of those people will be in areas that do not have a post office, so they will travel to their local DVLA office. What is the likely impact of the closures on people who, for whatever reason, want a face-to-face service when they are renewing their tax disc or something like that? I know that that can be done at post offices, but that is easier in some places than it is in others.

Finn Mackenzie: In any case, if the DVLA were to use the Post Office as an intermediary, it would use only main post offices in the cities and major towns. As the plans stand, there would be an impact on rural communities even if the DVLA went through with that. There will be no face-to-face DVLA interaction for people in rural areas that do not have post offices, such as areas around Inverness and in the Scottish Borders. As I said, there are no plans as yet to continue to use the Post Office. I believe that the Post Office contract comes to an end next year and that the DVLA is in

the process of tendering a new intermediary contract. It remains to be seen what face-to-face contact, if any, there will be for anyone.

Maureen Harkness: In some rural areas, post offices issue tax discs, but only in cases in which the person is the registered keeper. Post offices cannot change tax classes—they cannot change from disabled to petrol or vice versa—and they cannot do a change of keeper. They can do only straightforward taxing of vehicles. As members will imagine, there are a lot of heavy goods vehicles in rural areas, but post offices cannot tax HGVs or special vehicles. Without local offices, everything that is not straightforward will have to be sent to Swansea. People will have to wait for it to come back and will then go to the post office to tax the vehicle.

Mark McDonald: That leads me on to my next question. For whatever reason, there are times when people leave it until the last minute to get their new tax disc or they forget that their tax disc needs to be renewed. Obviously, there is only a certain grace period—

Maureen Harkness: There is no grace period.

Mark McDonald: I thought that there was, so I have been misinformed—not that I have ever used the grace period, I hasten to put on record.

Maureen Harkness: Nobody does.

Mark McDonald: In some situations, a quick turnaround is necessary. That is particularly true for a small business, which could have a van or a fleet of vans off the road for a week because a 24-hour or at-the-counter turnaround is not possible.

Maureen Harkness: Absolutely.

William Telfer: It is an urban myth that there is a 14-day grace period. There has never been anything in legislation or elsewhere on that. However, the DVLA plans to make that urban myth real. To return to the crime issue, the DVLA had to start doing accurate surveys following the death of Jill Dando. When the police tried to get her killer, they could not find out who had been driving the suspect's car because the DVLA's vehicle database was inaccurate and they had to go through about 14 or 15 keepers. Following the work that was done, the DVLA's figures show that, when a policeman notices that a disc is out of date, 23 per cent of the time, the person does not get done—

The Convener: Is that a technical term?

William Telfer: Aye. In 23 per cent of cases, the person does not get done just for the tax disc, because the insurance is out, too. There are other percentages for cases that go on to higher crimes, including where a warrant is out for the person. The police are trained that an out-of-date disc is

an indicator and an excuse to stop a vehicle. If the DVLA introduces that 14-day period and we have discs that are out of date for 14 days, how will the police differentiate? That will mean that 23 per cent of the people who the police do not stop will be committing other crimes.

The Convener: That is a good point. I remember reading that, when there was a crackdown on crime in New York, the police connected problems with cars to wider problems with crime.

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): A number of valid and salient points have been made. I am concerned about the belief that the consultation was a sham and about the fact that the consultation was done over the Christmas and new year holiday period. I am also concerned that no equalities impact assessment is on the horizon. We would expect at least to have a date for when we will see the result of an impact assessment.

Let me pick up on Mark McDonald's point. In my constituency, Falkirk Council decided to purchase its tax discs online. It did so for a number of months but found the system unsatisfactory and reverted to purchasing tax discs locally—not at a DVLA office but at the local post office. That is a prime example of how attempts to make the service more efficient online do not always work. I have a fair degree of sympathy with the petitioners.

14:30

The Convener: Thank you for that observation, and I thank the witnesses for their contributions. The petition is interesting and worthy in many ways, in that it raises issues to do with the centralisation of jobs and the vital role that your members play throughout Scotland. I think that the petition is important and that our consideration of it should continue. I suggest that we write to the Scottish Government to ask what discussions it has had with the UK Government and to ask what its view is on the strengths of the petition.

Sandra White: I entirely agree. When we ask those questions, can we send the Scottish Government the transcript of the discussion? A number of pertinent issues were raised, particularly in relation to crime and people who are not insured. We could highlight that part of the discussion, to show why we are so concerned.

Nanette Milne: I agree with what members have said. Can we take action on the process of the consultation? Must we do that through the Scottish Government or can we write directly?

The Convener: The clerks are telling me that we can write directly to the originators of the consultation to express our concern.

Nanette Milne: Valid concerns have been expressed about the process, apart from anything else.

The Convener: That is a fair point.

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): I am concerned about the impact assessment and the timescale—or lack of timescale. We are talking about a serious number of jobs. I do not think that I have ever passed the Glasgow office without seeing people queueing outside. I cannot believe that all those people will start using computers to do everything online from here on in.

The Convener: Do members agree that we should continue consideration of the petition by writing to the Scottish Government, to ask about its discussions with the UK Government and to seek its view on the petition, and by writing to Westminster to express our concern about the nature of the consultation?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: We will keep the petitioners informed about the next steps when we have had some feedback. I thank our three witnesses for coming along; your evidence was helpful.

14:33

Meeting suspended.

14:34

On resuming—

National Donor Breast Milk Bank (PE1426)

The Convener: Our second petition is PE1426, by Donna Scott, on a national donor breast milk bank service. Members have the clerk's note, the Scottish Parliament information centre briefing and the petition.

I welcome Donna Scott and Jase Kelly to the meeting. Before I invite Donna to make a short presentation of, say, five minutes, I will let in Mark McDonald, who has been trying to catch my eye.

Mark McDonald: Before we begin, convener, I declare that the petitioner, Donna Scott, is one of my constituents and that I know her and have been working with her on this issue.

The Convener: Thank you for that. I ask Donna Scott to make her presentation, after which I will invite the committee to ask some questions.

Donna Scott: Good afternoon, convener and committee members.

My petition relates to the unequal access to donor milk for babies across Scotland. Understanding of the value of donor breast milk in neonatal units has been growing in recent years.

Everyone has heard of blood banks, but not everyone will have heard of milk banks, and parents who find themselves in neonatal units—usually in emergencies—will not know to ask for donor milk or even know whether it is available.

I completely understand why units that cannot provide such milk do not offer it as an option, because it is not helpful to discuss something that cannot be provided. However, the situation has changed in recent years, with more and more research confirming that babies thrive on donor breast milk and much more evidence about the risks of formula, particularly to vulnerable pre-term babies in respect of necrotising enterocolitis and allergies. We also know more about the lifelong benefits of breast milk to cardiovascular health, bone growth and neurological development. Moreover, a recent phenomenon—even outwith neonatal circles—that has been facilitated by social media is informal mother-to-mother milk sharing.

As a result, parents who find themselves in neonatal units will perhaps be much more informed and they will ask about the availability of donor milk for their baby. The World Health Organization has made it clear that formula is the fourth best option for feeding babies, pre-term or otherwise. Obviously, direct breastfeeding from the mother is the best option, second is the feeding of expressed breast milk either by tube or cup, and third is donor milk.

There is evidence that clinicians and parents in Scotland are happy for donor milk to be used in neonatal units. In the period 2008 to 2011, the Yorkhill milk bank, which is the one milk bank in Scotland, increased by four times the amount of pasteurised milk that it processes. It is providing donated milk for three times more babies than it did in 2008 and it has twice as many donors as it had before. Interestingly, 40 per cent of donors come from outwith the greater Glasgow and Clyde area, and the health boards in Lanarkshire, Ayrshire and Arran and Lothian have utilised the service at Yorkhill.

Recently, the Scottish Emergency Rider Volunteer Service has been involved in delivering milk to other neonatal units. However, as I pointed out, the only milk bank in Scotland is at Yorkhill and it is funded and run by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde as a local service. Over the next few months, parents who find themselves in a neonatal unit will be receiving a DVD called “Small Wonders”, which includes a section on donor milk, and they will start to ask whether such milk is appropriate for their child.

Donor milk is also important because it supports maternal lactation. International evidence is emerging that suggests that breastfeeding rates are better in maternity units that use donor milk. It

is easy to see why that might be the case; it shows that healthcare professionals value breast milk so much that they are willing to use screened and pasteurised product from other mothers. If those women are pumping milk for a mother's child, it encourages them to keep going. This is only a temporary stopgap or an emergency option. Women do not simply sit back and get brought bottles of frozen milk; the understanding is that their own milk production has to be kept up to allow them to take over in due course.

My son was born at 32 weeks and, having spent three weeks in a neonatal unit, I can genuinely say that expressing exclusively is one of the most relentless and exhausting tasks that I have ever undertaken. Some women have to do it for three months or even more, depending on the gestation of their baby or the medical conditions that it has.

I argue, therefore, that we need to consider the establishment of a national donor breast milk bank. Because NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde meets all the costs of running the Yorkhill milk bank, if there is a 27-week-old baby in Aberdeen and another in Glasgow that have identical clinical needs, the baby in Glasgow will get priority. I do not find that an acceptable position for the national health service in Scotland.

As demand increases—as it has done so far and will surely continue to do—the question is whether the Glasgow milk bank will be able to cope without extra funding and improved infrastructure. There have been points in the past few months at which milk supplies have been quite tight because so much milk is going out.

I propose that, instead, there should be a central milk bank based at Yorkhill that can source locally screened donors as well, and a transport network such as the Scottish Emergency Rider Volunteer Service should co-ordinate supply and demand throughout Scotland. That would make the milk bank service much more equitable, efficient and well supported. Yorkhill would need investment and infrastructure to facilitate that expansion.

Another option would be to set up separate milk banks. However, that would be quite expensive and it is not the most efficient option.

Yorkhill has the required expertise and facilities, so it would be a good foundation from which to reach all the main neonatal units in Scotland. To base a central milk bank there is a feasible way in which to expand the milk bank service.

As a parent living in Scotland, if I had another baby who was in a neonatal unit that was not in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's area, my baby would not be considered for this resource in the way that a baby born in Glasgow would be. I do not find that acceptable.

The Convener: Thank you for your evidence. You make a strong and compelling case. You mentioned the international evidence. What best practice can you identify—first, in the rest of the UK, and secondly throughout Europe? Are there examples of a national milk bank service that works in a particular nation state or large territory?

Donna Scott: Throughout the rest of the UK, the provision of donor milk is a patchwork. I cannot cite any examples, because services tend to operate in their own local areas.

I do not have extensive knowledge of this, but countries such as Sweden certainly have a network of milk banks. Sweden has 27 milk banks for a population of about 9 million people. I imagine that they provide full coverage across the whole country.

The Convener: Have you identified any constraints on health boards, apart from money? Why are other health boards not looking at the milk bank as an excellent initiative on which Yorkhill is leading the way in Scotland?

Donna Scott: Given Scotland's population distribution, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has a larger number of babies who require neonatal care, and they are treated at Yorkhill. Because other health boards have not had access to the resource, they have not been using it, so on the surface the demand has not been there. The more that clinicians and parents realise that the resource is available and can be used, the more use of it will become common practice.

The Convener: Has there been any interest from the third sector or the co-operative movement? There seems to be an ideal opportunity for them to get involved in this development across Scotland.

Donna Scott: Not to my knowledge.

The Convener: Perhaps that is something that we can pursue as a committee.

Nanette Milne: Thank you for your interesting presentation. As the convener said, you make a good case. Politicians inevitably think of money, and at present budgets are stretched, including health board budgets. Have you done any research on relative costings for a national donor breast milk bank and for banks set up by individual health boards? Do you have any figures on that, or is there anywhere we could go to get them?

Donna Scott: I have read estimates and my understanding is that to set up a new milk bank would cost about £200,000. That includes staff training, all the necessary infrastructure and everything that is required within that. It would therefore be quite a big financial undertaking to set up separate banks around Scotland. That is why

enhancing and expanding what we have is the most effective and efficient approach.

Nanette Milne: It strikes me that that cost is not enormous in terms of health service budgets. I do not know whether the Government has done any costings, but that is something that the committee can find out.

14:45

Mark McDonald: Welcome to the committee, Donna. My first question is for Mr Kelly, who I know has been working with the Yorkhill milk bank to transport milk from donors to the bank, and from the bank to other health boards where there is sufficient capacity, although there is also demand from elsewhere. Will you expand on the work that ScotsERVS does with the Yorkhill milk bank?

Jase Kelly (Scottish Emergency Rider Volunteer Service): ScotsERVS is a charity that operates throughout Scotland and transports any medical items that the NHS needs quickly. The NHS might be used to using other means such as taxis or expensive couriers, but we transport for free.

We operate nearly every night in Edinburgh, Ayrshire and Lanarkshire. It seems that our services are primarily being requested around Yorkhill. However, we are a Scotland-wide charity and we do not discriminate; if a call comes from NHS Grampian, NHS Tayside or another health board, we will respond to the request for transport.

Mark McDonald: There will be a certain window of time within which donated milk has to get from the donor to the bank or from the bank to the health board that requested it. What is that window? If you were in Glasgow and a call came from Inverness because donor milk was required there, are you confident that you could deliver within a viable timeframe?

Jase Kelly: All our vehicles are specially adapted, and we have specialist refrigerated boxes. The boxes that the NHS supplied to us can only refrigerate for a maximum of eight hours, which is more or less fine for Scotland. The boxes that our charity has purchased refrigerate for 24 hours, so we can provide unlimited UK coverage for what is inside the box.

Mark McDonald: Donna, I am aware that you took a large amount of milk to donate to the Glasgow milk bank, which I think was before ScotsERVS was involved. Will you expand on what you did?

Donna Scott: My son was discharged from the neonatal unit at the end of April 2011. I was in the fortunate position of being able to fully breastfeed my son upon leaving the unit. However, I had been expressing to save, and by June 2011 I had

5.5 litres of expressed milk. Of course, that was far more than I needed, so I wanted to make a donation. However, doing that was very difficult.

A large part of the problem is that the screening must be done in Glasgow, although the milk bank staff will come out to within an hour of Yorkhill. For women who do not live in that area, that means that bloods cannot be taken, so screening cannot take place and milk cannot be used, even if ScotsERVS can come and pick it up. That raises another issue—if there was remote testing for donors, that would free up the situation and keep the supply and demand balanced.

I decided that, rather than the milk being wasted, I would take it to Glasgow. I had online screening before I went, which was acceptable to Yorkhill. I took the milk there and had my bloods taken, and the milk was put to good use.

Mark McDonald: You spoke about the issues of demand and the difficulty in measuring demand in areas that do not offer a donor milk service. If the service is not there and the available service is not being promoted, how can demand be measured?

It is clear that you have done a lot of work on the issue. Have people said to you that, if they had known that the service was available, they would have requested it? Also, have people said that they did not request the service because they knew that it was not available, but that they would have wanted it if it had been available?

Donna Scott: Many people that I have spoken to—parents and non-parents—have said that they did not know that milk banks existed. People think that milk banks are a great idea. At an individual level, one friend that I spoke to was particularly concerned that she might need donor milk, which she knew could not be accessed—at the time—in Aberdeen. I have also heard that health professionals have assumed that people can get donor milk outwith Glasgow. For example, some surgeons have assumed that milk is available. They do not realise how the system falls short.

Many people would have used the service if they had known about it. Speaking to mothers in the neonatal unit, I found that many of them did not know that it was possible to get donor milk or that they could donate it. Although awareness is growing, many people are still unaware of the service. The more people find out about it, the greater the demand will be.

Mark McDonald: When we spoke to NHS Grampian, it stated that it would be interested in linking into a national service but that it would not be able to set up its own milk bank. Have you had any contact with other health boards on whether they would be interested in Scotland having a national infrastructure rather than their having to

face the up-front costs of establishing their own milk banks?

Donna Scott: I have not.

Mark McDonald: The committee might want to take that up.

Sandra White: I declare an interest as, many years ago, I was a contributor to the milk bank at Yorkhill. Also, I believe that I know Councillor Brothers's father from a number of years ago, when I was a councillor in Renfrewshire.

I was interested in what was said about the lack of information and awareness, and I echo Mark McDonald's point about a national network of milk banks.

I note that there is informal liaison between NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and other health boards, particularly NHS Lothian and NHS Ayrshire and Arran, which feed—pardon the pun—into the national milk bank in Glasgow.

Jase Kelly's voluntary service does fantastic work, and I know that it has purchased new motorbikes and so on in the past couple of months. However, if we are going to have a national milk bank, can we rely on a voluntary service, or would the service have to be brought in house?

If we had a national network of milk banks, which would no doubt be based at the Southern general hospital, because the Yorkhill baby unit will be moved there in a couple of years' time, how could we ensure that other areas, such as Inverness and Aberdeen, would get parity of access? As you said, at present, people who stay within an hour of Glasgow get priority.

Jase Kelly: As you say, ScotsERVS is a voluntary organisation that relies on public generosity and companies sponsoring us to meet our costs for fuel, vehicles, repairs and so on.

We did our sums before starting the project—ScotsERVS was about three or four years in creation, and it has been active for only about six months. It is going well at the moment. We have enough money in the bank to sustain ourselves for a little while longer. However, as you say, sustainability will probably be an issue. We will have to consider getting lottery, Government or national health service funding to support our service.

Donna Scott: If there is to be true parity, some sort of contribution will have to be made by the other health boards as well, or we will need some central funding in order to make the milk banks into a national resource. I do not know how that would work within the NHS, but that would be important.

I can understand NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's position, but it means that there is a postcode lottery. Anything that can help to iron that out and ensure that babies throughout Scotland can be catered for on the basis of clinical need would be helpful, as that is the ideal.

The Convener: I think that this is an excellent initiative and I recommend to the committee that we continue the petition. I suggest that we write to the Scottish Government to find out whether it might want to roll out the service across Scotland. It would be in the best position to do that, although in saying that, I do not mean to knock the work that Yorkhill is doing. Do members have any other suggestions?

Sandra White: I absolutely agree that we should continue the petition. We should write to the Scottish Government to find out its response to what the petition seeks. We should write to NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to get its response and to ask about its experience of its work on the donor breast milk service that it provides. We could also write to ask ScotsERVS—Jase Kelly's organisation—and the United Kingdom Association for Milk Banking for their responses.

The Convener: I call Mark McDonald, who has been very involved in the issue.

Mark McDonald: When we write to NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to ask about its experience, we should ask it about the potential for expanding what it offers and whether it has assessed how much an expansion would cost. I suggest that we also write to the other territorial health boards to ask them what internal discussions they have had about donor milk, whether they would be interested in linking into a national infrastructure and whether they have considered establishing a milk bank. We spoke about the national versus the network approach. Ironing out such issues in the responses would be the way to go.

Nanette Milne: I have no idea what the proposal would cost. I presume that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde knows what its service costs, but I do not know whether financial investigations have been done by other health boards or the Government. It would be interesting to find out about that from the organisations that have been mentioned.

Mark McDonald: I suspect that the UK Association for Milk Banking will be able to help on the costs, as it works with all the milk banks across the UK. There are a number of milk banks in England, which could perhaps provide comparative figures.

Anne McTaggart: Elaine Smith MSP brought the issue to Parliament and the cabinet secretary Nicola Sturgeon replied on it, but it is important to

go back to the cabinet secretary, because she gave an assurance that she would involve her officials, so some answers might be available already. It is obviously unfair that a postcode lottery applies to who gets milk.

The Convener: I think that we all agree that the petition is interesting and that we will pursue it with the various bodies that members identified. We will keep the petitioner informed about the next step with the petition. I thank both witnesses for giving useful evidence.

I suspend the meeting for two minutes to allow the next witnesses to take their places.

14:57

Meeting suspended.

14:59

On resuming—

Access to Justice (Non-corporate Multiparty Actions) (PE1427)

The Convener: The third new petition is PE1427, by Rob Kirkwood on behalf of Leith Links residents association, on access to justice for non-corporate multiparty groups. Members have the note by the clerk, which is paper 3, the SPICe briefing and the petition. I welcome Malcolm Chisholm, who has a constituency interest in the petition.

I welcome our three witnesses: Rob Kirkwood, Professor Rob Jackson and Allan Smith from Leith Links residents association. I invite Rob Kirkwood to make a short presentation of about five minutes, after which I will invite Malcolm Chisholm to make a short contribution.

Rob Kirkwood (Leith Links Residents Association): Thank you. The petition is our second on the issue. The first, which was supported by Shirley-Anne Somerville, was shelved on her advice because the Gill report basically recommended that there should be procedures for dealing with multiparty actions.

In the Scottish ministers' response to the Gill recommendations, they said:

"The difficulty, of course, is that Scotland faces a period of unprecedented pressure on public finances, and it is clear that simply spending more money on a wider range of publicly funded services to improve access to justice is unaffordable and unsustainable. It will be necessary to prioritise, to co-ordinate expenditure more efficiently, and to be innovative in identifying opportunities to secure justice in new, cheaper ways."

The second petition represents our attempt to be innovative and provide access to justice in a relatively cheap manner.

Currently, Scottish people, in contrast to people in England and Wales, are at a disadvantage when private companies behave badly. It is incredibly difficult to hold those companies to account. Our experiences with Seafeld sewage works illustrate the problem, which is replicated throughout Scotland. Veolia Water, which is a private company, operates Seafeld sewage works unprofessionally. That is not only my opinion; under the freedom of information legislation, we have obtained documents from Scottish Water that clearly state that the private finance initiative is not working and that it will try to buy out the contracts at the first opportunity. That is because of the poor management of the site.

Initially, we thought that the council would represent us. When we asked it to serve notice on Veolia Water, the response was that, if a person lives next door to a sewage works, they ought to expect to live inside smells occasionally. On that basis, of course, if I lived next door to a zoo, I should expect lions in my garden on a regular basis. The point that we made was that technology exists not only to keep lions in cages, but to keep smells within sewage works.

The council's second response was simply that it is not in the public interest to serve a notice on public utility companies such as Veolia Water or Scottish Water.

It is interesting that, although more than 100 water treatment plants create odours in communities in Scotland, the City of Edinburgh Council is the only council to have served a notice, and that happened only after an eight-year campaign that involved the media, including television and newspapers, and our building a giant turd and piping it down to Parliament. That is what it took to get a notice served from our council, which had clearly gone native and acted as a cheerleader, to use a current phrase, or a firewall between the public and a private company.

That private company takes a great deal of money out of the Scottish economy, of course, but it cannot be held to account. There are no ways by which we can force or encourage it to behave more responsibly. We have tried to get legal aid, but it was refused. We secured the services of environmental lawyers, but the barrister advised them that they could not get the relevant documents that were required.

We believe that it is urgent to enact changes to the existing rules that will give Scottish people, in a relatively short period of time, the same kind of access to justice that people in the rest of the United Kingdom enjoy.

I know that the response from the Justice Committee may well be that it will deal with the issue at some point in the future, but it seems to

me that there is little political will at the moment to enact the Gill recommendations in this respect. Perhaps the public finances are not in a fit state at the moment for that kind of primary legislation. I therefore think that there are grounds for our suggested interim measures to be enacted. We have been assured that it would be relatively simple to do that. The Scottish ministers have called for justice to be accessed in new and cheaper ways, and what we suggest represents exactly that.

The Convener: Thank you for your statement. I invite Malcolm Chisholm to make a contribution.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): Thank you, convener. The background to the petition is the experience of a large number of residents in the vicinity of the Seafeld sewage plant, but it is also the experience of many people who live quite a long way from it who have been suffering for years from the stench from the sewage works. I pay tribute to the Leith Links residents for their long-running campaign, which has resulted in some progress, but we still have problems. Clearly, that is why the petition is still relevant to their situation.

I want to make two further points about that. First, although the petition's proposals have grown out of a particular campaign, they could apply to many similar situations in which private companies cannot be held to account under the procedures of Scots law. I had a recent example of that. Like several other MSPs, I have had constituents come to me about the issue of the PIP breast implant scandal. I know that several of the women involved are seeking to take action, but are having to do it in England. They cannot do it in Scotland because it is not possible for a group of them to take action in Scotland in that regard. Obviously, many issues would arise if they decided to take action individually, because apart from that being very difficult to do it would also be very expensive. Certainly, we need the ability to take group action in the situation that Rob Kirkwood described, but it would apply to many other situations in which private companies need to be held to account.

My second point, which I think Rob Kirkwood touched on, is that what the petition proposes is consistent with what Lord Gill proposed. However, the problem is that the Scottish Government—I am not necessarily criticising the Government, because implementing all the Gill review's recommendations would have financial implications—is not going to enact those recommendations in the near future, as far as we know. In fact, the Government is inviting people to come forward with alternative, innovative solutions. The petition represents such an approach because through its proposals a lot of the principles that Lord Gill champions could be

enacted without—I think—primary legislation or a great deal of expense. In that sense, I would have thought that what the petition proposes is not something that the Scottish Government ought to or will oppose in principle.

I endorse completely what Rob Kirkwood said about the on-going problems at the Seafeld sewage works. I think that approving the petition and getting its proposals enacted would certainly help to deal with those problems either through the taking of action or by applying pressure for action to be taken—it could work in either way. However, I think that the petition's proposals also have a more general application and are consistent with the Gill review's recommendations.

The Convener: Thanks very much. The petition is very interesting. In essence, Mr Kirkwood, you are saying that you want to ensure that there is a lot more power for communities like your own to take on faceless bureaucracies. We hear that message from many other groups across Scotland who are probably in circumstances similar to those of your group. As Malcolm Chisholm said, it looks as though implementation of the Gill review's recommendations would have helped you. However, we have a problem because they have not been fully implemented. Does that summarise the position?

Rob Kirkwood: Yes. There seems to be no political will at the moment to implement the Gill review's recommendations, because of the money involved. I hope that what we propose represents a cheap alternative.

Sandra White: I read through the petition and found it very interesting. I thank Mr Kirkwood for his explanation and Malcolm Chisholm for adding that the situation affects not only those who live in Leith Links but people further afield. The Government has said that in principle it agrees with the Gill review. We should ask the Government why, whether for financial or other reasons, the review's recommendations are not being implemented. I do not see why private companies should not be held to account in the same way as public companies or anyone else.

I very much support the petition and what the petitioners are trying to do. It bodes very well that they have suggested what I would call a compromise. I look forward to raising the issue with the Government through the Public Petitions Committee to see where we can go with it.

Mark McDonald: The petition is excellent, because it seeks to be constructive. When the Government has said that it will go down a certain route, it would be easy just to argue against that, so it is commendable that the petitioners are trying to find an alternative route. I hope that the Government will be amenable to that.

We should certainly write to the Government and ask for its view on the issues that are raised in the petition. The petitioners deserve to be commended for taking a constructive approach. I hope that it will bear some fruit.

The Convener: Do the other witnesses want to add anything?

Professor Rob Jackson (Leith Links Residents Association): I was asked to come to the meeting today because of what I have experienced south of the border. I find the differences between Scottish law and English law bizarre and I cannot really understand the logic behind those differences. However, I am not a lawyer so those questions will remain.

As Rob Kirkwood said, it is very difficult and expensive for multiparty actions to be mounted in Scotland. Similarly, there is no enforceable protocol for the discovery of documents and their disclosure. That problem also needs to be addressed.

I will give you an example. I was the expert for one of the largest group actions in England, which involved the water company, United Utilities. I was instructed by lawyers acting for the residents. When I was first involved there were 12,000 claimants, but by the time that the case was settled out of court, the number of claimants had been whittled down to 5,000. United Utilities paid £4 million compensation, because those people had suffered in odorous conditions for 20 months.

The only reason why that case could be taken through legal proceedings was that the company was legally obliged to disclose documents. I was therefore able to view those documents and the case was progressed thereafter. The £4 million that was paid to the 5,000 residents for a 20-month nuisance is quite a lot of money. The way that things stand, Scottish taxpayers are severely disadvantaged.

The Convener: I appreciate that you are not a lawyer, but you have given us an interesting example. My understanding is that courts have a power to insist on documents being submitted to them. There is also a general rule about freedom of information, although I understand that it does not apply across the board. For the record, can you run us through why such powers have not been used in this case?

Professor Jackson: I do not think that there is any enforceable protocol in Scottish law for the discovery of documents. I have been interviewed by barristers about the case at Seafield. They asked me what sort of things I would want, and I replied that I would like the site management records of the operator, which happens to be a private company. Counsel's advice was that we would not get the documents. The case breaks

down before it starts if people cannot get access to the documentation that they need to make a case for negligence. People want to know what the liability is, and what the causation is.

Allan Smith (Leith Links Residents Association): I have been a resident in the area for 30 years. The issue has been going on for a very long time. It is very hard for an individual to fight against a large company.

The Convener: That is a clear statement that has been made by all the witnesses.

Sandra White: Professor Jackson's comments are interesting. FOI legislation and so on exists, but we cannot get the documentation in court because we are dealing with a private company. Is that right?

Professor Jackson: That is my understanding of the situation.

Sandra White: If it was a public company, would we be able to get the documentation?

Professor Jackson: If it was a public company, we could get information. In Scotland, a large proportion of public utilities—putting the water sector to one side—are managed under private finance initiatives. My understanding is that, if the PFI company is a private company, there is no enforceable protocol for it to disclose information that is requested.

Sandra White: Thank you for clarifying that.

15:15

The Convener: I have one final question, just so that we are totally clear. Is there a distinction between the situation with getting documentation prior to appearing in court and the situation post litigation, when courts generally have the power to get it?

Professor Jackson: The reason for having a pre-action protocol would be to get as much information as possible disclosed. It is all about avoiding the courts. If the document is out and we can all scrutinise it and agree what is what, there is no need to go to court, which is in everybody's interests. The issue is the lack of a pre-action protocol.

The Convener: Basically, the issue is about the need for a mediation process pre litigation and about getting the documents to prevent cases from going to court.

Professor Jackson: Yes. There needs to be open and full disclosure so that the documents can be scrutinised and the matter can be negotiated.

The Convener: Thank you—that is helpful and has added clarity.

I ask members for suggestions on the next steps. We have already hinted that it would be useful to continue the petition and ask the Scottish Government for its views. Do members agree to do that?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Sandra White: We should also write to the Lord President, the Court of Session rules council and the Scottish Law Commission. Can we clarify that, with a PFI contract involving a private company, we cannot get documents? Water is not privatised in Scotland, but it is in England, so I wonder whether there is a difference there and I would like to find out.

The Convener: That would certainly be useful.

As members have no further suggestions, I thank the witnesses for coming. The session was useful. As you heard, we have agreed unanimously to continue the petition and to write to the Scottish Government and a variety of other bodies. I thank Malcolm Chisholm for coming.

15:17

Meeting suspended.

15:18

On resuming—

Current Petitions

NHS 24 (Free Calls from Mobile Phones) (PE1285)

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is consideration of four current petitions, the first of which is PE1285, by Caroline Mockford, on free calls to NHS 24 from mobile phones. Members have a note from the clerk—paper PPC/S4/12/7/4. I invite comments from members.

Sandra White: I would like to continue the petition and ask for an update from the Scottish Government on when it expects to make a decision on the use of 111 numbers.

The Convener: Do members agree to Sandra White's recommendation?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: It is agreed that we will continue the petition, as set out in paragraph 19(1) of the clerk's paper.

Gypsy Traveller Encampments (Guidance) (PE1364)

The Convener: The second current petition is PE1364, by Phyllis McBain, on clarifying guidelines on Gypsy Traveller encampments. Members have a note by the clerk, which is paper PPC/S4/12/7/5, and a submission. I invite contributions from members.

Mark McDonald: I am trying to balance up the issue. Part of me thinks that we should keep the petition open and see what comes out of the review, but I can also see an argument for closing it on the basis that the petitioner has been invited to contribute to the review. The length of time that the review will take to reach its conclusions leads me to assume that, if the petitioner is dissatisfied with the outcome of the review, she could submit a fresh petition. I am therefore leaning toward suggesting that we close the petition, but we can make it very clear to the petitioner that I and Nanette Milne, as local members, will continue to keep an eye on the issue. We could wait a while for the outcome of the review; it would be strange to keep the petition open indefinitely.

Angus MacDonald: I am content to take on board the local members' suggestion that the petition be closed.

Nanette Milne: I, too, am happy to support that suggestion.

The Convener: That is a sensible way forward. What the petitioner has called for has, in effect,

happened in the sense that the review has been set up. We have to look carefully at what the petitioner is calling for before we decide. Mark McDonald has made a sensible suggestion. Do colleagues agree to close the petition under rule 15.7, on the basis that what the petitioner wanted has been achieved?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Lesser-taught Languages and Cultures (University Teaching Funding) (PE1395)

The Convener: The third current petition is PE1395, by Jan Čulík, on targeting funding for lesser-taught languages and cultures at universities. Members have a note from the clerk and paper 6 refers. There are also submissions. I welcome Jan Čulík and Hugh McMahon to the gallery. They have worked very hard on this petition for a number of months. I invite contributions from members.

Sandra White: I would like to continue the petition. I refer members to the letter that we got from Gillian Morrison of the Government, which basically says that the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council will provide additional information. That information is not enough for me and I do not think that it clarifies the situation. The letter from the SFC talks about how the language-based area studies programme and the Arts and Humanities Research Council put money in, and about how the SFC itself contributed money to the project. It seems to me that the SFC is saying that, because it contributed money away back in 2006 and in 2010-11, it is not prepared to contribute any more. No assessment has been done, although the SFC said that one would be done. I would like to write to the funding council to ask again what case assessment was carried out and what the conclusions were. I would also like to see a copy of the findings of any investigation.

Anne McTaggart: I declare my interest in that I am a member of the cross-party group on Poland, which has obviously tried to explore the issue. We should explore the issue in greater detail because it is cause for concern—most certainly in the cross-party group. I think, our having received the letter from Gillian Morrison, that it would be interesting to see what evidence there is.

The Convener: This is obviously a very important petition and it is good that we have spent a lot of time on the issue because it is important to the future of higher education. Are we agreeing to continue the petition, and to seek further information from the Scottish funding council on the basis of the points that have been made by Anne McTaggart and Sandra White?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: I thank the petitioners again for going to the trouble of turning up and for their contributions to date. I appreciate that.

Wild Animals in Circuses (Ban) (PE1400)

The Convener: The final petition for today is PE1400, by Libby Anderson, on behalf of OneKind, on a ban on the use of wild animals in circuses. Members have a note from the clerks and paper 7 and the submissions refer. I invite contributions from members.

Nanette Milne: The Scottish Government's letter says that it is waiting for clarification of the impact of legal issues and that it had hoped to have reported by now, but hopes to be able to do so by the summer recess. In that case, it would be sensible to postpone any further consideration until just before the summer recess when, we hope, we will have the information.

The Convener: Do members agree to continue the petition?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: I am sure that the clerks will timetable the petition's return to the committee for just before the recess so that we can re-examine it.

15:25

Meeting continued in private until 15:46.

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