

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 8 October 2025
15th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

PE2056: Introduce legislation allowing Scottish Ministers to intervene on the hire of public land

Introduction

Petitioner Stephen Gauld

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce legislation providing Ministers with the power to “call in” and potentially override council decisions on the hire of public land for large scale events.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2056>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 5 February 2025.](#) At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee’s last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new written submissions from Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government and the petitioner, which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee’s last consideration can be found on the petition’s webpage.](#)
5. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. [The Scottish Government gave its initial response to the petition on 9 February 2024.](#)
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 8 signatures have been received on this petition.

Action

8. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
October 2025

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2056: Introduce legislation allowing Scottish Ministers to intervene on the hire of public land

Petitioner

Stephen Gauld

Date Lodged

23 October 2023

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce legislation providing Ministers with the power to “call in” and potentially override council decisions on the hire of public land for large scale events.

Previous action

My company has raised this matter with the following:

- Council officials including the heads of land hire departments
- Our local MSP Rona Mackay
- Scottish Government Ministers including the Minister for Independence
- The Scottish Government’s Director of Culture and Major Events
- Neale Hanvey MP
- Local councillors
- The Scottish Land Commission
- The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

We have also sought legal advice from lawyers in Edinburgh and Glasgow, and engaged our public relations company to assist in contacting the bodies referred to above. We are continually refused engagement.

Background information

Despite having a very good track record with loads of experience of delivering large scale events, my business has, since 2006, tried to hire land from councils but we have been continually refused. Reasons given have included not wanting land to be damaged, being too close to a residential area, and in one case not allowing us to book the event space in case someone else wanted to book it. When trying to address these concerns, we have been fobbed off and declined meetings, this includes several attempts to meet with the Chief Executives for Glasgow and Edinburgh City Councils.

There does not appear to any reason for local councils to behave the way they are, other than they have their own agenda, which excludes anyone they don't want to engage with.

Having spoken to other business owners, we have become aware we are not the only people this is happening to.

Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2056 on 5 February 2025

The Deputy Convener: Our next petition is PE2056, which was lodged by Stephen Gauld, and calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce legislation providing ministers with the power to call in and potentially override council decisions on the hire of public land for large-scale events.

We last considered the petition at our meeting on 6 March 2024, where we agreed to seek the views of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Association for Public Service Excellence in Scotland, Event Scotland, the Scottish Tourism Alliance, and the Scottish Showmen's Guild, on its ask.

Responses from Event Scotland and the Association for Public Service Excellence are similar to the view that the Scottish Government previously provided to us, which was that local authorities are best placed to make decisions about the hiring and use of public land. Indeed, APSE highlighted that

“such decisions are subject to judicial review ... and ... any disputes regarding decision making would be ... for the court to adjudicate on”.

COSLA responded to let us know that it has “no position” on the matter but suggested that we might want to contact the Society of Local Authority Lawyers and Administrators Scotland for its view.

The Scottish Tourism Alliance responded to say that it believes that

“where there is no sound reason given in refusing the hiring of land for events and there is a clear case that it delivers a positive local, regional, and national economic impact ... it would be fair that the Scottish Government could have the power granted to challenge the local authority's decision”.

The response goes on to state that

“it is important that there is an open and transparent dialogue with local authorities” and others, including businesses,

“to reach an informed decision if an event is to take place”.

We have also received a submission from the petitioner commenting on the various responses and setting out his view that the hire of public land is separate from council licensing procedures, as they come into effect once permission to hire the land is granted.

Do any members have comments?

Fergus Ewing: The evidence that we have had from the Scottish Tourism Alliance, which you helpfully read out to us, deputy convener, should be pursued—namely, the recommendation that the Scottish Government should have power to challenge a local government decision. We need to explore that further.

The petitioner's previous comments state that he was “fobbed off” with various excuses, and there has not really been any answer to that. On one occasion, he was

told that he could not use the land because someone else might want it—for goodness' sake, what sort of an excuse is that? I know that the Scottish Tourism Alliance represents a huge range of tourism bodies, so its voice is significant. The fact that it has chosen to respond with that specific suggestion makes me feel that we should pursue the matter further rather than close the petition at this juncture, to be fair to the petitioner. It may be that the Scottish Government will refuse to do that—I would not be surprised if it were to do so—but we should at least ask it.

The Deputy Convener: Are we agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C: Written submissions

Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government written submission, 10 March 2025

PE2056/H: Introduce legislation allowing Scottish Ministers to intervene on the hire of public land

Thank you for your letter of the 6 February 2025 regarding the petition on introducing legislation allowing Scottish Ministers to intervene on the hire of public land.

The Scottish Government's position on this proposal remains unchanged from the response issued by the previous Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning on the 1 February 2024.

Local and national government have committed to respecting each other's democratic mandates as part of the Verity House Agreement and it is the view of the Scottish Government that locally elected representatives are best placed to prioritise the needs of the local community.

As long as they act lawfully, it is up to each democratically elected council how it manages its day-to-day business and decision-making processes, Scottish Ministers would not intervene in decisions relating to the hiring of public land owned by local authorities. Ultimately, it is for locally elected representatives to make local decisions on how best to serve their communities. Should individuals or businesses wish to raise concerns about a decision taken by a local authority, each council has a formal complaints procedure. Should the matter remain unresolved, it may also be possible to refer any concerns to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

I hope this response is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

SHONA ROBISON

Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government written submission, 2 May 2025

PE2056/I: Introduce legislation allowing Scottish Ministers to intervene on the hire of public land

Thank you for your letter of the 21 March 2025 regarding the petition on introducing legislation allowing Scottish Ministers to intervene on the hire of public land. Noting your request for a reply by 22 April 2025, please accept my apologies for not responding sooner.

As previously advised, the Scottish Government's position on this proposal remains unchanged from the response issued by the previous Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning on the 1 February 2024.

The Scottish Tourism Alliance submission does not change our position, and the Scottish Government would not consider introducing a mechanism to allow it to

intervene, where a local authority has not provided a sound reason for refusing an application for the hire of public land. Local and national government have committed to respecting each other's democratic mandates as part of the Verity House Agreement. It would be against the principles set out in this agreement for the Scottish Government to intervene in decisions relating to the hire of public land owned by local authorities, or pass judgement on what is, or is not, a "sound reason" for refusing an application. It is the view of the Scottish Government that locally elected representatives are in the best possible position to judge whether the hire of local land is in the best interests of the local community. Ministers would hope that local authorities would make a balanced decision in relation to applications to hire public land, factoring all relevant considerations to ensure decisions best help achieve the shared priorities between local and national government to best meet the needs of the local communities they serve.

As previously advised, the Scottish Government is of the view that a suitable mechanism already exists for individuals or businesses who wish to raise concerns about a decision taken by a local authority, through council's formal complaints procedures and the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. Matters can also be raised with Local Councillors.

I hope this response provides clarity on the Scottish Government's position on this proposal.

Yours sincerely,

SHONA ROBISON

Petitioner written submission, 19 September 2025

PE2056/J: Introduce legislation allowing Scottish Ministers to intervene on the hire of public land

There have been a few developments since the last consideration of our petition.

Glasgow

We received contact from Glasgow Council events land hire on the 7th of January 2025, bizarrely just as the second hearing of our petition was submitted. They asked us to contact them regarding enquiries we had made on land hire in Glasgow in the summer of 2024, stating they were aware of several email enquiries but thought a "conversation or a site visit may be more useful". We obliged and set a meeting to hire Glasgow Green, where we were told immediately we could not hire it because the council had planned a Christmas Market and wished us to be involved and that there was a toxic dump that we could not set up our event on top of. We informed them that Christmas market type events are not what we do, and asked if we can hire Bellahouston Park for a large scale event. We were told the land was available on the date 30th May 2026 and were asked to fill in the permission to use form, which we did immediately mid-January. After chasing several times we heard back from Glasgow events, a different department, asking for a full breakdown of the event and saying that it would need to go to the events board, we provided this immediately. We expressed concerns regarding plagiarism, which is rife in this industry and were told it would be treated as confidential but we would not be told who sat on the

events board. After chasing for a month we were told it was going to an in-house advisory group for a collective decision on a city wide appraisal as it was “GCC Land”, I always thought it belonged to us, the people. Anyway, after chasing for nearly 2 months we heard back from GCC Land hire asking for a meeting with our team. We held a meeting 3 weeks later and gave them an overview of the event, who was performing, and all relevant details.

After some more chasing, 6 weeks later we received feedback that as we had not held an event of this scale before, they wanted to set another meeting with Police Scotland to make sure they were happy. After more chasing, a month later we heard back saying they would contact Police Scotland for a date, a month later another email, “we’ve not forgotten about you, we will chase Police Scotland for a date” (now start of September). After more chasing and an unannounced office visit, we received a date of 17th September.

At this meeting we had TWO globally respected event managers/organisers who have organised every kind of massive event everywhere in the world, one of the most proficient traffic management people on the planet and one of the most respected security companies in the UK (the latter two could not get into the Teams meeting after several attempts). At this meeting GCC and Police Scotland after all questions had been answered by the experts said we needed to provide a full management plan (at a cost of approximately £100k) which would then go to the Events Board for consideration and that we still did not have permission to use the land.

Aberdeen

We last approached Aberdeen City Council in March 2025 and were told we could not hire our chosen park until late August because of current yearly bookings. They have since hired to other events companies in the summer.

We contacted ACC the start of June 2025, heard nothing for a month, again made contact and heard nothing for 2 weeks, contacted them again and were given a direct email address (the only way to contact land hire). We received a response two days later asking for details, which we answered immediately, they came back with a form that we filled in giving all event details including management personnel involved and asking for a Teams call. They came back saying they were too busy for that and asked were the details on the form correct regarding capacity and “have we run an event of this scale before” and said they don’t think the park will accommodate this many people. We assured them it would and that the numbers we quoted were correct, emphasising the experience of the team involved and that time was marching on and we asked can we get the process started. This took us to last week but have heard nothing since.

I believe this is an utterly ridiculous state of affairs, it seems impossible to get any kind of commitment on land hire. Once land hire is given we still need to go through the full licensing process and also provide all the relevant documents on the actual event itself, which is a different process to the council, the land hire should be the easy part of this. As the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee is the only way for citizens that are actually on the sharp end of this to get something done about this, it is beyond question that the Scottish Government need to step in as this

is not only a time wasting, expensive and demoralising way to have to do business, but also a nationwide issue.