

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 11 February 2026
4th Meeting, 2026 (Session 6)

PE2138: Make publicly owned buildings accessible for people with colour blindness

Introduction

Petitioner Ian Hume McKee

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to make the design and signage for publicly owned buildings accessible for people with colour blindness.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2138>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 18 June 2025.](#) At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Disability Equality Scotland.
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 the Cabinet Secretary for Housing, the Petitioner and Disability Equality Scotland 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 13 June 2025.](#)
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 59 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
February 2026

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2138: Make publicly owned buildings accessible for people with colour blindness

Petitioner

Ian Hume McKee

Date Lodged

20 January 2025

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to make the design and signage for publicly owned buildings accessible for people with colour blindness.

Background information

Colour blindness, mainly an impaired ability to distinguish between red and green, affects about one in twelve Scottish men and one in two hundred women. Despite this frequency very little if anything has been done to make life easier for colour blind people, indeed things are slightly worse. For example, once the signage on public toilet doors was 'vacant' or 'engaged' but now it is usually red or green and the recent proliferation of unisex toilet cubicles drives men to use cubicles when before a urinal in a men only toilet would have been used. Hospitals use red and green lines to direct patients and graphs on government documents use colour to differentiate trends.

Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2138 on 18 June 2025

The Convener: We come to PE2138. Colleagues will be aware that they have fresh submissions before them. The petition was lodged by Dr Ian Hume McKee, who, you might remember—well, no, only Fergus Ewing, David Torrance and I might remember—is a former parliamentary colleague of ours. He stood down in 2011, I understand. I remember Dr Ian McKee—I can remember some very florid chamber contributions and sparring engagements in times past. The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to make the design and signage for publicly owned buildings accessible for people with colour blindness. Good morning, Dr McKee, if you are joining us.

The petitioner highlights the difficulty that he and other colour-blind people experience when dealing with a world in which information is often provided in a colour-coded way. He points out that hospitals use red and green lines to direct patients, and graphs and Government documents use colour to differentiate trends. The SPICe briefing states:

“While there are regulations and guidance on inclusive access to public buildings, there is limited specific guidance on addressing the challenges associated with colour blindness.”

The briefing outlines the requirement to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people, as set out in the Equality Act 2010. However, SPICe notes that it is not clear whether colour blindness would constitute a disability under the act, as it would likely depend on the impact that the condition has on an individual.

We have received a written submission from our parliamentary colleague Gordon MacDonald, which highlights the challenges that are faced by colour-blind high school students. He shares an example of a student in his constituency who was unable to answer a higher geography exam question because it could be answered only by identifying colours on a map. He explains that the question was worth 20 out of 100 marks, so the student was left at a serious disadvantage.

10:15

I mentioned at the beginning of this agenda item that we seek an initial view from the Scottish Government on each new petition. However, I was disappointed that the response from the Scottish Government on this petition, which was due in mid-February, was only very recently received. We now have that response before us, and I wonder whether the committee would like to consider how best to proceed. If responses to our inquiries are not timeously responded to, it merely delays our ability to represent the petitioner who has brought the petition before Parliament, which is our responsibility and our endeavour. We understand that it can take a little time to consider a petition, but it is very unhelpful if we do not have the response in due course, such that we can consider the detail of the petition timeously.

Maurice Golden: With the delay to the response, in addition to its generality, it would be worth while writing back to the minister seeking detailed views on the action that is called for in the petition; details of the current accessibility standards for the design and signage in publicly owned buildings for people with colour blindness; and the minister's view on whether it is acceptable for the Scottish Government to fail to provide a response to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee, as the convener has highlighted. Perhaps it would also be as well to write to Disability Equality Scotland seeking its views on the action that is called for in the petition.

The Convener: It must have been quite tricky for any higher geography student suddenly discovering that part of the exam was conditional on being able to identify colours, because they would be quite concerned. The suggestion that colour blindness might not actually be a disability of any sort is therefore also a cause for concern.

Are colleagues content with Mr Golden's suggestion?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C: Written submissions

Cabinet Secretary for Housing written submission, 25 July 2025

PE2138/E: Make publicly owned buildings accessible for people with colour blindness

Firstly, thank you for raising the matter of Petition PE2138 with me. I acknowledge that delays in providing responses to petitions, as was the case with PE2138, while an isolated incident, is unacceptable and has had a detrimental impact on the ability of the committee to fully consider the subject matter. I can only apologise for how this has affected the ability of the committee to undertake its important and valued work.

With regard to the initial response, the Scottish Government importantly noted how tonal contrast was used to address accessibility issues relating to colour blindness as well as visual impairments more widely within the built environment. This is established as best practice within British Standard BS 8300 which makes recommendations on the use of light reflective values within buildings and signage to establish tonal contrast between elements as well as use of universally accepted public information symbols and colour coding as set out under international standard ISO 7010 and BS 5499-4 where this relates to health and safety signage.

Where guidance is produced by the Scottish Government, the recommendations of BS 8300 are either cited directly or inform its production. This is demonstrated by examples from building regulations, the requirements of Scottish Government estates projects and sector specific guidance for NHS estates as provided.

The scope of the petition also includes buildings and services operated by wider public authorities and includes the production of displayed materials both internally or via external contracts. As an operational matter, it would be for the relevant public authority to produce its own guidance, reflective of its building estate and needs of its service users. Such guidance is regularly reviewed by relevant in-house teams, in so far as it relates to visual impairments more generally. Where there are specific issues or concerns, these should be raised directly with the relevant public authority who can review and update guidance as appropriate.

With regard to the broader question of whether or not colour blindness is defined as a disability for the purposes of The Equality Act 2010, the committee is reminded that the Act is reserved legislation and therefore a matter for the UK Government. While the Scottish Government already provides guidance in line with best practice, where we have powers to do so, we are unable to offer comment on issues relating to reserved powers or operational matters that form the broader scope of this petition.

In recognising the wide-ranging nature of the petition and focus on operational matters, we must acknowledge that response to such questions require input from across multiple policy areas. Looking forward I have asked Officials in my portfolio area to review procedures so that in future cases, and indeed in respect of the Committee's work, rounded and fulsome responses can be offered.

I trust this assists with the ongoing consideration of the petition.

Yours sincerely,

MÀIRI MCALLAN

Petitioner written submission, 30 August 2025

PE2138/F: Make publicly owned buildings accessible for people with colour blindness

The Scottish Government's submission of 13th June correctly describes colour blindness but fails to mention that it affects at least 8% of Scottish men so it is a handicap for a significant minority.

In both submissions strong reference is made to the recommendations of British Standard BS8300 and its requirement for difference in light reflective values when using colour as a discriminatory factor. But BS8300 also strongly recommends the use of well recognised symbols or words in addition to colour. Thus toilet signage should include 'ENGAGED' or 'VACANT' and trend lines in graphs should be distinguished by symbols. Yet this rarely happens.

The Government states that specific guidance to follow the recommendations of BS8300 is given in the design of Scottish Government estates and NHS estates; it would be interesting to be provided with examples of how this has turned out in practice. But it emphasises that such guidance is not retrospective and that much development is the responsibility of local government or private developers. Moreover the issue of whether colour blindness is a recognised disability is a reserved matter and so the SG cannot comment on the issue.

I find this dismissive stance very depressing. It is my experience that there is a great deal of ignorance about problems experienced by the colour blind and simply explaining them can result in immediate progress. Changing a lock on a toilet cubicle costs around £14 plus the labour; a sports club of which I am a member immediately agreed to do this on my request. It costs nothing to use symbols on graphs or avoid red laser pointers in lectures. And I find it amazing that the situation described by Gordon Macdonald MSP in which a Highers candidate was handicapped by his colour blindness should not concern the Scottish Government on the grounds that disability is a reserved matter.

In summary, there is a great deal of ignorance about the problems of those of us who are colour blind, yet there is a reserve of goodwill to help and that simple, cheap measures exist to ameliorate these problems. I maintain that the Scottish Government has a role in encouraging such measures and ask the Committee to pursue this issue.

Disability Equality Scotland written submission, 4 December 2025

PE2138/G: Make publicly owned buildings accessible for people with colour blindness

We write to respond to the above petition.

Disability Equality Scotland agrees that colour blindness should be considered as an important factor when creating signage for individuals with colour blindness and other impairments.

Whilst the petition recognises the red-green being an issue, there are many other types of colour blindness to be considered. Two other common combinations are blue-yellow and complete colour blindness.

The petitioner gives the example of just using colours, rather than colours and words. We support that there should be a combination of colour and image and/or words. However, the contrast of the background and image/wording must be considered.

The Equality Act 2010 provides a framework for services and public functions to ensure that disabled individuals have equal access and opportunities. It requires reasonable adjustments to be made to access and services. Whilst this is often seen as putting information into large print and/or Easy Read, colour blindness causes many barriers for individuals and is, unfortunately, not considered.

Disability Equality Scotland promotes and follows the social model of disability. The social model indicates that people are disabled by the built environment and society's perceptions and assumptions. Not considering individuals who live with colour blindness when creating signage is another example of public bodies not following the social model or the Equality Act.

We hope this information is helpful to the Committee in their review of this petition.