



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 8 March 2016

Session 4

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PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE
6th Meeting 2016, Session 4

CONVENER

*Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con)

*Kenny MacAskill (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)

*Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP)

*Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab)

*John Wilson (Central Scotland) (Ind)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP)

John Scott (Ayr) (Con)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Catherine Fergusson

LOCATION

The Sir Alexander Fleming Room (CR3)

Scottish Parliament

Public Petitions Committee

Tuesday 8 March 2016

[The Convener opened the meeting at 11:01]

Continued Petitions

The Convener (Michael McMahon): Good morning, and welcome to the sixth meeting in 2016 of the Public Petitions Committee—the final meeting of this session. I remind everyone, including members, that mobile phones and BlackBerrys should be turned off, as they can interfere with the sound system.

Before beginning our formal agenda, I want to bring the committee's attention to an issue in relation to PE1593, from Fans against Criminalisation, which we have been considering for some time.

A complaint was made under the code of conduct. Section 7.3 of volume 2 of the code details the requirements in relation to members' conduct during a committee meeting. That section of the code cross-refers to rules 7.3.1 and 7.3.2 of the standing orders. Section 9.1.6(a) of volume 2 of the code provides that complaints about the conduct of a committee member are to be referred to the convener of that committee.

Upon receiving the complaint, I thought that it was only fair to afford the member who was complained about the opportunity to respond to the terms of that complaint. I therefore extended that opportunity to Kenny MacAskill, as he was the person who had been complained about, but I at no point made any comment about the substance of that complaint.

That simply fulfils the responsibilities that come with the role of convener under the code of conduct. Those responsibilities are determined by the Parliament and I must act—and have acted—in accordance with them. I provided clarification to Kenny MacAskill of the basis on which the complaint fell to me to consider in that role and advised him of how to go about seeking clarification from the clerks of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, should he wish to do so.

It appears to me that Mr MacAskill conflated an invitation to provide comments with a finding on the terms of the complaint and responded with comments that challenged my authority as committee convener and attacked me personally. I therefore asked him to withdraw his comments

about my conduct and to apologise for them, and to respond to the complaint. He has done neither.

On 21 November 2012, I made certain comments in the chamber. In response, the Presiding Officer said:

“The standing orders of this Parliament explicitly state that members shall respect the authority of the Presiding Officer. It is inevitable that decisions of the chair will not meet the approval of all members at all times. That has always been the case. Nevertheless, it is imperative that the authority of the chair is respected at all times.

I acknowledge that Mr McMahon apologised.

As Presiding Officer, I will support to the limits of my power the conduct of parliamentary business in this chamber. I will, however, not tolerate behaviour that falls short of the standards that the people whom we are privileged to represent expect of us.”

The Presiding Officer could do that, but I have found that standing orders and the code of conduct have offered me no protection whatsoever in respect of the deliberate contempt that Mr MacAskill has shown towards me and, more importantly, the petitioner and the third sector body that also complained about his comment.

I wanted to put that on the record, because I feel that it is completely inadequate that the code of conduct does not provide any protection to the convener in that regard, and I should advise the committee that I will be writing to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee about my concerns in that respect.

Youth Football (PE1319)

11:05

The Convener: The first item of business is consideration of continued petitions, the first of which is PE1319, by William Smith and Scott Robertson, on improving youth football in Scotland. Members have a note from the clerks and copies of the submissions. I welcome Chic Brodie to the meeting. He has shown an on-going interest in the petition, and I invite him to comment.

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): Thank you for allowing me to attend and to speak on the petition. Before I do so, I would like to comment briefly on the letter from the Scottish Professional Football League, which I have just seen. It reflects the answer to a letter that I wrote to the Scottish Football Association and the SPFL about one individual's transfer and payment, although there are several other cases. The letter states, in paragraph 2:

“We are often told of these payments but, to date, we have been provided with no evidence and it therefore is of great concern to us that there is continuing allegation and innuendo without any actual substantiation.”

I wrote to the SPFL highlighting the name of the individual, whom I will not mention here, in a transfer between two of Scotland's senior clubs for a sum in the region of £40,000, we believe, of which £8,000 went to an agent. The SFA and SPFL said that they were not aware of that but, lo and behold, the front page of the agent's website declared that they had registered the individual for whom we sought information. We will go back to them and we will highlight not only that case but the others of which we are aware. It is stretching it a bit far for the SPFL to say that it has

"been provided with no evidence",

when the agent has declared publicly that the individual has been registered. I have to question the registration competence of the bodies concerned.

That said, I am delighted to be able to address the substance of the petition, and I will be brief. There are two real tests to the petition, which I was happy to speak to before, and I am happy to have been involved with those who brought the petition to us. The most important aspect, reflected in the report by the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, is the potential exploitation of children, some of whom, I am told, are as young as six years old. The commissioner's reports are invaluable in opening a window on what he believes is necessary and what he thinks has been happening.

The second important aspect is the outcome for, and the performance of, Scottish football generally. It is not good. Failure at international level, European level and world level is evidence of national performance. The sport is too centralised, takes too much of a short-term view and is skewed toward the larger clubs, and that does not help with the expectations of young people who are brought into that environment. I believe that it needs a major overhaul and reorganisation, with stronger emphasis on Scottish youth. In my opinion, we need only one national organisation to do that, and I have to ask which of the two organisations is truly fit for purpose with regard to the creation of a youth and elite academy that reflects the size of the Scottish population and does not try to emulate a disproportionate level of involvement in an elite academy that is almost equivalent with that of Germany.

The overhaul of young people's football in terms of the role and qualification of agents must also be considered, particularly with regard to children, and of course there must be emphasis on the role of parents. There should be clear guidelines and penalties for agents, and consideration should also be given to how some parents might be seduced into signing their children up to professional football clubs. There is a wider role

for clubs in social and other local sports and community activity.

Lastly, we must ensure that in no way is there a detriment to the education of boys and girls who are involved in trying to fulfil the expectation of being good professional footballers, and in some cases, great professional footballers. That can only be done if football is brought meaningfully to schools, communities and grassroots boys and girls clubs to ensure that we begin again to believe that not only should football be competitive, but also fun for children. Children are not for sale.

On that basis, I support the petition and I applaud the petitioners for lodging it. We ask the committee to consider the appropriate action that the Parliament can take. I have spoken to the Minister for Sport, Health Improvement and Mental Health several times on the matter. Now is the time for action.

The Convener: Thank you for an interesting speech, Chic. Do members have any comments?

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): Thanks to the petitioner, the SFA and the SPFL have taken the issues concerning youth football reasonably seriously. The petitioner has stated that the petition is moving the clubs and the governing bodies in the right direction. We have also seen the Children and Young People's Commissioner say that it is clear that there have been some improvements in the approach taken to children involved in youth football.

However, there are still matters that are outstanding. I note the commissioner's comment that he no longer believes that the matters that remain outstanding can be dealt with by self-regulation. He recommends that the Public Petitions Committee refers the matter to the Scottish Government to consider how the issues may be dealt with through external regulation. That suggestion was backed by the petitioner.

In light of those responses and taking on board Chic Brodie's comments this morning, I suggest that the committee close the petition, but also write to the Scottish Government asking for it to consider regulation through legislation to prohibit controls over young people that would not be permissible in any other walk of life, as the petitioner put it.

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (Ind): Unlike Angus MacDonald, I do not think that we should close the petition, although I agree that we should write to the Scottish Government to seek its views regarding regulation. The Children and Young People's Commissioner has indicated that there are concerns. Having listened to some of the evidence from the SFA and the SPFL, it is clear that they do not seem to be taking the issue as

seriously as the general public and the petitioners do.

It is only right that we write to the Scottish Government seeking its views on the matter and that we include that as part of our legacy paper for the next committee. There are still issues that need to be addressed. Hopefully our successor committee will get some response from the Scottish Government about what action it will take.

Too often we hear about self-regulation not being regulation at all. If organisations such as the SFA and the SPFL are not prepared to regulate or accept and acknowledge that there are some issues out there in relation to youth football, we must consider a form of regulation that encompasses and protects those young people and their families from what could be seen as abuse by unscrupulous agents or clubs.

The Convener: I am also minded to keep the petition open and include it in our legacy paper. The SFA and the SPFL are entities in their own right and like any other commercial organisations they have the right to make rules to govern themselves. Equally, they take public money and they recently asked the Scottish Government to contribute to initiatives that they have been pursuing. They cannot have it both ways; they cannot make the argument that they are of such cultural and sporting importance that the Scottish Government has a responsibility towards them, but then say that they do not have any responsibility to act in a way that those who represent the general public would consider to be appropriate.

They have not been pushing hard against having a discussion around the matter and they have indicated that they would be prepared to sit down in a round-table discussion. We could suggest to the successor committee that it could pursue such a round-table discussion. It could see whether any constructive discussions could be had, leading to some consensus being achieved as to how to go forward.

11:15

John Wilson: Convener, Mr Brodie will be able to testify that the SFA and SPFL resisted the first attempt to get them to a meeting of the Public Petitions Committee. They felt that they were not accountable to the Scottish Parliament for their actions. Although I agree that it might be useful to invite them to a future committee meeting, I advise any successor committee to look back at the initial responses from the SFA and the SPFL to the original invitation. It took some persuasion to get those two bodies to sit in a committee meeting to discuss and answer some of the issues that were raised by the petitioners. I just wanted to make

you aware of the fact that they have given evidence in the past but they did so reluctantly.

Chic Brodie: I had meetings at Hampden Park with the SFA and the SPFL. Some encouraging things are happening in Scottish football. For example, fans' involvement in the role of Hibs and Hearts in widening the involvement in the franchise is encouraging, but that is at the senior level.

The need for an evidence base was reiterated at the meeting at Hampden. I think that that evidence has been produced but having a round-table discussion and certainly continuing the petition with that information and with the involvement of parents would be good. Parents have come to me with problems that they were having with the major clubs in Scotland and the impact that it was having on their children's education. There is the binding "contract" in relation to how the parents have signed up children to be involved and they are tied very much to one specific club, hence the issue that we raised about transfer fees.

I would be encouraged if the petition were to carry on as part of the legacy paper and if a round-table discussion was held, certainly with more evidence than we had the first time. Perhaps the committee could bring in parents who would be willing to comment on their experience of what happens.

The Convener: It would be for the next committee to determine what to do but we can certainly suggest that it considers such an action if we keep the petition open. I take on board John Wilson's request to write to the Government and get a response in relation to that specific point. I think that we can do both. Do members agree?

Members indicated agreement.

Angus MacDonald: If the general consensus of members is to keep the petition open and to include it in the legacy paper, I am content with that, so long as John Wilson's suggestion about writing to the Scottish Government is included.

With regard to a further evidence session, clearly we have tried that in the past. However, Chic Brodie's suggestion that parents should be part of that round-table discussion is certainly a good one if we are going to go down that route because it is good to hear straight from the horse's mouth, as it were.

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): I reluctantly concur with the consensus to keep the petition open. It has been going since 2010 and I am not sure that we will make any significant further progress as a committee at all. That is my view. However, I note what the commissioner says, which is summed up in John Wilson's recommendation that we ask the Scottish

Government whether it has any will to intervene. I agree to keep the petition open on that basis.

The Convener: That is a fair enough point to make. I think that there is a consensus that we will try to keep the petition open and try to pursue it a bit further. I thank Chic Brodie for his contribution.

Chic Brodie: Thank you for allowing me to speak, convener.

Bond of Caution (PE1412)

The Convener: PE1412, by Bill McDowell, is on bonds of caution. Members have a note from the clerk and submissions in relation to the petition. Do committee members have any suggestions to make?

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I am quite happy to close the petition under rule 15.7 of standing orders.

The Convener: Are members agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Gender-neutral Human Papillomavirus Vaccination (PE1477)

The Convener: PE1477, by Jamie Rae, is on behalf of the Throat Cancer Foundation, on a gender-neutral human papillomavirus vaccination. I invite contributions from members on the petition.

Angus MacDonald: I note the petitioner's request for the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation to

"accelerate its assessment so that a decision on vaccinating adolescent boys is made in 2016, not 2017."

However, I also note the JCVI's comment that

"it would be inadvisable to take shortcuts which could undermine the validity of the results in order to expedite"

the review. Although I understand the petitioner's frustration at the length of time that the matter is taking, we should take on board the JCVI's comments.

That said, we should write to the Scottish Government to ask that it

"consider early adoption of a programme",

as the petitioner has suggested, and keep the petition open for the legacy paper while we await the Scottish Government's response.

Jackson Carlaw: I am minded to recommend that we close the petition on the basis that the JCVI has agreed to the objectives that were set out in the original request and will make recommendations that will fulfil the petition's request. I am not sure what more the committee could achieve.

The Convener: I take Jackson Carlaw's point, but we could wait until we got the Scottish Government's response. There is not much left to do, but a response would still be due back from the Government if we wrote to it. Notwithstanding the fact that some progress has been made with the JCVI, we could wait to see that response.

Angus MacDonald: There certainly has been progress, and I am minded to close the petition. However, I take on board the petitioner's comments and agree that we should do that wee bit extra.

The Convener: One more letter cannot do any harm.

Do members agree that we should write to the Scottish Government and keep the petition open while we wait for its response?

Members indicated agreement.

A Sunshine Act for Scotland (PE1493)

The Convener: PE1493, by Peter John Gordon, is on a sunshine act for Scotland. What action should be taken on the petition? There is stunned silence.

Jackson Carlaw: I am minded to close the petition under rule 15.7 of the standing orders on the basis that the Scottish Government has undertaken to review the need for updated guidance on what the petition calls for and is consulting on the issue to gather views. Again, we have fulfilled the objectives that the petitioner originally set out. It is not for us to do what has been requested; it is for us to urge the Government, which has said that it will do that.

The Convener: Exactly. I cannot think of anything else that we need to do. Do members agree?

David Torrance: I am happy to support Jackson Carlaw's suggestion.

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Okay. We will close the petition.

Polypropylene Mesh Medical Devices (PE1517)

The Convener: PE1517, by Elaine Holmes and Olive McIlroy, on behalf of the Scottish mesh survivors hear our voice campaign, is on mesh medical devices. John Scott, who has joined us, has pursued the matter with diligence. Do you want to make some comments before we consider the petition?

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I am grateful that the committee has carried out the work that it has carried out and for the letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport, Shona

Robison. I am delighted that the committee has taken a very serious matter forward in a thoughtful and sensitive way.

I note from the committee's paper that it believes that consideration of the petition should be extended into the next session of Parliament. If that is the view of the members of the committee, I share it.

On behalf of the many affected petitioners, I congratulate the committee on its efforts thus far. It should keep up the good work and keep watching, because not all the problems have been solved yet. I am aware of recent reports in the press about huge claims having been paid out in America because of injuries that have been suffered as a result of mesh implants. That is only likely to lead to more litigation in this country. To avoid that in the future, we must be vigilant in how we deal with the problem.

Jackson Carlaw: It is clear that we should keep the petition open and include it in our legacy paper.

I note two specific points in the cabinet secretary's letter. First, we will see a copy of the report on the single-incision mini-slings. Secondly, and more urgently, there is the de facto determination that the regulation of medical devices is reserved to Westminster and that our concern about the conduct of the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency and its interrogation of the devices cannot be addressed by our looking to the Scottish Government to set up a parallel operation.

It would be useful for the committee to write to the United Kingdom Government minister who is responsible for the MHRA, drawing their attention to the work that the committee has done on the subject and asking how we can influence the debate that is taking place over whether the MHRA is properly regulating the devices, about which we have significant concern.

The Convener: More information about the matter is appearing all the time, and we are hearing more horrendous information about the impact of the implants. There is still a good bit of work to be done on the petition and on the issue in general.

There is a consensus on the committee that we should keep the petition open and allow the Public Petitions Committee in the next parliamentary session to continue to scrutinise it. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Thank you very much, John.

John Scott: Thank you very much for allowing me to speak, convener.

Restraint and Seclusion in Schools (National Guidance) (PE1548)

The Convener: PE1548, by Beth Morrison, is on national guidance on restraint and seclusion in schools. There is still work that we need to do on the petition. It would be advisable to write to the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, inviting his views on the guidance that is proposed by the petition, and to include the petition in our legacy paper for session 5. Do members agree?

Members indicated agreement.

Sewage Sludge (PE1563)

The Convener: PE1563, by Doreen Goldie, on behalf of Avonbridge and Standburn community council, is on sewage sludge spreading.

Angus MacDonald: I declare a constituency interest in the issue.

As we can see from the petitioners' submission, they broadly welcome and agree with most of the recommendations that have come out of the Scottish Government's sludge review. I note that they are disappointed that no reduction in the spreading of sewage sludge is planned in the near future. However, the petition has achieved a great deal. It brought forward the review—in fact, we could argue that the review might not have happened had it not been for the petition. In addition, following pressure from me and from Margaret Mitchell MSP—John Wilson has also had an interest in the matter—the Scottish Government has taken on board a large number of the points that have been raised.

Given the new legislation on the subject that is on the way, the consultation that that will generate and the fact that the petitioners now have direct access to the lead Scottish Government officials, which is also a welcome development, I would normally have been minded to close the petition because it is a success story for the petitioners and the Public Petitions Committee. However, while welcoming the progress, the committee should keep the petition open to allow us to keep a watching brief on any further progress that is made following the introduction of legislation and on the recommendations that have been made to give the Scottish Environment Protection Agency more power to control the issue.

There is a strong argument for keeping the petition open, and I hope that other members of the committee are similarly minded.

John Wilson: Like Angus MacDonald, I think that we should keep the petition open. We have achieved a lot and useful progress has been made. However, the petitioners raised a number of questions in their submission of 1 March, in

response to the Scottish Government's action to date. It would be useful to write to the Scottish Government with those questions to find out whether they can be answered and dealt with as part of the review process. We need to ensure that the Government not only has a review and issues guidance but, at the same time, answers the petitioners' questions. There is no point in the Government producing a review document that says what it will do if some of the questions that the community council has raised are still outstanding.

It would be useful to write to the Scottish Government, saying that further questions have been asked, asking for clarification on those issues and urging the Government to ensure that they be covered as part of any guidance that is issued. There is a particular issue with SEPA's powers. As we have discussed previously, it is okay to say that an agency has powers but, if it does not have sufficient resources to use those powers, the powers are, in effect, meaningless.

11:30

Jackson Carlaw: I am minded to close the petition. The petition calls on the Scottish Government to ban the use of sewage sludge, but the Scottish Government has made it clear that it supports the practice of spreading raw sewage. I do not know whether that is a metaphor more generally but, in any event, the Government has declined to support the aims of the petition.

Nevertheless, I hear what my colleagues say. If they believe that their suggestion would allow us to pursue the petition in the next session, I am minded to support that, but it is pretty clear that the Scottish Government will not agree to the actual objective of the petition.

The Convener: We have been in this position before. We accept that the Government is not going to do what the petition asks for, but that does not mean that there is not an area that the committee can continue to scrutinise and ask questions about. Hopefully, we will get some answers.

Angus MacDonald: As I understand it, the petitioners have submitted their response directly to the Scottish Government and now have direct access to the lead officials, which I am sure is welcomed by everybody. However, there is no harm in the committee resubmitting the questions that the petitioners have raised in order to get feedback directly from the Scottish Government. That is a good suggestion.

The Convener: I am happy to keep the petition open until we get that response. At that point, the session 5 committee can determine whether there

is any value in taking the matter further. Do members agree?

Members indicated agreement.

Adult Cerebral Palsy Services (PE1577)

The Convener: PE1577, by Rachael Wallace, is on adult cerebral palsy services. We still have not pursued the petition to the fullest extent, and there is a bit of work to be done. We cannot do anything specific now, but we cannot close the petition. It has to be left open.

Jackson Carlaw: The meeting between Murdo Fraser, Ms Wallace and the minister was delayed until the beginning of March, which means that some of the workstreams arising from that meeting have not had a chance to mature. It would make sense to allow those to progress and for the new committee to consider the matter in the next session.

The Convener: Do members agree?

Members indicated agreement.

School Libraries (PE1581)

The Convener: PE1581, by Duncan Wright, is on saving Scotland's school libraries. What do members think?

Jackson Carlaw: I am very depressed by the response that we have received. To my mind, it almost validates the need for the petition. The response is summed up nicely in the response from the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, which states:

"School libraries are run in different ways across the country and given the financial challenges that Councils are facing this is an area where reforms have taken place."

In essence, that means closing libraries, merging them or undermining and reducing facilities. Most of the local authorities that have responded have more or less said, "Hands off—this is our territory." However, as far as I can see, they are undermining things.

Last week, we had national good read day, or whatever it was called. I saw the First Minister appear with Harry Potter and sundry other characters, all of whom were reading books and encouraging children to read. That will not be possible if there are no libraries for them to borrow books from and no educated, trained librarians who can advise and assist them in that.

We need to pursue the issue not with local authorities but with the Government. I do not see how that strategy can be fulfilled given the current way in which libraries in schools are being undermined.

The Convener: I agree. The petition was introduced because of the on-going situation, but a number of people have raised concerns about what will happen as a result of the current spending round given the budget restrictions that local authorities face. People think that a bad situation is going to get worse, and that appears to be exactly what is happening. We cannot walk away from the table, shrugging our shoulders and wringing our hands; we must continue to press the issue. Therefore, we have to keep the petition open and let the future committee continue to look into the issue on the basis of what happens as a result of the current cuts at local authority level. Do members agree?

Members indicated agreement.

Shared Space Schemes (Moratorium) (PE1595)

The Convener: PE1595, by Alexander Taylor, is on a moratorium on shared space schemes. I do not think that we have concluded our deliberations on the petition. We are gathering a lot of information on it. I am certainly learning a lot about the concerns, and I think that there is more that we can learn. We cannot close the petition until we have pursued the issue a lot further.

Jackson Carlaw: I agree. I was, again, disappointed by the quality of the response that we received and the variability of it. One council responded:

“However, due to acknowledged conflicting disability needs and preferences, particularly surrounding kerb use, it is not possible to deliver a street design to meet the specific desires of all disability groups.”

That does not really take matters much further forward. Given that we were told that the shared space schemes that are being introduced are actually more prejudicial to disability groups than what was there previously, I feel that there is a need for further action on the issue.

I also note the comment by Lord Holmes that the UK Government has asked all UK authorities to submit details of any shared space schemes that they currently operate so that a review can be undertaken. If the UK Government is pressing for a review of the way in which the schemes are functioning, there might be a case for a parallel initiative here in Scotland.

The Convener: I agree with that.

In some of the submissions that we have received, there appears to be a belief or a misconception that the committee has the authority to order local authorities not to do things. I have to put it on the record that we do not have that authority. We can scrutinise what is happening and ask for a policy direction to be

looked at, but we cannot make a ruling on the ability of a local authority to implement such a scheme, and we certainly cannot order a planning authority to undo decisions that it has made.

John Wilson: That perception might arise from the East Dunbartonshire Council submission, which describes the committee as the Scottish Government Public Petitions Committee. If only we were, convener. We are the Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee and we do not have legislative powers to force the Government to do anything.

The Convener: I had to make that clear, in case people were working under a misapprehension.

We will definitely keep the petition open and take it forward.

Members indicated agreement.

In Care Survivors Service (PE1596)

The Convener: PE1596, by Paul Anderson, James McDermott and Chris Daly, is on In Care Survivors Service Scotland. Given the on-going discussions, we have to include the petition in our legacy paper. Do members agree?

Members indicated agreement.

Mycoplasma Fermentans and Autism (PE1597)

The Convener: PE1597, by Bill Welsh, is on Mycoplasma fermentans in regressive autism.

Jackson Carlaw: I think that we have to close the petition. The Scottish Government, which acts on the advice that it receives, has made it clear that it does not support the aims of the petition. Therefore, it is impossible that the petition can proceed.

The Convener: Do members agree?

Members indicated agreement.

Annual Report

11:38

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is consideration of the committee's draft annual report for the parliamentary year 11 May 2015 to 23 March 2016. As has been agreed by the Conveners Group, all committee annual reports follow a standard format. Members have a note by the clerk and the draft annual report, which is a pretty standard document.

As there are no comments, are members happy to agree the report?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: As we agreed at our previous meeting, the committee will now go into private session for agenda item 3.

11:38

Meeting continued in private until 11:41.

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