



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Public Petitions Committee

Thursday 3 September 2020

Session 5



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - www.parliament.scot or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Thursday 3 September 2020

CONTENTS

	Col.
NEW PETITIONS	1
Parental and Familial Alienation (PE1790).....	1
Referendums (Scotland) Act 2020 (PE1791)	3
Additional Dwelling Supplement (Eligibility Criteria) (PE1798)	6
Court Reporting (Publication of Addresses) (PE1799).....	7
Lands Tribunal for Scotland (Remit) (PE1800)	9
European Union Withdrawal Agreement (Powers of Economic and Industrial Intervention) (PE1801).....	11
CONTINUED PETITIONS	13
Polypropylene Mesh Medical Devices (PE1517)	13
Housing Legislation (Review) (PE1756).....	17
Scottish Local Government Pension Scheme (Actuarial Reductions) (PE1757)	19
Primary Schools (Equal Teaching Hours) (PE1759)	21
Rail Fares (Pricing) (PE1760).....	25
Housing Regulations (PE1761)	27

PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE

11th Meeting 2020, Session 5

CONVENER

*Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con)

*Tom Mason (North East Scotland) (Con)

*David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Lynn Russell

LOCATION

Virtual Meeting

Scottish Parliament

Public Petitions Committee

Thursday 3 September 2020

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

New Petitions

Parental and Familial Alienation (PE1790)

The Convener (Johann Lamont): Good morning. I welcome everyone to the 11th meeting of the Public Petitions Committee in 2020. The meeting is being held virtually.

The first item today is consideration of new petitions. The first petition for consideration is PE1790, on parental and familial alienation, which was lodged by Samantha Kerr. The petition calls on the Scottish Government to recognise parental and familial alienation as a specific and serious form of pathological psychological child abuse. We have received 10 submissions from the petitioner, one from the Scottish Government and one from Paul Anderson on behalf of Forever Fathers and Alienated Parents Support Ireland. The submissions are summarised in the clerk's note. Since our meeting papers were published, further submissions have been provided: two from the petitioner and one from Paul Anderson. They were sent to us separately.

The Scottish Government submission confirms that there is no provision in the Children (Scotland) Bill, which was passed last week, imposing a requirement on the court to consider in every case the possibility of one parent deliberately turning a child against the other parent. However, section 8 includes the establishment of a register of child welfare reporters, and it is envisaged that their training will include recognising situations in which a child has been turned against a parent. Training requirements will be set by regulations and there will be a full public consultation on the criteria in due course.

My view—and my experience—is that there is an issue for families in a parent feeling that they have been denied access to their child or that, over a period of time, the child has been alienated from them in some way so that contact does not happen. I am aware that it is a difficult issue for some parents and families. I am interested to hear committee members' views on the petition, but my view is that Parliament has considered the issue previously and that the Children (Scotland) Bill allows for an understanding of such complex issues in families and relationships. I cannot imagine that there is anything more difficult for a

parent than feeling that they have been systematically alienated from their child. However, I have some confidence that the provisions in the Children (Scotland) Bill will provide a means of addressing the concerns that the petitioner has raised.

What are committee members' views on the petition?

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): This is obviously a difficult and concerning petition. I welcome the petitioner's submissions and comments, and the other submissions. It is a sad situation when there is parental alienation. However, the Scottish Government recognises the situation and some of that is reflected in the Children (Scotland) Bill, and we know that the Scottish Parliament has previously considered the issue in the petition. On that basis, I propose that we close the petition under rule 15.7 of standing orders. The Scottish Government is well aware of the issue, recognises that parental alienation might occur and will ensure that child welfare reporters are trained to identify such situations.

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I back what Maurice Corry has said. The Scottish Government has recognised the concerns that are raised in the petition and is willing to put in place training, so I am happy to close the petition.

Tom Mason (North East Scotland) (Con): I do not have much more to add. It is obvious that the Scottish Government recognises the situation and that it is possible for training to take place. The Children (Scotland) Bill has been passed and we will have to see what transpires from it. If gaps in provision are found in the future, they can be addressed after we have got to grips with the present situation. I agree with the recommendation to close the petition.

Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): I concur with everything that other members have said. The subject is an extremely distressing and emotional one, and I certainly have full sympathy with what the petitioner is asking for. We have had a lot of information, so I thank the petitioner for everything that she has given us to facilitate our consideration of the issue.

I agree that the crux of the situation is around child welfare reporters. Our papers note that

“there will be a full public consultation”

on the criteria for their training requirements. I am confident that that will cover the issues that have been brought up in the petition, and I am content to close the petition on that basis.

The Convener: My sense is that committee members are very sympathetic to the issues that have been highlighted. There are complex issues around how to identify that somebody has been

systematically behaving in a way that alienates a child from their parents, and around the difficulties that that presents to the parents and to the child. I would echo Gail Ross's comments, in that we are very appreciative of all the work that has been done by the petitioner, which has given us a lot of useful information about what has been happening, both here and elsewhere.

I think that members agree that the Parliament has closely examined the matter, recognising that there is an issue and that child welfare reporters will be critical. We would underline the importance of child welfare reporters being appropriately trained, and that involves having an understanding of what has happened within families.

I also echo Gail Ross's point about the opportunities for the petitioner to engage with the full public consultation on the regulations. The petitioner clearly has strong views on the matter, and it would be important for them to be fed into the regulations, so that the training is appropriate.

My sense is that we want to thank the petitioner for highlighting this very important issue, which can cause a great deal of heartache for families. We acknowledge that the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament have understood that there is an issue and believe that the training of child welfare reporters is the best way to progress the matter.

I think that, on that basis, we want to close the petition under rule 15.7 of standing orders. As no one is indicating otherwise, that is agreed. We emphasise our gratitude to the petitioner for bringing the issue forward. We recognise that there has been action although, as in all such cases, if the petitioner feels that there has not been progress in a year's time, there is an opportunity to resubmit the petition to the committee.

Referendums (Scotland) Act 2020 (PE1791)

The Convener: The second new petition for consideration today is PE1791, on the Referendums (Scotland) Act 2020, which was lodged by Mike Fenwick. The petitioner calls on the Scottish Government to recognise and respond to concerns that section 39 of the 2020 act establishes a legal challenge, namely that it breaches protections afforded by the Human Rights Act 1998. We have received submissions from the Scottish Government and the petitioner, which have been summarised in the clerk's note.

The Scottish Government believes that section 39, like the rest of the 2020 act, is compatible with convention rights, noting that

"restrictions on timescales for bringing legal challenges are commonplace in legislation ... for legitimate reasons of

legal certainty and finality which are recognised in Convention jurisprudence".

The petitioner notes that the 2020 act is the foundation for all future referenda, and its importance therefore cannot be understated. The petition requests that the Scottish Parliament reconsider one element of the act, section 39, to ensure with absolute certainty that the provisions do not in any way undermine that foundation.

I invite members to comment. My understanding is that, when the Referendums (Scotland) Bill was going through the Parliament, there was a debate on the question of timescales, and an amendment lodged by Jackie Baillie extended the timescale to eight weeks. That parliamentary consideration is in the very recent past. My sense is that the question has been interrogated and tested, and I think that the right balance has been secured in the bill. It is not something that the Finance and Constitution Committee did not consider at all; it was something that the committee looked at.

David Torrance: The Scottish Government's submission states:

"The petitioner does not provide details of what rights he thinks are breached by the restricted period for legal challenge set by section 39"

and

"does not identify any specific beach of Convention rights on which the Scottish Government can express a specific view."

I do not think that the Government will change its mind. I am therefore minded to close the petition under rule 15.7 of standing orders, on the basis that the Scottish Government does not agree to the action called for in the petition, which states that section 39 of the Referendums (Scotland) Act 2020 breaches protections afforded by the Human Rights Act 1998.

Tom Mason: Constituents of mine have also raised that issue, in as much as they were not convinced that the legislation that has recently been passed is comprehensive in that respect. I value the information that the committee has received from the Law Society of Scotland. I would like the committee to write to the society, seeking its opinion, and allow the Scottish Government to come back and comment. At this stage, I am not convinced that we should close the petition.

The Convener: I am not sure that we can hear Gail Ross just now, so we will hear from Maurice Corry and come back to Gail once we can restart her connection.

Maurice Corry: I agree with Tom Mason that we should get the verdict of the Law Society of Scotland, seek its views on the action that is called for in the petition and see where it stands on that. I would be more comfortable with taking that

approach, rather than closing the petition at this stage, as one of our members has already recommended.

The Convener: Thank you very much for that. I think that we have lost Gail Ross for the moment.

The committee is ambivalent on the matter—we are not really sure whether there is an issue here—but two members have said that it would do no harm to test it by asking the Law Society of Scotland for its views. I do not know whether any other member wants to come back in, and I am conscious that Gail Ross has not had an opportunity to say anything. However, if we were to decide not to close the petition, at least that would give her an opportunity to comment in future. Does everyone agree? It is not ideal that Gail has not been here for that discussion. *[Interruption.]* I think that Gail is now back with us.

Gail Ross: Can you hear me, convener?

The Convener: Yes. I do not know whether you heard what we were saying. There was an ambivalence about whether there really is an issue here, because the Parliament has previously considered the matter. However, both Maurice Corry and Tom Mason thought that it might be worth while for the committee to write to the Law Society of Scotland to test the argument to our satisfaction before we close the petition completely. Do you have a view on that?

Gail Ross: I do not see that there would be harm in our writing to anyone. However, as you said, convener, the matter has been tested at committee stage. An amendment from Jackie Baillie was supported by everyone at the Finance and Constitution Committee's meeting, including the cabinet secretary. The bill was then considered by the whole Parliament, where it was supported and the Presiding Officer agreed that it was competent. Further, the Human Rights Act 1998 gives the Scottish courts the right to challenge any action that it thinks contravenes that legislation, but I note that no such action has been taken so far.

I really do not see that there is an issue here, but I will not disagree with the committee's writing to anyone. If that is the view of the majority of the committee's members, that is fine by me.

09:45

The Convener: I am not sure whether that is the majority view. My sense is that nobody seems to be terribly convinced that there is an issue, but two members feel that it would be worth testing the argument. In the interests of not having a division, I wonder whether that would be acceptable to the committee. If members are strongly against it, they can indicate to me now.

No member has indicated disagreement. In that case, we will write to the Law Society of Scotland to seek its views on the action for which the petition calls. However, I highlight that we are aware that the argument was tested quite strongly as the Referendums (Scotland) Bill went through committee. We will await a response from the Law Society.

Additional Dwelling Supplement (Eligibility Criteria) (PE1798)

The Convener: PE1798 has been lodged by Marcus Tait. It calls on the Scottish Government to review the additional dwelling supplement eligibility and relief criteria. The petitioner believes that the supplement is too sweeping in its current form, and that the eligibility for exemption is too narrow, and that, as a result, there is an unfair impact on smaller developers.

In its submission, the Scottish Government explains that the issue was raised in 2019, during committee scrutiny of the operation of the additional dwelling supplement. Stakeholder organisations were encouraged to provide further evidence; however, no additional examples were provided.

This is an interesting petition in respect of how the criteria have impacted on one person. Nevertheless, I am conscious that it appears from the evidence that there have been no examples other than the one that the petitioner identifies. It seems that the issue will be looked at anyway, and the argument will be tested. Nevertheless, I am interested to hear members' views. We will start with Tom Mason.

Tom Mason: I am interested to hear what other members think about the petition. At the moment, I think that closure is the best solution, because it seems that no further examples have been submitted. I have an open mind, however, and will listen to other members' comments.

Gail Ross: In its submission, the Scottish Government says that it is already working with Homes for Scotland to try to understand the issues. I take the point that the issue that the petitioner raises does not seem have been an issue for anyone else.

I was interested to read about the relevant court case, *P N Bewley Ltd v HMRC*, in which it was ruled that the stamp duty land tax did not apply to derelict buildings. I was interested to know whether there was any crossover with the petition. The Scottish Government is considering the points that the petition raises, and I am satisfied with its response, so I suggest that we close the petition.

[Temporary loss of sound.]

The Deputy Convener (Gail Ross): Members, I think that we have lost our connection with the convener. I ask Maurice Corry to come in with his comments.

Maurice Corry: Can you hear me all right?

The Deputy Convener: Yes.

Maurice Corry: I am minded to close the petition under rule 15.7 of standing orders, on the basis that no further evidence has come to the Scottish Government of other instances of the specific issue arising. I believe that the Scottish Government has oversight of the matter. If further evidence were to come forward and the petitioner were to lodge a petition again in a year, I would see no problem with that. At the moment, however, I am minded to close the petition.

David Torrance: Like other members, I am happy to close the petition.

Tom Mason: Closing the petition is the right thing to do at this moment.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you. No member has indicated that they disagree with the committee closing the petition under standing orders rule 15.7, because we agree that the Scottish Government is considering the points in the petition. We thank the petitioner. As always, they have the opportunity to come back again in a year's time, if they feel that their points have not been addressed.

Court Reporting (Publication of Addresses) (PE1799)

The Deputy Convener: PE1799 was lodged by Sarah McHardy on behalf of Families Outside, and calls on the Scottish Government to make it illegal for any press or media outlet to publish a defendant's address.

We have received a written submission from the Scottish Government that states that there is no requirement in law to publish prosecuted persons' home addresses and that the media can access a personal address via certain court documentation, provided that doing so does not breach data protection or contempt of court rules. Media access to personal information is also subject to a professional code of conduct, with the intention being to restrict access to situations in which it is deemed necessary, and it is also subject to legislation that is intended to protect the individual. The courts also have the power to restrict information, if necessary.

It can be a massive issue for families if a family member has been remanded to prison and their address is published, but it seems that that is done only for identification purposes and that many rules, requirements and standards are in place, in

particular the code of conduct. What are members' views?

Maurice Corry: I am minded to close the petition under standing orders rule 15.7, on the basis that there are clear rules and standards in the prosecuting and courts systems whereby personal information and data are not published unless that is specifically required under a judicial judgment by a judge or a person in that position.

In addition, legal provision exists to prevent, where that is considered necessary, disclosure of material such as addresses. I am therefore happy that there is a solid system in place that prevents from happening what the petition highlights. If that should happen, obviously the hand of the law should come down on the matter. As I said, I would be content to close the position.

David Torrance: I back Maurice Corry's view that we should close the petition, because a professional code of conduct and legislation that can deal with the issue that the petition raises are in place. There are measures in place to protect individuals, when needed. I am happy to close the petition.

Tom Mason: I am of the same view: there are sufficient measures in place to prevent unnecessary exposure of addresses. There are occasions when such exposure is necessary, but the right weight has been given to the existing measures. Closure of the petition under standing orders rule 15.7 is appropriate.

The Deputy Convener: Based on that discussion, we are therefore proposing to close the petition, under standing orders rule 15.7, on the following bases: that there is an established professional code of conduct, along with standards and underlying legislation that are intended to ensure that journalists do not publish personal information such as addresses unless that is necessary to identify someone; and that provision exists to prevent the disclosure of material such as addresses by law, where that is considered necessary. No members have indicated that they disagree with closing the petition. Thank you, members.

I believe that we now have the convener back. Welcome, convener.

The Convener: I just want to say that I agree with the decision that was made on the last petition, and that Mary Fee MSP had indicated her support for the petition but has been unable to attend today as she has another committee meeting.

Lands Tribunal for Scotland (Remit) (PE1800)

The Convener: PE1800 is on expanding the remit of the Lands Tribunal for Scotland. It was lodged by Siobhan Samson on behalf of Bo'ness Community Council and Grangemouth Community Council, including Skinflats. It calls on the Scottish Government to expand the remit of the Lands Tribunal for Scotland to include consideration of planning decisions, which are currently called in by Scottish ministers.

In her written submission, the petitioners explain that although they do not object to Scottish ministers being able to call in planning applications, they do not believe that they should then be able to subsequently decide on those applications.

In its submission, the Scottish Government states that planning is established as a process in which decisions are appropriately made by elected representatives, usually at local level, and in some cases by Scottish ministers. It also explains that the role of Scottish ministers in the planning process was recently considered during the passage of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019.

My view is that a balance is struck between individuals and communities. One of the issues is that people who have not managed to persuade others of their view feel that the process can be unfair and not independent. It is difficult to see how we could give people confidence in the system.

The other issue is that when Scottish ministers make a determination, they have to do so on the basis of planning legislation. They cannot override it, and their explanation has to fit with planning law and all the guidance around it.

Maurice Corry: I am minded to close the petition under rule 15.7 of the standing orders, on the basis that we have three stages in our planning process. First, there is application to the local council then, if that is not satisfactory to the applicant, there is due process to take the matter to ministers via a Scottish reporter, and beyond that there is the opportunity for judicial review. The petitioner said that the Scottish Government is aware of the issue and understands it. I think that there are enough checks and balances in our planning procedures. Therefore, I seek to close the petition.

David Torrance: I agree that we should close the petition under rule 15.7 of standing orders. The issue was recently visited during passage of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019. Consequently, the Scottish Government is not minded to seek any further changes in the area. Therefore, I do not

think that the Government will change the process and I am quite happy to close the petition.

Tom Mason: The matter has been considered very recently, and there is ample opportunity for communities to participate in the planning process. The problem is—I have said this before on other matters—that participation early in the planning process is, unfortunately, not widely taken up. That means that people wake up too late to make objections.

Although the process is semi-judicial—certainly on planning and regulations—the input of some political activity is important. Otherwise, there is no accountability. It becomes entirely an issue of detailed facts that are inflexible.

I think that closing the petition is the appropriate action.

10:00

Gail Ross: I agree with everything that has been said on the planning process and the individual's rights in the several stages of appeal. It is also important to note that the Scottish Government's submission says that it is

"conducting a consultation on the future of the Scottish Land Court and the Lands Tribunal for Scotland",

which proposes that they be merged. One of the questions is whether that merged body should take on more functions. That consultation could—I would like this to be on the record—be an avenue through which the petitioners could feed in their views. Because of that and the comments that have been made by other members, I am also content to close the petition.

The Convener: There is consensus that there are concerns about people's confidence in the system, that there needs to be early engagement, as Tom Mason indicated, and that Parliament has looked at the issue recently and concluded that there has to be balance in decisions. Gail Ross's suggestion about the consultation on the Lands Tribunal for Scotland and so on is one that the petitioner might want to take up.

I think we that we are agreeing to close the petition under rule 15.7 of standing orders, on the basis that the role of Scottish ministers in the planning process was recently explored during passage of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 and that, consequently, the Scottish Government is not minded to seek further changes in that area.

Planning is always a live subject, and there is no doubt that MSPs will continue to receive representations on the matter, so it will continue to be something that people pay attention to.

No member is indicating that they disagree, so we agree to close the petition.

We thank the petitioners for taking the time and effort to contact us on these important matters.

**European Union Withdrawal Agreement
(Powers of Economic and Industrial
Intervention) (PE1801)**

The Convener: PE1801 was lodged by Vincent Mills, on behalf of Radical Options for Scotland and Europe.

The petition calls on the Scottish Government to negotiate with the UK Government to ensure that in any future EU withdrawal agreement, Scotland retains the powers to provide state aid to workplaces that are threatened with closure; to take public utilities such as rail, bus and power fully back into public ownership; and to require public sector contractors to recognise trade unions and collective bargaining on wages.

We have received written submissions from the Scottish Government and Unite Scotland. The submissions are summarised in our clerk's note.

Since the meeting papers were published, the clerks have been alerted to an email from the petitioners that strongly advocates that the committee contact the Scottish Trades Union Congress for its view on the issue.

I think that there is an issue here. There is an interesting argument that I was alive to during the debate on leaving the European Union, on how state aid is constrained and how procurement is sometimes a lengthy, complicated and expensive process—for example, a local housing association must make sure that the *Official Journal of the European Union* has notice of what it is doing. We have examples of our own, around ferry procurement and so on.

I would like a procurement policy that allows for more than looking at cost—on which looks also at employment standards and so on. I am mindful that the petitioners are keen that we at least flag the issue to the Scottish Trades Union Congress and get a response, because the matter is one that it will have looked at in more detail than the committee has.

David Torrance: I am quite happy for the committee to write to the Scottish Trades Union Congress seeking its view on what the petitioner is calling for, and to the Scottish Government to see its commitment to the issue. It would be interesting to hear those views. I know that the Scottish Government has said in its submission that it is committed to retaining the current powers. Like the convener, I would be happy to see procurement in which other factors are taken into account when contracts are being bid for.

Tom Mason: I am open to persuasion. I would have thought that the situation is clear in terms of

what is being negotiated and what is available, and I do not think that the various standards are going to be lowered because of the withdrawal negotiations, but if the committee thinks that it is necessary to have more information from the STUC, I would be quite happy to receive that.

Gail Ross: I, too, would like to seek the views of the STUC. The petitioner argued his case very well in the additional email that he sent. I think that the Scottish Government is alert to what is going on. It has told us on numerous occasions in relation to the petition, and has made it obvious in the chamber in debates, that it is extremely committed to retaining the powers. I agree with the points that the convener and David Torrance made, and that we should write to the STUC for its views.

Maurice Corry: I am minded to agree with members that we need to get information and views from the STUC. I will be happier, having sought its views and heard what actions it thinks would be appropriate. It is a fairly contentious subject, so we need to get it right.

The Convener: In that case, I think that there is agreement that the issue is worth exploring—*[Inaudible.]* Members should say if they disagree that we should write to the STUC seeking its views on the action that is called for in the petition. No member disagrees, so I take that as agreement.

10:06

Meeting suspended.

10:15

On resuming—

Continued Petitions

Polypropylene Mesh Medical Devices (PE1517)

The Convener: I welcome everyone back to this meeting of the Public Petitions Committee. Technical problems mean that I am not showing up on the video, which is perhaps a bonus for everyone concerned. I will continue with the audio only, to facilitate the discussion instead of pausing it.

The first continued petition for consideration is PE1517, on polypropylene mesh medical devices, which has been lodged by Elaine Holmes and Olive McIlroy on behalf of the Scottish mesh survivors hear our voice campaign. The petition calls on the Scottish Government to suspend the use of polypropylene transvaginal mesh procedures; to initiate a public inquiry and/or comprehensive independent research to evaluate the safety of mesh devices using all evidence available, including evidence from around the world; to introduce mandatory reporting of all adverse incidents by health professionals; to set up a Scottish transvaginal mesh implant register, with a view to linking it up with national and international registers; to introduce a uniform approach of fully informed consent across Scotland's health boards; and to write to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, asking it to reclassify TVM devices with heightened alert status to reflect on-going concerns worldwide.

The petition was last considered in September 2019, when the committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government and to Dr Veronikis, who is an obstetrician-gynaecologist based in Missouri, in the USA. The committee has received a submission from the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport and two submissions from the petitioners, which are summarised in our papers.

Since our papers were circulated, the clerks have received a subsequent submission from the petitioners, a copy of which has been provided to members. In the submission, the petitioners express how little confidence they have in the surgeons in the national mesh removal service and say that mesh-injured women should be able to see the surgeon of their choice, including Dr Veronikis. Members may wish to note that the committee has invited Dr Veronikis to make a written submission on three separate occasions; however, a submission has not been provided.

As members will know, the First Minister, in her statement earlier this week on the Scottish Government's programme for government, announced the establishment of a patient safety commissioner. That step has been taken in response to recommendations in the Cumberlege review, which, as our papers note, was commissioned as a result of concerns about a number of treatments, including mesh implants.

We have dealt with this petition over a significant period of time. I very much welcome the decision to establish a patient safety commissioner, but the important point will be how the issues are taken forward. On so many occasions, there has been some progress with the petition—for example, in the setting up of a review—but people have then been very disappointed with the outcome.

The petitioners continue to be concerned and frustrated at the lack of progress and the lack of confidence that they feel in the process regarding the implications of what was done to women, as well as at the lack of information. They have concerns that the issue may still be on-going and about whether they can get the surgery that they need from someone in whom they have confidence.

There are further actions that we can take with regard to the petition. I ask Tom Mason to speak first.

Tom Mason: The issue has been running since long before I entered Parliament. I am a member of the cross-party group on chronic pain, and we have heard some quite horrifying stories about the suffering that certain patients have been through. We need to make some progress and offer some assurances. We need information from the Government and assurances, but those assurances have to be given in person. I would like us to call in the cabinet secretary to give assurances that the Government will follow through on the requirements.

I would also like to ensure that the Government understands the need for patients to have confidence in the system. If confidence is not maintained, there will continue to be an issue. I leave that thought with the committee. We need to get the Government's assurance that it has the confidence of patients. We could request that in writing, but a session with the cabinet secretary would be worth while.

Gail Ross: As the convener and Tom Mason have said, the petition is an extremely important and long-running one.

I absolutely agree that we need more information from the Scottish Government about its response to the report of the independent medicines and medical devices safety review. It is

essential that we get that feedback. I would also like to hear feedback on the establishment of a patient safety commissioner. I would like to know what the commissioner's role and remit will be and what timescales the Government is working to. I would also like to know how the Government is continuing to work with the petitioners. Obviously, they continue to go through hell, and it is only right that they are involved in every step of the process. We should first write to the Government to get a reply on those points before we call in the cabinet secretary.

There are certainly questions to be asked about the situation with Dr Veronikis. I would like to know why the proposals relating to Dr Veronikis have not come about. I do not think that we have had an answer to that yet. It is disappointing that we have written to Dr Veronikis on three occasions and have not had anything back. That is another issue that we need to ask more about.

In the first instance, we should write to the Scottish Government on those points and then decide what to do when we have a reply.

Maurice Corry: I agree with Gail Ross, and I support everything that she said. I also agree with Tom Mason that we should ask the cabinet secretary to come to the committee to update us, so that we can explore whether there is any resistance from the Scottish medical sector to Dr Veronikis coming here. We should also ask to have before us the Scottish Government's clinical director, Dr Jason Leitch, because I want to get to the bottom of where the medical profession in Scotland stands on the issue. It is disappointing that we have not had a response from Dr Veronikis, so we need to push to get one. I agree with Tom Mason and Gail Ross, but I would go one step further and ask the Scottish Government's clinical director to appear before us.

Gail Ross raised the issue of the patient safety commissioner and the timescales for introducing that. I welcome the Cumberlege review, and I am glad that the Scottish Government has paid cognisance to it. Because this is such a long-running and urgent problem, we really need to flush out the issues.

David Torrance: I was a member of the committee when the petition was originally brought before us, and I have watched the work that the committee has done and have seen how the petitioners have continued to raise their concerns and highlight them to the committee. I have also seen how MSPs in the previous and current sessions of Parliament have raised the issues. The committee even went to the European Parliament to give evidence on mesh implants. I am still quietly concerned and still need reassurance that the issue will be taken forward

and that the petitioners will be happy with the outcomes.

I agree with other members that we need the cabinet secretary to come to the committee and that we need to write to the relevant authorities for confirmation of what has happened, because the situation seems to have dragged on and on. As one of the members who dealt with the petition initially, I would have thought that the process would have been finished by now. I feel for the mesh survivors with regard to how long this process has taken, so I am happy for the cabinet secretary to appear before us.

The Convener: I think that there is a consensus that we want to hear from the Scottish Government. The question is, what is the most productive way in which we can do that? I have no hesitation in asking the cabinet secretary to come before the committee, but I think that, as Gail Ross said, it would be useful to get a report from the Government first about how the new commission will work, what other work is being done around it and what contact the Government has had with Dr Veronikis. I know that there is a great deal of unhappiness about the fact that that has not been progressed.

At some point, I think that we would want the cabinet secretary and the clinical director, or whoever might be appropriate, to come to the committee to answer the questions that Maurice Corry has raised.

On the point about Dr Veronikis, in a sense, he has no responsibility to respond to us although he has been engaged with the Scottish Government. It would be interesting to know where that work has got to, but we must recognise that he is a busy man who might not necessarily feel that he has a responsibility to deal with the issue, even though it is a huge one in Scotland and elsewhere.

A compromise position might be to write to the Scottish Government to get a detailed response from the cabinet secretary about what precisely the programme is and how it will be taken forward, to clarify what progress has been made in discussions with Dr Veronikis and to flag up that, at some point, we will want to hear from the cabinet secretary. If the Scottish Government has made progress and a patient safety commissioner is to be established, we would want to know the timescales for that. That would be a good news story for the Government to tell the committee and might give the petitioners some confidence.

We all recognise that we want to continue petition, and we want the Scottish Government to give us a detailed response to the Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review report that includes a timescale for the establishment of a patient safety commissioner

and what that post would look like. We also want the Government to tell us, as Gail Ross has said, how it will engage with the petitioners, who clearly remain, at best, cynical about what is happening, given their circumstances.

Are members content to seek that response, with a view to having the cabinet secretary appear before the committee at a later stage? As no one is indicating that they disagree with that suggestion, I will take that as assent.

As David Torrance said, we recognise that the Public Petitions Committee has engaged in this work over a long time and that there is global recognition that it is a health scandal.

Housing Legislation (Review) (PE1756)

The Convener: The next continued petition for consideration is PE1756, lodged by James Mackie, on a review of housing legislation to protect people experiencing domestic or elder abuse. The petition calls on the Scottish Government to review current housing legislation in circumstances in which a non-tenant has been responsible for domestic or elder abuse.

We have received submissions from Shelter Scotland, the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers, the Chartered Institute of Housing and the Scottish Government, as well as two further submissions from the petitioner. All of them are summarised in the clerk's note. The submissions from stakeholders focus on domestic abuse and highlight work that has been undertaken by CIH Scotland, Scottish Women's Aid, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, Shelter Scotland and ALACHO.

I was struck by the number of responses that we got. That suggests to me that those organisations regard the issue as important and serious and as being worthy of further action. I would like the committee to take the petition forward partly because it has clearly tapped into something that organisations already recognise as an important issue. It might be that we can work through some ways in which it can be addressed.

Gail Ross: I, too, was struck by the depth and the amount of the submissions that we received, all of which were helpful. It was interesting to see that the Scottish Government has asked CIH Scotland and Scottish Women's Aid to chair a working group on the improvement of housing outcomes for women and children who are at risk of domestic abuse. It is hoped that that group will report later this year.

10:30

Work is also being done to review how local authorities might use current tenancy agreements

as a means of removing perpetrators rather than victims from the family home. There is a lot of information to get through and a lot of work is still under way, so I agree that we need to find out more. For example, it would be important for us to find out from the Scottish Government whether existing legislation could be extended to provide the protection that the petitioner seeks. Are legislative steps needed to end joint tenancies in which both the victim and the perpetrator are named in tenancy agreements?

Given the elder abuse aspect, I would also like the committee to write to Age Concern Scotland and Action on Elder Abuse to seek their views on the proposed action on that point.

I suggest that we thank the petitioner for raising this important subject and that we agree to take the petition forward in the light of the work that is on-going.

Maurice Corry: I fully support what my colleague Gail Ross has said on taking the petition forward.

The subject is quite complicated. I was a guardian in a situation in which this problem existed. The person was in her own house rather than a tenanted one, but the issues were similar. It proved very difficult to remove the perpetrator, which eventually happened only because he tried to assault a carer and was physically removed from the property by the police. We had an awful job trying to get the process done through the local authority and the care support organisations.

I agree that the issue is serious, and I also think that what the petition mentions represents only the tip of the iceberg. I therefore back what has been said about the committee's writing to the Scottish Government and to Fife Council for further information as well as to key stakeholders such as Age Concern Scotland, Age Scotland and Action on Elder Abuse.

Such issues really need to be examined—not only in the context of tenancies but also in private home settings. In the case of which I had experience, the local authority was involved but, frankly, acted very badly in the time that it took to sort the problem out.

David Torrance: I agree with other committee members. I have nothing else to add, because they have covered all the avenues. I was taken aback by the number of responses to the petition and was impressed with their quality. I am therefore happy to agree with everything that has been proposed so far.

Tom Mason: I have nothing to add. It is a complex issue on which we need to make progress. I agree with other members that the committee should seek more information from the

various stakeholders and from the Government to enable us to make informed decisions.

The Convener: I think that we have consensus that the issue is an important one and that we have been struck by the quality of the submissions that we have received.

We also agree that we should write to the parties that other members have indicated and that we should seek examples of good practice from bodies such as Fife Council, recognising that not only domestic abuse but elder abuse has been highlighted. We look forward to receiving responses in that regard.

Scottish Local Government Pension Scheme (Actuarial Reductions) (PE1757)

The Convener: The next petition for consideration is PE1757, which seeks a reduction in the level of actuarial reductions to the Scottish local government pension scheme. Lodged by Liz Maguire, it calls on the Scottish Government to significantly reduce the levels of reduction to the Scottish local government pension scheme to ensure that today's low-paid workers do not become even poorer pensioners.

Since our previous consideration of the petition, we have received submissions from the Scottish Government and the petitioner. In its submission, the Scottish Government notes that the Scottish ministers

“adopt the principle of ‘financial neutrality’ when setting the actuarial factors used to work out the reduced pension payable by the Scottish LGPS on early retirement.”

The petitioner notes that that does not explain why the Scottish ministers

“take the view that the advice of the actuary is to be adopted without question. It also fails to make any reference to the fair and just society which Scotland seeks to have.”

She goes on to note that the Government's response

“fails to acknowledge that the rise in the State Pension Age has effectively increased the level of reductions which were in place prior to the new regulations introduced in 2015.”

The petition deals with the complicated issue of pensions, which I do not pretend to understand terribly well. However, I am struck by the fact that women in low-paid work—which is often heavy, physically demanding work—might want to take early retirement. The argument is made cogently that they are disadvantaged as a result of the deductions that are made in order to ensure financial neutrality.

I think that we should pursue the petition by seeking an explanation from the Government of why it has not acknowledged that the field of

pensions has changed since the state pension age changed.

I invite views from members, starting with Maurice Corry.

Maurice Corry: This is an interesting petition that deals with an issue that has been bubbling away for a little while. I think that we should write to the Minister for Public Finance and Migration to ask whether any consideration has been given to changing the calculations for the local government pension scheme, given that the state pension age has risen since the regulations were introduced in 2015. We should write to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, too. It is important that we obtain its view so that we get a balanced picture.

We should also ask the minister whether the Government agrees that women are disproportionately affected. I agree with what the convener said about those who do heavy work perhaps wanting to retire a bit earlier. We need to get a balanced picture. As part of that, we might want to look at what happened with the recent parity of pay case involving Glasgow City Council, which will obviously affect pensions.

There are several responses that we need to get before we can come to a considered view on the petition, but those are my views at the moment. We should definitely involve COSLA.

David Torrance: Like the convener, I think that the area of pensions is a minefield and I do not pretend to understand it all. However, I think that the concerns that have been raised are just. I feel for low-paid workers, who might end up as low-paid pensioners.

I agree that we should write to the Minister for Public Finance and Migration to raise our concerns with him.

Tom Mason: I have nothing to add—I agree with what has been said so far. There are gaps in the information that we have received, which need to be closed. At this stage, writing to the Government and COSLA is the right idea.

Gail Ross: I have nothing more to add; everything has been covered. There is an anomaly there. We need to find out why the levels of reduction to the Scottish local government pension scheme have not changed, given that the state pension age has risen. I agree that we should send the two letters that have been suggested.

The Convener: I have an additional suggestion to make. We could ask the Government whether it has looked at the fact that the scheme operates on a unisex basis, whereby men and women are assumed to have been affected in the same way. We could ask whether it has carried out an equality impact assessment, given the

disproportionate number of women in local government in low-paid, physically demanding jobs. It might be the case that everything balances out, but it would be worth our asking that.

I think that we are agreed that we want to write to the Minister for Public Finance and Migration and COSLA, and that we should ask the question that I raised. As no one disagrees, that course of action is agreed to.

Primary Schools (Equal Teaching Hours) (PE1759)

The Convener: The next continued petition is PE1759, on equal school hours for all children in Scotland, which was lodged by Susan Crookes. The petition calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that all children in Scotland receive the same teaching hours.

We have received written submissions from the Scottish Government and COSLA. Both make the point that local authorities have responsibility for the delivery of education services that are relevant to their local area, resources and circumstances. They also discuss the resourcing of authorities, which is even more pertinent now, given the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Scottish Government has highlighted that there are legislative parameters within which local authorities must operate, such as the requirement for each local authority to provide 190 days of schooling per year, with discretion over the length of the school day.

COSLA states that it is more important to focus on outcomes than inputs and outputs, such as learning hours, and that there is no evidence that draws a link between a longer school week and better educational attainment.

It is an interesting issue. Both the Scottish Government and COSLA say that there is nothing to see here. However, are we seriously saying that schools can provide 190 days of schooling without defining what a school day is? Could schools end up offering education only in the mornings because resources do not allow for anything different?

Although I accept that there might not be a direct link between a two-hour difference in school days and differing levels of educational attainment, surely it cannot be argued that providing only a couple of hours of school per day would be sufficient and would have no impact.

I am interested in whether there might be a disproportionate impact on children in disadvantaged areas if they ended up with reduced hours, given the importance and stability of school for some young people. That is my sense of it—it is not so much about the particular

issue of two hours' difference. The argument that was made in response to the petition was not as substantial as I would have wanted.

I welcome comments from members.

David Torrance: I am minded to close the petition under rule 15.7 of the standing orders, because the Scottish Government and COSLA do not support the actions that are called for in the petition and they stated that local authorities should have the flexibility to make appropriate local decisions. That is key for me. There are different circumstances across all local authorities. In addition, the Scottish Government said that it would enact legislation to require longer days, if there was sufficient evidence that that was necessary.

I am happy to close the petition.

Tom Mason: I would like some more information on what the drivers are for outcomes, and on whether it is appropriate to give flexibility or whether there has to be more direction. We do not have information on what the drivers are, so we could write to the Scottish Government to find out where its evidence to determine the number of hours comes from. More information is required.

Gail Ross: The petitioner mentions the Highland Council, which is my council area. I remember that when the change was made, it was specifically stated that it is difficult for younger children, such as those in primary 1 to 3, to concentrate for a large number of hours. The issue depends on what people think young people are actually missing out on. There is a school of thought that says it could be more influential for kids to have more play time than sit-down lessons at that age.

10:45

Our transport system—the petition says this as well—is different from a lot of other local authorities' transport systems. At the time when the change was made, parents raised questions about childcare, which was a big issue. If a parent has a young child who finishes at half past 2 and another child in a different age group who finishes at 3 o'clock, the disparity means that they have to pick up one child and then go back to pick up the other one. A lot of schools started offering after-school clubs so that the younger children could stay on and get involved in play, which solved a lot of the childcare issues.

As noted in our papers, there is no evidence to suggest that any of the children in Highland who are getting 22.5 hours as opposed to 25 hours are missing out on anything. In fact, there seems to be a great deal of agreement that they may actually

benefit because they do not have to concentrate for such a long time.

We have the information that we need. If other members feel that we need to get more information by writing to whoever, I am happy enough with that. Nevertheless, I think that we have enough information to enable us to close the petition. I am satisfied that what is happening in Highland is not disadvantaging our children.

Maurice Corry: This is an interesting issue. Having been a councillor in a rural area—Argyll and Bute—I am familiar with the issues that Highland Council has been experiencing, in particular the need to allow time for children to be transported back to the islands and more remote rural communities.

I take the convener's point about the disadvantage to children who may not have an opportunity to get the full hours of education—that is an issue to be looked at. I agree with Tom Mason that we need some more evidence. We may close the petition in due course, but I feel that we are a little bit short of information. We can perhaps get more information from other local authorities, both municipal and rural; I know that there is an issue in my former council area.

I accept that the Scottish Government wants to allow local authorities the flexibility to make appropriate local decisions. I am all for localism—there is no question about that. However, there is an issue here. I am interested to hear the convener's comments on the matter, given that she has been a teacher. I would support the idea of getting some more evidence, and we may need to discuss how we do that.

The Convener: My feeling is that, although there may be an argument for a level of flexibility—I hear what Gail Ross says about differing circumstances in different local authorities—that has not been addressed in the submissions. They say that there is no evidence that there has been a change in education or attainment levels, but at what point would there be? How short would the school day need to be before that became a problem?

I am all in favour of local flexibility and decision making, but if decisions are made because of financial constraints, which has been flagged up as an issue, that can begin to build in disadvantage. A local authority that is under massive financial pressure may say, "Well, we can always reduce hours."

For some families, the childcare aspect matters, although it is clearly not the primary role of education. In Highland—Gail Ross will know this better than many—and in some of our other more remote areas, there will be only one bus going.

Even if a child finishes early, they will have to wait, along with their siblings, for the one bus home.

No one is suggesting that children should always be sitting at a desk and learning in that way—there is a lot of flexibility around play learning and so on. I understand the argument in the submissions that there has been no detriment and that flexibility is needed. However, I fear that that approach could be taken to its logical conclusion, and what is to stop a gap opening up? I would like to ask that question.

Gail Ross: On that point, perhaps we can write to the Highland Council to ask for the specific paper that went to council members when the decision was made. I think that we would get a lot of information from that.

I want to put on record the fact that teachers are contracted on the basis of 22.5 hours of face-to-face teaching time a week. The argument that if we left it up to local authorities, we might only get however many days of teaching therefore does not stand up. That would not be a worry.

The Convener: It may be that I am just a bit more sceptical that the 22.5 hours could be stretched over more children. Nobody is intending to do that, but I am thinking about the logic of the argument. I would like to know where the balance is between local decision making and the basic standards that parents or carers can expect. That is really my only question.

Maurice Corry: I entirely agree with what you have just said. We need to be very careful that a one-size-fits-all approach is not taken. There are very different dynamics in each area. I would be much more comfortable if we could get more evidence and more information about the issue.

The Convener: Okay. What Gail Ross suggested is interesting and important. It is clear that there was a thought-through argument and discussion, and people were content with that. It would be useful to see that information. We could write to Highland Council, but we may want to write to other rural and remote local authorities that might have a view on the matter. I am sure that what happens in Shetland and Orkney, given the transport constraints, will be quite difficult, as well.

I would like us to go back to the Scottish Government and ask what the constraints on flexibility are. That is not to suggest in any way whatsoever that local authorities would do anything other than what they have to do with the resources that they have. We recognise that.

We are conscious that, although the issue has been flagged up as a Highland one, we want to examine the more general issues. It is clear from

what Gail Ross has said that the policy was thought through.

Do members agree to the approach that I outlined? Any member who disagrees should so indicate. No member disagrees, so we will proceed with that approach.

Rail Fares (Pricing) (PE1760)

The Convener: The next continued petition for consideration is PE1760, on clear pricing for train fares, which was lodged by George Eckton. The petition calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that a requirement of future rail contracts is that customers, as a matter of course, be given information on the cheapest possible fare.

Since the petition was last considered, in December 2019, the committee has received written submissions from the Scottish Government, the Office of Rail and Road, the Advertising Standards Authority, the Rail Delivery Group and ScotRail. A written submission has also been received from the petitioner. Those submissions are summarised in the clerk's note.

I would be interested to hear what the other committee members have to say, but I think that an issue remains. There should be full transparency. I was quite taken by the comments of the petitioner, who talked about the example that had been given to show that it is all very complicated and that people are constrained by timetabling challenges; the example missed the point, which is that it is possible to travel from point A to point B and have quite disparate fares for the same journey.

I think that we can close the petition, because it looks like the Scottish Government is going to address the issue in future rail contracts. However, I am interested in what colleagues have to say.

Tom Mason: The situation has been taken on board. Issues have arisen from the pandemic, and transport has been in a bit of a mess. We need to see what transpires. I suspect that there will be reviews of various contracts as a result of that.

At this stage, closing the petition is appropriate—otherwise it would be open for several years. When the situation has steadied itself, the petitioner can take an additional view if he thinks that that is appropriate.

Gail Ross: I agree. I was struck by the statement from the Rail Delivery Group. It said that the current fare system is

“complex and in need of drastic reform.”

There is a good couple of examples of how people could get from A to B with different stops on different trains. You might end up getting there 10 or 15 minutes later, but you would save quite a

considerable amount of money. I suppose that it depends on whether your priority is pricing or timing.

It will be interesting to see the findings and recommendations of the Williams rail review, but the Scottish Government has said that it is looking at ways of ensuring fairer pricing, so I am content to close this petition.

Maurice Corry: I am minded to close the petition but, to pick up on Gail Ross's point about the Williams rail review, it is important that we feel that that issue will be addressed across the United Kingdom. In relation to customer experience, the Rail Delivery Group managing director commented that there are about 60 million different train fares. That is horrendous. I tested it out some time ago down in the south of England, and I got four different tickets. I saved money—about £12—but it was a bit of a carry-on trying to get the tickets organised. Staff at the local office said that they wished they had a simple system. The issues are endemic and we need to get this right.

I think that we should close the petition under rule 15.7 of the standing orders and I hope that the Williams rail review will highlight the issues and we will get the amendments written into the new rail contract, because, frankly, at the moment it is a farce.

David Torrance: I agree with my fellow committee members that we should close the petition. I have nothing else to add.

The Convener: Thank you. I was quite struck by the defensive approach—“It's all very complicated. You might want a cheaper fare, but then you might miss your train,” and so on. There should be a more proactive approach to making ticketing easier for people. We have to get people back on to public transport and often one of the reasons why people will choose to fly rather than go by train for long journeys is that it is all so complicated. I got the sense that people were trying to justify the current system when the petition has made a clear case for why it is not justifiable.

However, I think that, as a committee, we are looking to close the petition, given that the Scottish Government has indicated that, in future rail contracts, there should be

“an obligation placed on the operator to provide customers with clear, straightforward information on all fares' options”.

I would like to go a wee bit further and say that it should look at why the fares have to be complicated in the first place.

In closing the petition, I think that we want to acknowledge the importance of the issue that the petitioner has highlighted. If there is no progress over the next year, the petitioner may want to

bring back the petition. There are other options such as lobbying individual parliamentarians, particularly as elections get nearer, to concentrate people's minds.

This issue is important and we have probably done as much as we can to add value to it. We may, in closing the petition, flag up to the Scottish Government that we want it to be quite strong about the issue, because the language about aiming to ensure that there will be an obligation may be a bit more flexible than we would want.

I think that the committee is agreed to close the petition on that basis, while recognising that there is an issue. We thank the petitioner for the work that has been done and highlight his right to come back to the committee if he feels that the issue has not been addressed properly within the next year.

Housing Regulations (PE1761)

The Convener: The final continued petition for consideration today is PE1761, on new housing regulations, lodged by David Murphy Shaw, which calls on the Scottish Government to establish new housing regulations by

"Replacing current planning regulations with a regulatory framework governing prefabrication properties and companies"

and

"Allowing property taxes to take account of the property location, size of plot and number of children living at the property."

Since the petition was last considered in November 2019, the committee has received a written submission from the Scottish Government. The submission is summarised in our meeting papers.

Again, there are interesting issues here. I am reflecting on whether there is anything further that we could do. Part of the issue is that the Scottish Government has indicated that it does not think that this would be the right approach and it is clear on that. The question is whether that is something that we can address through this committee or whether this will be a matter for public debate at a later stage.

11:00

Gail Ross: This is a difficult one, because the Scottish Government does not agree with most of the points that the petitioner has made. It is difficult to see another avenue that the committee can go down on the petitioner's behalf.

I agree that the petition raises a lot of issues for debate, not least the subject of the council tax and a possible land tax. As we know, that has been on people's minds for a number of years.

Unfortunately, as you suggested, convener, interesting though the petition is, we have probably taken it as far as we can. I thank the petitioner for bringing up a lot of points that I had never even considered before. Obviously, the petitioner has the chance to bring the petition back in a year's time if they feel that the issues are on-going. We should close the petition under rule 15.7.

Maurice Corry: I am minded to close the petition under rule 15.7 of standing orders, on the basis that my colleague Gail Ross has set out. The issue might come back in a year's time, and the petitioner is certainly welcome to bring it back.

A lot of movement is going on in relation to the whole business of buildings. We have had a proposal by Graham Simpson MSP for a member's bill to better address the issues for purchasers of new-build homes. The aim was to extend the developers' guarantee so that people have assurance that their houses are of a certain quality and meet design and technical specifications. There is an issue at the moment because there are more kit-built houses, and the petitioner has made a fair comment on that. However, we should close the petition at this stage, although I expect that it might come back.

David Torrance: I support closing the petition at this stage. If the Scottish Government does not agree with the actions that the petition calls for, it will not go anywhere, so I am happy to close it.

Tom Mason: To me, the petition is rather confusing, in that it mixes up planning with taxation and tries to link taxation to how people use a property rather than the style of the property. I note that there was no further submission from the petitioner after the Government made its comments. Such a submission would have helped us to interpret some of the issues. On balance, I think that we should close the petition.

The Convener: There are issues here. The whole question of a land value tax will be interrogated during the election next year, and I am sure that the complexities of taxation and housing regulation will be part of the more general political debate over the next few years. Therefore, the question will not disappear simply because the committee is not going to debate it further.

I think that the committee is agreeing to close the petition, given how near we are to an election, and the fact that the Scottish Government does not agree with the actions that it calls for. That means that the petition will not be progressed in the current session of Parliament, although the issues might be discussed further during the election and of course the petitioner can bring

back the petition at a later stage if he feels that that is worth while.

I think that we are agreeing to close the petition. We again thank the petitioner very much for highlighting significant issues to do with housing regulation.

We have now reached the end of our agenda. I thank everyone for participating. It is always a bit of a challenge to have a meeting virtually. I apologise for the weakness of my link, which meant that I was just a voice for the last part of the meeting. I hope that members of the public will understand that.

Meeting closed at 11:04.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.parliament.scot

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers
is available here:

www.parliament.scot/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: sp.info@parliament.scot



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba