

Commission on Parliamentary Reform

Taking forward recommendations from the petitions process review

At its business planning meeting in September 2016, the Public Petitions Committee agreed to take forward a number of the recommendations made by its predecessor in light of a review of the petitions process. Information about the implementation of these recommendations, including indicative timescales where possible, is set out below.

The Committee recommends that the Session 5 Public Petitions Committee establishes a system for recording and publishing information about proposals that do not go on to be lodged as petitions. The information that should be published is the title and summary of the petition and the reason for the proposal not being lodged. We consider that publication of this information within the annual report will assist in ensuring there is greater transparency in this area.

- The first batch of information was considered by the Public Petitions Committee in February 2017, and has been published. Information will be published on a quarterly basis from this point onward.

...we recommend that our successor committee considers new ways of presenting the decisions and outcomes of petition consideration. This could include presenting information more clearly on the webpage for each petition, publishing a summary of the Committee's consideration of a petition or publishing a formal report.

- The Committee has, so far, agreed to report on one petition and will continue to review other ways of concluding consideration of petitions that better reflects the work done and changes achieved.

We consider that relevant demographic information should be sought from petitioners on an ongoing basis. In the first instance, we recommend that a survey system (suitable for both online and hard copy petitions) could be used to request demographic data; that any such system should enable differentiation between people submitting proposals that go on to be lodged and people submitting proposals that do not and that this demographic data should be captured in a way that allows respondents to remain anonymous.

- Discussions between clerks and other officials are ongoing to take forward the collection of petitioner demographics.

In addition to taking forward these specific recommendations, the Committee has also considered other recommendations made by the Session 4 Committee in relation to supporting effective engagement with the petitions system and the work that is undertaken on individual petitions. Ways in which these recommendations have been reflected to date include—

- New guidance on making written submissions has been agreed by the Committee and published. To further assist people in engaging with the

petitions process more information is now being published about the future schedule for consideration of petitions to the deadline for providing written submissions in advance of the next consideration of a petition.

- Other ways of gathering information to support consideration of petitions have been used, thus far including an informal meeting with a petitioner and agreement to undertake engagement to allow evidence to be gathered from individuals affected in relation to a number of petition. In using these options, the Committee recognises that the public forum of a Committee meeting may present a barrier to people sharing their views with the Parliament. The Committee is keen to take steps to ensure that such barriers are minimised.
- New guidance information will be prepared to assist people in bringing petitions. It is hoped this can be completed by Easter 2017.

This work recognises that the Committee's remit explicitly requires it to keep the operation of the petitions system under review.

Petition numbers

In the current Parliamentary year, 34 petitions have so far been lodged. The table below provides information on the number of petitions lodged in each year of the previous Session of the Parliament.

Parliamentary year	Number of petitions
2011-12	37
2012-13	46
2013-14	40
2014-15	47
2015-16	45

Petition subjects

The petitions system provides 14 subject categories for petitions. The 43 petitions that have been, or will be, considered for the first time in Session 5 fall into 9 of these subject categories.¹² The subject category breakdown of these petitions is—

Subject category	Number of petitions
Education	1
Environment and Energy	4

¹ This includes nine petitions lodged towards the end of Session 4 but not considered by the Session 4 Committee. This reflected a practice that was also adopted at the end of Session 3 where a cut-off date was set so that the Committee was not considering petitions on which it would not also be able to consider responses prior to the date of dissolution.

² No petitions have been lodged in the following subject categories: Business and Industry; Culture and Sport; Economy and Finance; Equalities; EU and International Affairs.

Health	12
Housing and Planning	1
Justice	6
Parliament and Constitution	1
People and Communities	8
Rural Affairs	3
Transport	7