

**For consideration by the Procedures Committee in relation to possible changes in
Standing Orders concerning the Public Petitions system**

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

We have read the report of the Public Petitions Committee on the Resubmission of Petitions and note with concern their conclusion (paragraph 23) that:

The Committee notes the views of some respondents that there ought to be a requirement that any organisation referred to in a petition must be allowed to respond to the petition. However, while the Committee generally follows this approach as good practice the Committee does not agree that it is necessary to amend the Standing Orders in this respect.

We agree completely that it is good practice to notify any organisation or individual named in a petition and to invite them to submit information relating to the petition. However, as is clear from the above, this is not currently mandatory, and whilst the Committee may 'generally' follow this procedure we are aware of a petition where this procedure was not followed. This caused considerable distress to people in the organisation concerned and to the Jewish community more generally. (PE779, to which we have referred in our written evidence to the Public Petitions Committee in respect of their report.)

Unless the Public Petitions Committee is provided with full information it cannot be expected to '*[conduct] its own consideration of the issues*' and '*[make] a recommendation as to the progress of a petition*' (Public Petitions Committee remit) in any meaningful way. Failing to address this issue may result in further occasions on which MSPs do not have adequate information to enable them to give proper consideration to the subject of a petition, a state of affairs that is fair to neither the petitioner nor the subject of the petition.

We do not believe that our recommendation would lead to any significant increase in the work of the Committee or would unduly delay the consideration of petitions. As we have pointed out in our evidence to the Public Petitions Committee, the majority of petitions address general policy issues and it is only the small number of petitions that refer to specific organisations or individuals that would be affected by this change

We note that the Association of Scottish Colleges has also raised this issue in their written evidence to the Public Petitions Committee, and believe it to be significant that two out of only ten responses should have done so independently of one another.

The remit of the Public Petitions Committee states that: '*[its] initial consideration generally includes seeking comments from various organisations with an interest in the issues raised by each petition.*' We find it disturbing that a Committee of the Scottish Parliament should, even rarely, choose to operate outside the guidelines expressed in its remit, and therefore urge the Procedures Committee to consider an amendment to rule 15.6 of the Parliament's Standing Orders in order that this should become mandatory rather than advisory.

We would be glad to provide further written or oral evidence should it be of help to the Committee.

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities is the representative body of all the Jewish communities in Scotland comprising Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee as well as the more loosely linked groups of the Jewish Network of Argyll and the Highlands, and of students studying in Scottish Universities and Colleges.