

Petitions Committee

2.00pm, Thursday 18 April 2013

Petitions for Consideration: Overview Report

| | |
|---------------|-----------|
| Item number | 5.1 |
| Report number | |
| Wards | City Wide |

Links

Coalition pledges

Council outcomes [CO23 & CO26](#)

Single Outcome Agreement

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Executive summary

Petitions for Consideration: Overview Report

Summary

The Committee is asked to consider four petitions at this meeting.

Valid petitions –

Crackdown on Legal Loan Sharks

A valid petition entitled 'Crackdown on Legal Loan Sharks' has been received. The petition received 1047 signatures, both online and in paper format. Of these 1047 signatures, 938 were considered valid and 109 were considered invalid. Signatures were considered invalid for a number of reasons, including where the signatory is not resident in the City of Edinburgh Council area or registered on the electoral roll. It was also not possible to verify some signatures as a full address had not been provided.

Details of this petition are set out in Appendix one.

A Safer mechanism for reporting Edinburgh Council Mismanagement

A valid petition entitled 'A Safer Mechanism for Reporting Edinburgh Council Mismanagement' has been received. The petition received 636 signatures, both online and on paper form. Of these 636 signatures, 515 were considered valid and 121 were considered invalid. Signatures were considered invalid for a number of reasons, including where the signatory is not resident in the City of Edinburgh Council area or registered on the electoral roll. It was also not possible to verify some signatures as a full address had not been provided.

Details of this petition are set out in Appendix one.

Princes Street for People

A valid petition entitled 'Princes Street for People' has been received. The petition received 716 signatures online. Of these 716 signatures, 592 were considered valid and 124 were considered invalid. Signatures were considered invalid as the signatory was not registered on the electoral roll in Edinburgh.

Details of this petition are set out in Appendix one.

Bedroom Tax

A valid petition entitled 'Bedroom Tax' has been received. The petition received 1251 signatures, both online and in paper format. Of these 1251 signatures, 988 were

considered valid and 263 were considered invalid. Signatures were considered invalid for a number of reasons, including where the signatory is not resident in the City of Edinburgh Council area or registered on the electoral roll. It was also not possible to verify some signatures as a full address had not been provided.

Details of this petition are set out in Appendix one.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to consider the petitions:

- 1.1 'Crackdown on Legal Loan Sharks' as set out in 5.1(a) of Appendix one.
- 1.2 'A Safer Mechanism for Reporting Edinburgh Council Mismanagement' as set out in 5.1(b) of Appendix one.
- 1.3 'Princes Street for People' as set out in 5.1(c) of Appendix one.
- 1.4 'Bedroom Tax' as set out in 5.1(d) of Appendix one.

Measures of success

There are no immediate measures of success applicable to this report.

Financial impact

There is no financial impact arising from the consideration of these petitions.

Equalities impact

There is no equalities impact arising from the consideration of these petitions.

Environmental impact

There is no environmental impact arising from the consideration of these petitions.

Consultation and engagement

There are no consultation or engagement requirements at this part of the process.

Background reading / external references

[Petitions webpages](#)

[Council Webcasting](#)

Coalition pledges

Council outcomes CO23 Well engaged and well informed – Communities and individuals are empowered and supported to improve local outcomes and foster a sense of community
CO26 The Council engages with stakeholders and works in partnership to improve services and deliver on agreed objectives

Single Outcome Agreement

Appendices Appendix one: Petitions for Consideration

Appendix 1 - Petitions for Consideration

| Item Number | Date Received | Petition Title and Petition Statement | Wards affected | Total Number of Signatories |
|-------------|------------------|---|----------------|-----------------------------|
| 5.1(a) | 24 December 2012 | <p>Crackdown on Legal Loan Sharks</p> <p>Companies which offer high interest short term loans were one of the great economic successes of 2012 – making their millions by exploiting the financial misery of 1000s of Scots. Often charging interest rates in excess of 4000%, these companies target low income families who are struggling to pay bills and make ends meet.</p> <p>These companies need regulated and our Governments also need to improve the debt relief services for those families whose debt has spiralled out of control.</p> <p>...But there's still plenty our council can do to protect people from the predatory practises of these legal loan sharks. We call on our council to establish a task force to take on payday loan companies. Such a taskforce should start by investigating the feasibility of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Running a city wide financial literacy campaign – warning against dangers of payday loans, promoting council money advice services and ensuring maximum benefit take up. - Promoting and supporting credit unions across all Council staff | Citywide | 938 signatures |

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| | | <p>and related agencies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rejecting all planning applications for payday loan shops which include a “change of use” - Blocking access to payday loan company websites in all council buildings and libraries across Edinburgh - Encouraging a crack-down on rogue payday loan lenders who flout trading standards rules with more council mystery shoppers. | | |

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| 5.1(b) | 07 January 2013 | <p>A safer mechanism for reporting Edinburgh Council mismanagement</p> <p>I ask the Council to implement a whistleblowing hotline for Council staff with an organisation that exists outside the Council, to which only senior Councillors would have access. An independent body such as Expolink or the Edinburgh Voluntary Organisation Council (EVOC) should run the hotline and every Council worker should learn about it as part of their induction training.</p> <p>The hotline should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Be completely inaccessible to Council staff apart from when a suggestion or complaint was lodged ii) Allow the staff complainant's name to be withheld by the body should they need to investigate any matter with relevant Council staff, but that the body might make the name available to elected members on condition of confidentiality iii) Be resourced by the Council through a revenue grant sufficient to administer the scheme. iv) Act as a deterrent against inappropriate and criminal behaviour by Council staff; giving elected members the information they need to take rapid, remedial action. | City Wide | 515 Signatures |

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| | | <p>The hotline could contribute to the re-building of confidence between Cllrs, ordinary staff and the rate-paying public after the property conservation and Mortonhall scandals, and help dissipate a culture of fear in speaking out at the Council- about either malpractice or the unintended consequences of Council management decisions.</p> <p>I believe that it would be to the clear advantage of the Council to have an improved whistleblowing system in place, which would assist both Councillors and employees to avoid future scandals that would bring the Council into disrepute.</p> | | |

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| 5.1(c) | 21 January 2013 | <p>Princes Street for People</p> <p>We request the Council to make Princes Street a place where people can move about, relax, shop, and enjoy this marvellous street in peace and safety; and where pedestrians, cyclists and trams co-exist well.</p> <p>In particular, we request that Princes Street is freed of all motor traffic.</p> <p>The Council can then develop the kind of Princes Street envisaged in the council's Jan Gehl report ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • safe, welcoming and attractive for pedestrians and cyclists • inclusive, catering for people of all abilities • encouraging tourists to linger, shop, tell their friends, and return • retaining public transport accessibility, by tram, nearby buses and possibly a free electric shuttle-bus • with a high-quality 2-way cycle route linking adjacent cycle networks to each other and to the shops and pleasures of Princes Street • increasing shop footfall, competing with Glasgow's pedestrianised streets • developing a 'cafe culture' • with garden and castle views uninterrupted by motor traffic | City Centre | 592 signatures |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not dominated by traffic noise and air pollution • and eliminating the tramline cyclist crashes and injuries now occurring regularly. <p>The overall aim is a Princes Street with the sense of 'place' which it deserves as Scotland's premier street - where people come and spend time, safe and welcoming for active travel by foot and bike, and enabling Scotland's iconic street to achieve its full potential for residents and visitors alike. A vision in Edinburgh - but a reality already in many European cities.</p> | | |

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| 5.1(d) | 20 February 2013 | <p>Bedroom Tax</p> <p>We call on the council to implement a policy to not evict tenants whose rent arrears have been caused by the 'bedroom tax'. The bedroom tax is fundamentally unfair and will reduce the amount of Housing Benefit paid to tenants who are deemed to have one or more 'extra' bedrooms, even if these bedrooms are in use. We understand that around 4,000 CEC tenants are likely to have their Housing Benefit cut. These households are already in financial hardship and simply unable to make up a shortfall caused by the bedroom tax. This will lead to rent arrears and the threat of eviction. We do not believe that anyone should be financially penalised and put out of their home simply for being deemed to have a spare bedroom. After the council election in May 2012 the newly elected administration agreed a number of 'Capital Coalition Pledges' one of the most important being aimed at 'Reducing poverty, inequality and deprivation'. However, we believe that if families are made homeless due to the bedroom tax this will directly lead to more poverty, inequality and deprivation and the destruction of communities. We therefore call on the council to refuse to evict tenants who fall into rent arrears because their Housing Benefit has been cut as a result of the 'bedroom tax'.</p> | City Wide | 988 signatures |