

Petitions Committee

2.00 pm, Thursday, 18 April 2013

Present

Councillors Chapman (Convener), Dixon, Edie, Gardner, Keil, Key, Paterson, Orr, Redpath and Rose (substituting for Councillor Balfour).

Also Present

Councillor Mowat

1. Minute

Decision

To approve the minute of meeting of the Petitions Committee of 22 January 2013 as a correct record.

2. Petitions Committee Business Bulletin 18 April 2013

The Petitions Business Bulletin for 18 April 2013 was presented.

Decision

To note the Business Bulletin.

(Reference – Business Bulletin 18 April 2013, submitted.)

3. Petitions for Consideration: Overview Report

The Committee was asked to consider four petitions.

Councillor Chapman made reference to the number of petitions being considered at this Committee and noted that the webpages would be updated to reflect the fact that the Petitions Committee would consider only 3-4 petitions per meeting.

(a) Crackdown on Legal Loan Sharks

A valid petition entitled 'Crackdown on Legal Loan Sharks' had received 938 signatures and the Committee was asked to consider the petition.

Kezia Dugdale, the principal petitioner, together with Gareth Lodge, welcomed the opportunity to attend the Petitions Committee to speak on behalf of the petition.

Mr Lodge advised that this petition was part of a wider campaign to raise awareness of and tackle the problems experienced by those who entered into agreements for payday loans. Reference was made to work undertaken with Govan Law Centre on this issue.

He advised further that there were 9 premises in Leith Walk alone which offered payday loan services. He requested that the Council use resources to educate and proactively support those who were affected.

Andrew Barnett on behalf of Unison was heard as a Deputation, and spoke in support of the petition.

Decision

To ask the Director of Services for Communities to report to the Petitions Committee on 3 June 2013 providing a recommendation on the appropriate decision making body to consider next steps on the following issues contained within the petition:

- i) A city wide financial literacy campaign – warning against dangers of payday loans, promoting council money advice services and ensuring maximum benefit take up.
- ii) Promoting and supporting credit unions across all Council staff and related agencies
- iii) The use of Planning Law in relation to loan shops
- iv) Blocking access to pay day loan websites in Council buildings and libraries across Edinburgh
- v) Encouraging a crack-down on rogue payday loan lenders who flout trading standards rules with more council mystery shoppers.
- vi) Other means by which the Council can support specific sectors affected.

(b) A safer Mechanism for reporting Edinburgh Council Mismanagement

A valid petition entitled 'A safer Mechanism for reporting Edinburgh Council Mismanagement' had received 515 signatures and the Committee was asked to consider the petition.

Pete Gregson, the principal petitioner, together with Gemma Ross welcomed the opportunity to attend the Petitions Committee to speak on behalf of the petition.

Mr Gregson gave a number of reasons to support his petition for the introduction of a whistleblowing hotline which would be accessible to elected members only. These reasons included the idea that it was difficult to raise issues with line management where there was an implication that line management might be involved, also many other councils currently used a hotline.

Decision

- 1) To ask the Director of Corporate Governance, in consultation with the Corporate Management Team, to note the terms of this petition in final consideration of the draft policy on this subject;
- 2) To note that the policy would be considered by the Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee.
- 3) To note that the Petitions Committee did not specifically endorse the terms of the petition.

(c) Princes Street for People

A valid petition entitled 'Princes Street for People' had received 592 signatures and the Committee was asked to consider the petition.

Peter Hawkins, the principal petitioner, welcomed the opportunity to attend the Petitions Committee to speak on behalf of the petition.

Mr Hawkins stated that preventing vehicular access to Princes Street would add to commerce and tourism in the city by promoting more on-street cafes and reducing the level of ambient noise. Furthermore, the views of the city were crucial and that too many buses on Princes Street restricted the views. Reference was also made to the increased safety that would be experienced by cyclists and pedestrians if traffic on Princes Street was restricted.

Councillor Mowat was heard as a local ward member and spoke of the negative effect on surrounding residents if all traffic was diverted from Princes Street.

Decision

- 1) To forward the petition for inclusion in the consultation undertaken as part of the 'Building a Vision for the City Centre' report agreed by the Transport and Environment Committee at their meeting 19 March 2013.
- 2) To note that this issue would be considered by the Transport and Environment Committee in due course.

(d) Bedroom Tax

A valid petition entitled 'Bedroom Tax' had received 988 signatures and the Committee was asked to consider the petition.

Des Loughney, the principal petitioner, together with Fiona Menzies welcomed the opportunity to attend the Petitions Committee to speak on behalf of the petition.

Mr Loughney made reference to the recent Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee decision on 16 April which referred to persons who may fall into arrears as a result of the bedroom tax. Mention was made of other authorities where discretion was given to disabled individuals who required an additional room for carers.

Neil Walworth on behalf of West Edinburgh Fights Back Against the Bedroom Tax was heard as a deputation and spoke in support of the Petition.

Decision

- 1) To refer the petition to the Health, Wellbeing & Housing Policy Development and Review Sub-Committee for information.
- 2) To note that members considered the following, earlier, decision of the Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee to be unclear:-

‘that where the Director of Services for Communities is satisfied that tenants who are subject to the under-occupancy charge have done all they reasonably could to avoid falling in to arrears’.

(References – Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee 16 April 2013 (item 1); report by the Director of Corporate Governance, submitted.)

4. Ongoing Petitions: Overview Report

The Committee was asked to note that there were four ongoing petitions. These petitions were open for signatures but had either not received a sufficient number of signatures to be considered or had a sufficient number of signatures but due to pressure of business were unable to be considered by the Committee at the current meeting.

Petition Name	Details
Dog Control on Shared Paths	To note that the petition was open for signatures by members of the public until 1 May 2013 or until the next available meeting of the Petitions Committee after the minimum signatories had been reached.
Remove Religious Observance from Non-denominational Schools	To note that the petition has reached the minimum number of signatories and had been scheduled for consideration by the Petitions Committee at the meeting on 3 June 2013.
Retain religious observance in non-denominational schools	To note that the petition had reached the minimum number of signatories and had been scheduled for consideration by the Petitions Committee at the meeting on 3 June 2013.
Closure of Holyrood Park to Through-traffic	To note that this petition was open for signatures by members of the public until 10 May 2013 or until the next available meeting of the Petitions Committee after the minimum signatories had been reached.

(Reference – report by the Director of Corporate Governance, submitted.)