



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

Tuesday 11 March 2025

Session 6



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT, HOUSING AND PLANNING COMMITTEE
8th Meeting 2025, Session 6

CONVENER

*Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con)

*Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab)

*Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

*Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Jenny Mouncer

LOCATION

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)

Scottish Parliament

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

Tuesday 11 March 2025

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:56]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Ariane Burgess): Good morning, and welcome to the eighth meeting in 2025 of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. We have received apologies from Emma Roddick MSP. I remind all members and witnesses to ensure that their devices are on silent.

The first item on our agenda is to make a decision on whether to take items 4 and 5 in private. Do members agree to take those items in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Petitions

Pre-1989 Scottish Secure Tenants (PE1743)

10:56

The Convener: We now have the opportunity to consider three public petitions that have been referred to us by the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee. The first petition that is under consideration is PE1743, on amending the law to protect the rights of pre-1989 Scottish secure tenants. Do members have any comments?

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): The Government's position on the petition seems to be clear enough: a diminishing number of tenancies is affected by the measure. As a result, I agree with the Government's view that it is really not worth our while to progress the petition any further.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): The petition raises a few issues, but the real motivation behind it is a situation in which a rent increase was referred to the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland, which then raised tenants' rents beyond the increase that had been requested by the landlord. That situation flagged up an issue that members of the Parliament should look at closely when considering the Housing (Scotland) Bill, which is the appropriate place to deal with it. It is good that the petitioners have raised the issue, but I would be happy to see the petition closed.

The Convener: Does anyone else have comments?

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): My point is similar to those that have already been made. It is an issue to be mindful of with regard to the present scope of the Housing (Scotland) Bill and what we might need to look at as we approach stage 2. It is for individual MSPs to look at the matter further and engage with those who might be impacted.

The Convener: No one else has comments, so the question is whether we agree to close the petition on the basis of the responses that we have had from the Scottish Government. In doing so, we could write to the Scottish Government highlighting the need for it to continue to engage with rented sector stakeholders on the issue. As Meghan Gallacher and Mark Griffin have highlighted, the Housing (Scotland) Bill affords the opportunity for individual members to lodge amendments on the matter. It has been great that the petition has been lodged and the issue highlighted.

Do members agree with those suggestions?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Scottish Landlords Register (PE1778)

The Convener: The next petition that is under consideration is PE1778, on reviewing the effectiveness of the Scottish landlord register scheme. Do members have any comments on the petition?

11:00

Meghan Gallacher: As we can see by looking at the petition, a lot of this ground is covered in the Housing (Scotland) Bill. It is important to look at the concerns that have been raised, but they could be debated at a future stage. I am sure that we will have such conversations when we approach stage 2 of the bill.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I agree. During stage 1 of the bill, the committee heard from local authorities about the fit and proper person checks that are already being carried out as part of the whole registration process, which gives us an indication of how things have progressed.

Willie Coffey: I agree with colleagues. The Housing (Scotland) Bill is an opportunity to implement the changes that the petitioner seeks. I ask colleagues to agree to close the petition.

The Convener: I agree that stage 2 of the bill will give us the opportunity to lodge amendments in order to address the issues that are raised by the petition. The petitioner did great work in lodging the petition and flagging elements around the landlord registration scheme.

Do members agree to close the petition?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Funding for Council Venues (PE1912)

The Convener: The final petition under consideration is PE1912, on funding for council venues. Does anyone have any comment on that?

Willie Coffey: The petition, which was lodged in the Parliament in 2021, simply calls on the Government to urgently provide additional revenue to local councils to run such services. We could argue that the call has been superseded by revenue awards to local authorities since that date, particularly in the coming year.

I am pretty sure that members will agree that the matters that are raised in the petition are very much of interest to the committee. However, I feel that it is appropriate for the committee to close the petition and take on board the petitioner's

message that there are wider issues, which the committee might wish to explore.

The Convener: We have certainly been hearing about wider issues.

Meghan Gallacher: I sympathise with the issues that are raised in the petition. In past years, we have seen a number of leisure and cultural facilities disappear from our communities up and down the country. That relates directly to funding. We should regularly debate the council funding that is being delivered by the Scottish Government and the impact that potential service reductions across the board will have on communities.

I would like the committee to return to the issues that the petition raises and explore them at a future date, because we really need to look at public services, the landscape across the country and which areas have been heavily impacted by the reduction of leisure and cultural facilities. I hope that we will explore the issue in the future, because it is one that I really sympathise with.

Mark Griffin: I make a voluntary declaration of an interest as a member of Unite the union and of the GMB union.

Although the petition confines itself to the issue of sport and cultural venues, it highlights broader issues in respect of public services that are provided by local government. To the public, sport and cultural services are probably the most obvious example, but a range of services that have changed significantly, including planning, regeneration and economic development, are not so obvious and do not have the same public profile.

Although it is probably right to close the petition, I think that we should consider taking a broader look, possibly in a wider piece of work, at the changing nature of local government over the past 10 or 20 years, or perhaps since the Parliament was re-established in 1999, and the change in local services since devolution. The petition highlights the need for us to do that broader work, which I hope that we can cover in the future.

The Convener: We could certainly look for opportunities to do that as part of our pre-budget scrutiny in the coming year.

Alexander Stewart: I agree with members. We have touched on the difficulties that communities face and the necessity of the services that the petition highlights. We discuss funding annually and the petition noted the broader funding cycle. The petition was lodged in 2021, and I am sure that local authorities will have given information to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee when it considered the petition.

It might be useful for us to clarify the status of the petition with local authorities and get more

detail on where they are with the process. If we close the petition and agree to consider the broader issues in our future work, we could consider what might be achieved. There is no doubt that there is a necessity for local authorities to find adequate funding and additional revenue. That concern is still very alive, even though the petition was lodged in 2021. I would be inclined to look at the wider issues, if the committee has the opportunity to do so.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): At the outset, I acknowledge my colleague Willie Coffey's stance and agree with him, to some extent. The petition has been around for a while and I think that it is important that the committee knows what its remit is in relation to the petition, as opposed to wider issues. I also agree with other colleagues and sympathise with the petition. The issues are affecting all our communities.

I have done bits of work and raised questions on various aspects that the petition considers, as have other colleagues. For example, not that long ago, along with colleagues from other parties, I attended a meeting of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee to discuss swimming pools, which have been a big issue, and I have done a bit of work in a cross-party group forum on access to football pitches. Meghan Gallacher is right that funding is an issue, but there are also other issues and the landscape is complex. For example, there are international issues with the chlorine supply for swimming pools, and we know that energy costs are problematic across the board, but especially for swimming pools. I feel that nobody is pulling all the issues together. I wonder whether there is an opportunity for the committee to do that.

I would be open to keeping the petition open and using it as a springboard to consider the wider issues, and to writing to local authorities to give us a bit more information before we decide whether to close the petition. I am also open to closing the petition and looking at including the issues that it raises in our work programme. I am happy to hear what other members think. Whatever decision we take, the petition has sparked the committee's interest in the wider issues, which I would like us to take forward. I am not entirely sure whether we should do that by keeping the petition open or not, convener. I am sitting on the fence.

The Convener: Now is the moment to decide as a group what we want to do with it. Having heard what people have said, my sense, and what I understand from the Citizens Participation and Public Petitions Committee, is that we do not have to keep a petition open in order to consider the issues that it raises. A petition is almost like a rocket launcher; it is a catalyst for us to look at

things. As colleagues have said, we all have experience across our constituencies and regions of those types of issues.

We could certainly look for an opportunity to do some work that could be of value, possibly as part of our pre-budget scrutiny process. We could communicate our appreciation for the trade unions—Unite, GMB and Unison—that jointly raised the petition and brought the issues to our attention. My sense is that there is a general inclination to close the petition and to commit to picking up a piece of work that would look at leisure facilities as well as other venues that people use more widely.

Do members agree to our taking that approach?

Members indicated agreement.

Subordinate Legislation

11:11

Meeting continued in private until 11:59.

Non-Domestic Rate (Scotland) Order 2025 (SSI 2025/37)

Non-Domestic Rates (Levying and Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2025 (2025/38)

Non-Domestic Rates (Transitional Relief) (Scotland) Regulations 2025 (2025/39)

Non-Domestic Rates (Hospitality Relief) (Scotland) Regulations 2025 (SSI 2025/40)

Local Government Pension Scheme (Scotland) (Amendment) Regulations 2025 (SSI 2025/48)

11:10

The Convener: The next item of business is consideration of five negative instruments.

As members have no comments to make, does the committee agree that we do not wish to make any recommendations in relation to the instruments?

Members *indicated agreement.*

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.

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