

PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 15 January 2008

Session 3

£5.00

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PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE

1st Meeting 2008, Session 3

CONVENER

*Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Bashir Ahmad (Glasgow) (SNP)
 *Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Angela Constance (Livingston) (SNP)
 *Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 *Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 *Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green)
 *Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 John Scott (Ayr) (Con)
 *John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED :

Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 George Darroch
 John Grant (Community Councils of Highland Perthshire)
 Michael Gray
 Eric Jones (Scottish Auto Cycle Union)
 Norman McCandlish (Community Councils of Highland Perthshire)
 Tina McGeever
 Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Bob Reid (Scottish Auto Cycle Union)
 Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Fergus Cochrane

ASSISTANT CLERK

Franck David

LOCATION

Committee Room 2

Current Petitions

Criminal Memoirs (Publication for Profit) (PE504)

15:56

The Convener: The first current petition is PE504, by Mr and Mrs James Watson. It calls on the Parliament to take the necessary steps to prevent convicted murderers or members of their families from profiting from their crimes by selling accounts of those crimes for publication. Written submissions have been made available to us. I invite suggestions on how to take the matter forward. There is a document—"Consultation on Making Sure Crime Doesn't Pay"—out for consultation at the moment.

Nanette Milne: The petition has been around for an extraordinary length of time, and hardly anything seems to have been done about it. We should perhaps press the Scottish Government to press the UK Government on the matter.

Rhoda Grant: Is that the correct protocol? Can we contact the Ministry of Justice about the matter ourselves? That seems more straightforward.

The Convener: We can write to the ministry to expedite matters. There is probably a reasonable consensus that we do not want individuals who have committed serious crimes to benefit—thanks to the nature of the media in our society—from those crimes. If it is a matter not just for the consultation document but for the UK Ministry of Justice and the Home Office, I am happy to write directly on the matter.

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We will write directly. We hope to get some clarity and a response on the matter.

Institutional Child Abuse (PE535 and PE888)

The Convener: The next two petitions relate to institutional child abuse. Petition PE535, by Chris Daly, calls on the Parliament to urge the Government, first, to make an inquiry into past institutional child abuse—in particular for children who were in the care of the state under the supervision of religious orders; and, secondly, to make an unreserved apology for said state bodies and to urge the religious orders to apologise unconditionally.

The second petition, PE888, is also by Chris Daly. It calls on the Parliament to urge the Government, in the interests of those who have suffered institutional child abuse, first, to reform the Court of Session rules to allow fast-track court

hearings in personal injury cases; secondly, to review the implementation of the Prescription and Limitation (Scotland) Act 1973; and, thirdly, to implement the recommendations of the Scottish Law Commission report on the limitation of actions.

Members have copies of the written submissions relating to both petitions. Are there any particular views about how to deal with the petitions, which have been in the system for a wee while?

John Farquhar Munro: The issues have been well debated in the Parliament already.

The Convener: There is a suggestion that we could possibly close our consideration of the petitions. I ask Fergus Cochrane to keep us right: we can consider closing both petitions, but is one of them more—

Fergus Cochrane: The committee can close both, or it could keep one open and close the other. It might make sense to make the same decision in relation to both petitions. To an extent, they go hand in hand.

The Convener: Okay.

Nigel Don: There are many papers—I hope that I can remember this correctly from when I read them—but it seemed to me that the outstanding issue relates to the limitation and prescription periods.

The Scottish Law Commission published a report on the matter very recently—in December last year—so I do not think that we should just close the petitions at this point. We should probably write to the Government to ascertain what it intends to do with the SLC report. At that point, we may be in a position to say that we have been through every hoop.

16:00

The Convener: That is not an unreasonable suggestion. Let us see how the Government intends to respond to the report that has been published. Depending on the speed of its response to us, we should be able to deal with both petitions relatively quickly.

Vulnerable Adults (Medication) (PE867)

The Convener: PE867, from Hunter Watson, calls on the Parliament to provide adequate safeguards against vulnerable adults being given by surreptitious means unwanted, unnecessary and potentially harmful medication. Some members heard about the petition at a previous committee meeting. We have a number of written submissions and responses relating to the petition. Do members have views on the petition? My only strong view is that we need some time—a period