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Public Petitioning in Legislatures in the UK and Ireland

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This paper examines the public petitioning systems that operate in the Scottish Parliament; the National Assembly for Wales; both houses of the UK Parliament and both Houses of the Oireachtas.

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Key Points

The use of public petition to raise awareness of issues is considered as an important tool in enhancing public participation in the workings of a number of legislatures.

The most advanced and accessible forms of petitioning in the UK and Ireland are found in the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales; in other words, in relatively new devolved legislatures.

Since its introduction in 1999, the Scottish Parliament's petitioning system has been developed and enhanced in response to research and committee inquiries.

Both the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales have embraced technology to allow for e-petitions.

The impact of petitions on the work of the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales can be demonstrated through a number of case studies.

The limited provisions for public petition which exist in the Northern Ireland Assembly most closely resemble the current system in place in the House of Commons, where individual Members rather than committees act as gatekeepers and where the options for further action in response to a petition are limited.

A number of recommendations for reform of the public petition system in the House of Commons have been proposed but these have yet to be implemented. Change, however, would seem inevitable and the new coalition government itself has proposed change to the system.

Political reform is also likely to lead to development of a public petition system in the Dáil.

The use of public petition, however, is not a notable feature in the upper houses of the UK or Irish Parliaments.

Executive Summary

The use of public petition to raise awareness of certain issues is considered as an important tool in enhancing public participation in the workings of a number of legislatures.

The paper examines the implementation of systems of public petitioning operating in the Scottish Parliament; the National Assembly for Wales; the Houses of Parliament and the Houses of the Oireachtas. A number of case studies are explored in order to give an understanding of the impact a petition can have. Furthermore the paper looks at reviews and developments that have taken place with regards to the petitioning systems. A comparative table sets out the process of the public petitioning systems in each legislature.

The Scottish Parliament has a comprehensive system of public petitioning that was introduced in 1999. The Parliament recognizes that the petitioning process is an important engagement tool and furthers its commitment to public participation¹. The system that is currently operating in Scotland enables members of the public to directly contribute to legislative decisions by highlighting matters of particular interest.

The petition is dealt with by the Public Petitions Committee and following may occur

- A decision will be taken as to whether the issues raised merit further consideration.
- The PPC may also refer a petition to the relevant subject committee of the Parliament for further investigation.
- It can also bid for parliamentary time for a petition to be debated by the whole Parliament.
- Having considered a petition the PPC (or relevant subject committee) may agree that no further action is required and close it. In all cases, the petitioner will be notified of any action.

In the Scottish Parliament, research studies and committee inquiries have informed the development of the system over time. The most recent committee inquiry took place in 2009.

In the National Assembly for Wales, a petitions committee was established in 2007, with the primary function of helping to increase the public's ability to contribute to policy within the Assembly. The committee's role is to decide on the admissibility of each petition and what further action should be taken.

On receipt of a petition, the committee will scrutinise the points raised within the petition. The Committee may then commission work from the research and legal teams in order to gain a better understanding of the issues raised. The Committee

¹ The Scottish Parliament. On-line guide to Public Petitions: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/petitions/index.htm>

may also make contact with the Chair and relevant Ministers to gain understanding of the Welsh Assembly's current position on the subject. If the committee so desires, written and oral evidence can be requested from relevant bodies.² Following consideration, the committee may:

- refer the petition to the government, any other committee of the Assembly or any other person or body for them to take such action as they consider appropriate.
- report to the assembly; or
- take any other action which the committee considers appropriate.

As of 21st October 2010, the National Assembly for Wales Petitions Committee had considered 190 admissible petitions, 59 of which were 'e-petitions'.

There are systems in place to help the public petition the House of Commons and The House of Lords. The systems in place in both Houses though are not as advanced as those in place in Scotland and Wales.

The Procedures Committee in the House of Commons, in a number of reports has recommended changes to the petitioning system, including the introduction of 'e-petitions'. To date, however, these recommendations have not been implemented.

The new Coalition Government has recognised the benefit of a public petitioning system to an extent and has proposed that petitions with a minimum of 100,000 signatures will qualify to be debated in Parliament. It is also proposed that "the petition with the most signatures will enable members of the public to table a bill eligible to be voted on in Parliament.

Petitioning the House of Lords is a procedure that is seldom used. Although there is a process in place whereby a member can present a petition to the House by reading out the petitioners name and stating the point of the petition, it is infrequently made use of and has little if any impact on the work of the House.

At present, there is no system of public petitioning in either House of the Irish Parliament. Although the Standing Orders of the Seanad permit for a Public Petitions Committee³, this committee has not been established. The Standing Orders also outline the procedure for the presenting of a petition; guidelines on what makes a petition admissible; and guidelines on how a petition should be properly closed

² The National Assembly for Wales's Petitions Process, online guide;

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/petitions/inquiries/petitionsProcess/5NAWPC.pdf>

³ Standing Orders 91-94, on-line guide: <http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/proceduraldocuments/SeanadSO2007.pdf>

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1 Introduction

1.1 The paper examines the implementation of systems of public petitioning operating in the Scottish Parliament; the National Assembly for Wales; the Westminster Parliament and the Oireachtas. A number of case studies are explored in order to give an understanding of the impact a petition can have. Furthermore the paper looks at reviews and developments that have taken place with regards to the petitioning systems. A comparative table sets out the process of the public petitioning systems in each legislature.

2 The Scottish Parliament

2.1 The Scottish Parliament has a comprehensive system of public petitioning that was introduced in 1999. The Parliament recognizes that the petitioning process is an important engagement tool and furthers its commitment to public participation⁴. The system that is currently operating in Scotland enables members of the public to directly contribute to legislative decisions by highlighting matters of particular interest.

Submission of Petitions

2.2 Petitions can be submitted in written form by following the template on line (See Annex 1). In addition to written petitions, Scotland has taken advantage of technological advancements to allow submission of e-petitions⁵ since 2000. These permit a broader scope of people to sign it as it allows for signatures to be collected worldwide, furthermore a non-UK citizen is able to lodge a petition as long as it adheres to the criteria set out for admissible petitions. E-petitions remain online for 4 – 6 weeks and have their own forum where those with interest in the subject can discuss their views⁶. It is also possible to endorse an open e-petition through the use of a mobile phone by texting the particular petitions ID number and your name to a number available on the website. After submission, E-petitions are dealt with in the same manner as written petitions.

⁴ The Scottish Parliament. On-line guide to Public Petitions: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/petitions/index.htm>

⁵ Welcome to E-Petitioner, accessed on-line: <http://epetitions.scottish.parliament.uk/default.asp>

⁶ The Scottish Parliament. How to Submit a Petition (2nd edn, July 2008). Accessed on-line:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/vli/publicInfo/htsapp/documents/Petitionleaflet-EngFINAL.pdf>

Public Petitions System

2.3 The system is made up of several procedures:

The Public Petitions Committee (PPC) analyses each petition to determine if it is admissible and should proceed for consideration. In some cases the PPC may request additional information to gain a better understanding of the petition. The petitioner can supply written evidence to substantiate their petition and it is also possible that the petitioner may be invited to supply oral evidence to the committee. The main objective of the PPC is to make sure that suitable action is taken regarding admissible petitions.⁷.

The petitioner will be provided with a written acknowledgement that provides them with information on when their petition is to be considered; they are also provided with a PE number for reference. All petitions that are submitted are considered in a public session. It is also possible for petitioners to track the progress of their petition online⁸.

Regulations for acceptable Petitions

2.4 There are certain standards required to ensure that a petition is admissible.

Admissible petitions are those relating to devolved matters and fall under the jurisdiction of the Scottish Parliament; furthermore they must be relevant to the Scottish people. It is preferred that petitioners demonstrate actions that they have previously taken to help find a resolution to their matter⁹. Petitions that are deemed as inadmissible are those that deal with issues of a personal/commercial concern and should be rectified through a tribunal or court proceeding; contain language that is considered to be abusive; could be libellous; or those that are similar and presented by the same people, unless a year has lapsed; or those that ask parliament to legislate on a reserved matter¹⁰.

Reviews of the current system

2.5 In 2006, the PPC commissioned research to assess the petitioning system that was in place¹¹. The research aimed to address the committees' procedures for assessing petitions; examine the variety of petitions that were submitted; and analyse the characteristics and perceptions of petitioners. The research concluded that there was a limited and disproportionate representation of petitioners¹². The report recommended that the committee should ensure that any awareness events

⁷ The Scottish Parliament. How to Submit a Petition (2nd edn, July 2008). Accessed on-line:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/vli/publicInfo/htsapp/documents/Petitionleaflet-EngFINAL.pdf>

⁸ As above

⁹ As above

¹⁰ The Scottish Parliament. How to Submit a Petition (2nd edn, July 2008). Accessed on-line:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/vli/publicInfo/htsapp/documents/Petitionleaflet-EngFINAL.pdf>

¹¹ The Assessment of the Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions System 1999-2006, on-line guide;

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/petitions/reports-06/pur06-PPS-assessment-01.htm>

¹² As above

should be more inclusive and aim to relate to as many varied groups in society as possible. The research further highlighted the importance of continuing an impartial and clear system for considering petitions in order to maintain a politically neutral process¹³.

Another research report was commissioned in 2008 by the PPC to review the work of the petitions system and the engagement of various groups with the process. The report, 'Engaging the public in the Scottish Parliament's petitions system', looked at various aspects of the petitioning system including the public's awareness of the petitioning system. It also sought to identify procedures that could enhance the system. The findings of the enquiry noted that the public were not very aware of the remit and powers of the Assembly, nor were they very aware of the ways in which to engage with the parliament including the petitioning procedure. The inquiry recommended that the PPC reflect on the use of the current promotional material and consider using a broader range of communication methods including an improved internet based method¹⁴.

In 2009 an inquiry by the committee into the effectiveness of the public petitioning system was conducted to review the current System¹⁵. The inquiry aimed to investigate;

- awareness of the existence of the public petitions process, particularly amongst hard to reach groups;
- participation in the process itself; and
- the scrutiny role fulfilled by the Committee¹⁶

The inquiry concluded with various recommendations and options that could be followed in order to enhance the workings of the public petitioning system. They recommended that the relationship with the education and community partnerships could be re-evaluated in order to help increase the awareness of the Committees role to community based groups. Furthermore it was suggested that the publicity leaflets should be made available in various languages, including Braille, and the hard copies should be distributed over a wider area. The relationship with the local media was underlined as important and the inquiry recommended that this relationship was continued in order to increase awareness of the PPC and the petitioning system. It was also decided that the PPC would formally notify the

¹³ The Assessment of the Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions System 1999-2006, on-line guide; <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/petitions/reports-06/pur06-PPS-assessment-01.htm>

¹⁴ Engaging the public in the Scottish Parliament's Petitions Process, on-line guide: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/petitions/inquiries/petitionsProcess/Engagingthepublicinthe petitionsprocess.pdf.pdf>

¹⁵ 3rd Report, 2009, Session 3- Inquiry into the Public Petitions Process, on-line guide: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/petitions/reports-09/pur09-03.htm>

¹⁶ Quoted from Inquiry report; As above

Scottish Government of new petitions and also encourage local councils to consider establishing locally based petitioning systems.¹⁷

Following the reports in 2008 and 2009 the public petitions system was developed further. The PPC decided to produce a DVD on the petitioning process which was made available to all schools, youth clubs etc. The PPC also decided to take advantage of new technology in order to increase awareness and engagement within the public petitioning system by setting up a blog page, a Public Petitions Wiki page and an updated podcast. Furthermore it is also possible to follow the work of the PPC via the social networking based sites Flickr and YouTube¹⁸. Those submitting petitions now also have the ability to take advantage of internet based tools by submitting photos and videos that are relevant to their petition¹⁹.

Case Study 1 – Scotland

A Petition was lodged by Tara MacDowell, on behalf of the stillbirth and neonatal death charity SANDS, PE1291, that called upon the “Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to (1) note and act upon the Sands Saving Babies Lives Report 2009 in support of its Why 17? Campaign; (2) develop a strategy for reducing levels of stillbirths and neonatal deaths; (3) fund further research to improve understanding of why stillbirths and neonatal deaths happen; (4) develop gold standard antenatal care provision in all NHS boards; and (5) work with Sands to improve public awareness of these issues.”²⁰ The petition was lodged on the 2nd November 2009 and consisted of 888 signatures. It was closed on 29th June 2010 as it had achieved as much as the committee could oversee. The committee agreed that its involvement could be stopped as they had helped form a relationship between the Government and SANDS so that they could work together to make the necessary arrangements²¹. These arrangements included the Scottish Governments decision to ring fence SANDS funding until 2011; it was agreed that relevant staff would receive adequate training so as to be able to give sufficient support to parents and also the establishment of a short life working group, involving members from SANDS and health professionals, in order to decide what the options were in regards to the points raised in the petition.²²

¹⁷3rd Report, 2009 (Session 3); Inquiry into the public petitions process; Remit and membership, on-line guide; <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/petitions/reports-09/pur09-03.htm>

¹⁸ 3rd Report, 2009 (Session 3); Inquiry into the public petitions process; Remit and membership, on-line guide: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/petitions/reports-09/pur09-03.htm>

¹⁹ As above

²⁰ Petition1291, on-line guide: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/petitions/docs/PE1291.htm>

²¹ Public Petitions Committee 11th Meeting 2010, Session 3, on-line guide

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/petitions/or-10/pu10-1101.htm>

²² Petition 1291, on-line guide: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/petitions/docs/PE1291.htm>

Case Study 2 – Scotland

A petition by Ryan McLaughlin, PE1259, asked the Scottish Parliament to recommend to the Government that new guidelines on vitamin D supplements for children and pregnant women are produced. The petition further urged for an awareness campaign that would make people aware of the amount of Vitamin D supplements they should take²³. The petition consisted of 1425 signatures and was lodged on the 8 June 2009. As a result, a scheme was put in place by the Scottish Government along with NHS Health Scotland “to produce guidance on vitamin D, to educate women on its importance, to consider different messages for different groups of people and to ensure health professionals are giving out correct and consistent advice to pregnant women and new mothers in relation to vitamin D.”²⁴ Ryan McLaughlin is still active within these processes.

Case Study 3 – Scotland

A petition from Tina McGeever, PE1108, called on the “Scottish Government to consider the provision, on the NHS, of cancer treatment drugs, in particular cutuximab, to ensure equity across NHS boards on the appropriateness, effectiveness and availability of such treatments.”²⁵ The petition consisted of 632 signatures and was lodged on the 7th January 2008. Although the petition is still open, actions taken on behalf of the petition have already secured benefits to cancer patients.²⁶ Tina McGeever’s work and commitment to securing the availability of cancer drugs throughout the process has been acknowledged. She, as well as the committee, was invited to comment on the new guidance issued on 17 May 2010 regarding the availability of newly licensed medicines.²⁷

²³ Petition 1259, on-line guide: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/petitions/docs/PE1259.htm>

²⁴ As above

²⁵ Petition 1108, on-line guide: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/petitions/docs/PE1108.htm>

²⁶ As above

²⁷ Public Petitions 1st Annual Report, 2010, on-line guide;
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/petitions/reports-10/pur10-01.htm#3>

3 The National Assembly for Wales

3.1 The National Assembly for Wales views the public petitioning system as a crucial function that enables increased public participation within the parliamentary procedures²⁸. Following the Government of Wales Act 2006, a petitions committee was established in 2007, with the primary function of helping to increase the public's ability to contribute to policy within the Assembly. The committee's role is to decide on the admissibility of each petition and what further action should be taken. All admissible petitions are considered by the Assembly. The regulations that are to be adhered to when a petition is being considered are outlined in the Standing Orders²⁹.

Submission of Petitions

3.2 Petitions can be presented in written form or submitted electronically³⁰. The E-petitions system was set up in 2008 and is designed to reach a much broader audience. It is possible for people worldwide to log on to the e-petitions site and sign those that they are particularly interested in. Before signing an open petition people can view the current signatories; petition status; principal petitioner; and additional information on the subject if it has been supplied by the petitioner.

Public Petitions System

3.3 Each petition that is presented is subject to the Assembly's petitions process. To begin with it is decided whether or not the petition is admissible. This decision, under Standing Orders 28, is taken by the Presiding Officer, however in practice the task is assigned to the Committee Clerk. All petitions must contain certain components before they are deemed as admissible.³¹ It is recommended that the petition follows the online template provided by the Assembly and does not include anything that could be deemed as defamatory; of a confidential nature; or abusive language³². Admissible petitions are then forwarded on to the petitions committee and examined by the committee clerk who decides on whether further evidence is required. The Petition Committee then decides on whether additional action should be taken before it is considered by the Assembly³³. The petitioner is informed of the action that will be taken in reply to their petition.

²⁸ The National Assembly for Wales' Petitions System – Guidance. On-line guide: <http://www.assemblywales.org/gethome/e-petitions/get-petitions-guidance-2.htm>

²⁹ The National Assembly for Wales' Petitions Process. On-line guide: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/petitions/inquiries/petitionsProcess/5NAWPC.pdf>

³⁰ E-petitions. On-line guide: <http://www.assemblywales.org/gethome/e-petitions.htm>

³¹ Petitions terms and conditions, on-line guide: <http://www.assemblywales.org/gethome/e-petitions/get-petitions-terms.htm>

³² Petitions terms and conditions, on-line guide: <http://www.assemblywales.org/gethome/e-petitions/get-petitions-terms.htm>

³³ The National Assembly for Wales' Petition System- Guidance. On-line guide: <http://www.assemblywales.org/gethome/e-petitions/get-petitions-guidance-2.htm>

Regulations of acceptable petitions

- 3.4 To be regarded as admissible, the petition should call for the Assembly to do something that is within its jurisdiction; should not use abusive language; should contain a minimum of 10 signatures. Furthermore, no similar petition should have been presented within the preceding 12 months³⁴.
- 3.5 As of 21st October 2010, the National Assembly for Wales Petitions Committee had considered 190 admissible petitions, 59 of which were E-petitions. The e-petitions site currently has 13 open petitions still collecting signatures. Furthermore, since 2007, 45 inadmissible petitions have been received, 12 of which were E -petitions along with 33 written petitions. The subject matter of the admissible petitions varied from petitions that requested the free use of leisure facilities for children and young people³⁵ to others that dealt with health services for people with particular illnesses³⁶. The petitions that were classified as inadmissible involved petitions that were under the remit of local authorities; petitions that were non-devolved matters; petitions that did not comply with the National Assembly for Wales's remit; petitions that was of personal case; and petitions that was related to evidence in a court case³⁷.

Case Study 4 - Wales

A petition was lodged by Rachel Thomas, P-03-197, on 12th February 2009 which highlighted the historical importance on The Vulcan Hotel in Cardiff. The petition contained 5000 signatures and called on the National Assembly and Government to protect the building from demolition or re-development³⁸. Although the petition did not get the building listed as an historical building, due to various regulations, it did postpone any re-development plans by three years. Furthermore it highlighted key issues regarding the regulations of listing historical buildings that may need to be re-assessed. The petition is still open and the battle to get The Vulcan Hotel listed as an historical building is still ongoing.³⁹

³⁴ Standing Orders of the National Assembly of Wales', Standing Order 28 – Public Petitions, on-line guide: <http://www.assemblywales.org.bus-docs-third-standingorders.pdf>

³⁵ P-03-206 – Free all year round swimming for children and young people, on-line guide: <http://www.assemblywales.org/gethome/e-petitions-old/admissible-pet/p-03-206.htm>

³⁶ P-03-211 - Care Facilities for Dementia Sufferers, on-line guide: <http://www.assemblywales.org/gethome/e-petitions-old/admissible-pet/p-03-211.htm>

³⁷ Inadmissible Petitions, on-line guide: http://www.assemblywales.org/gethome/e-petitions-old/admissible-pet/inadmissible_petitions.htm

³⁸ Journey of a Petition, available from The National Assembly for Wales Petition Committee

³⁹ Journey of a Petition, available from The National Assembly for Wales Petition Committee

Case Study 5 - Wales

A petition was lodged by Sustrans, a sustainable transport charity, P-03-077, which called on the Welsh Assembly and Government to introduce a system of traffic free, shared use paths throughout Wales.⁴⁰ The petitioner also attached a proposed Legislative Competence Order draft to the petition. The petition was lodged on 17th October 2007 with 14 signatures. It closed on 31st of January 2008 as the assembly agreed to pass the Legislative Competence Order during the current mandate.⁴¹

Case Study 6 - Wales

A petition was lodged by Neil Evans, P-03-063, to urge the National Assembly to ban the use of single use plastic bags in Wales. The petition was submitted on 11 July 2007 and contained ten signatures.⁴² Although the petition has not achieved a total prohibition of the use of plastic bags, it did bring the issue to the forefront and aided the introduction of new legislation. The Government has set plans in place for the introduction of legislation in 2011 that will put in place a charge on disposable plastic bags. Further legislation is also hoped for so that the profit from the charges can be invested in environmental issues. The petition was closed on 32nd March 2009, but is still impacting heavily on the Government's thoughts about the issue of single use plastic bags.⁴³

⁴⁰ Journey of a Petition, available from The National Assembly for Wales Petition Committee

⁴¹ As above

⁴² As above

⁴³ As above

4 The UK Houses of Parliament

- 4.1 There are systems in place to help the public petition the House of Commons and The House of Lords. However the systems in place in both Houses are not as advanced as those in place in Scotland and Wales.

House of Commons

Public Petitions System

- 4.2 There are two ways in which a petition can be presented to the House of Commons. However in both circumstances a petition may only be presented on behalf of the public by a Member. A member cannot present a petition from herself/himself; they must get another member to present it for them⁴⁴. There is no procedure in place regarding how a member of the public should give their petition to their MP.

Firstly, the petition may be presented through an informal procedure whereby the member can place the petition in the green bag situated behind the Speaker's chair at any time during the sitting of the house. The Member who is presenting the petition must sign their name on the first page above the petition. If these regulations are not followed the petition will be returned to the Member⁴⁵.

The second way to present a petition is through a more formal procedure whereby the petition is signed by the Member, certified by the Journal Office and then presented to Parliament on the floor of the House. The other Members of Parliament will be made aware that there will be a petition presented as it will be noted in the order paper for that day. Before the adjournment debate at the end of the day, the speaker will call upon the member to make a short statement and present the petition. A clerk then takes the petition from the member, takes note of its title and leaves it in the green bag behind the speaker's chair⁴⁶.

After the presentation the details of the petition and the manner in which it was presented are recorded. The petition is forwarded on to the relevant government department and the appropriate Minister replies in the form of a written observation. The petition and the reply are also forwarded to the relevant committee⁴⁷.

⁴⁴ Public Petitions to the House of Commons. On-line guide: <http://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/have-your-say/petitioning/public-petitions/>

⁴⁵ As above

⁴⁶ As above

⁴⁷ As above

Regulations of acceptable petitions

4.3 Petitions are not deemed as admissible or inadmissible as there is no actual procedure further than the presentation. However the style and contents of the petition must adhere to the principles outlined by the Commons. These include the number of signatures and how the petition should be worded⁴⁸.

E-Petitions

4.4 At present, there is no system in place to allow for the e-petitioning to the House of Commons. However, the Procedures Committee has published two reports on e-petitioning with the recommendation of employing an e-petitioning system. The earlier report recognises the high public of interest regarding e-petitioning and recommends the House of Commons implements a system to allow for e-petitions⁴⁹. The second report re-emphasises their previous conclusion that public participation would be considerably healthier through the adoption of an e-petitions system⁵⁰.

From, and including, Session 2006-2007 until Session 2009-2010, The House of Commons received a total of 898 petitions. Out of these, 772 received a written observation from a minister, while 126 did not.⁵¹ The petitions that are presented to the House of Commons might receive a brief response that is recorded in Hansard. However the process does not go much further.

Review and Developments

4.5 In 2008 a report published by the House of Commons Procedures Committee encouraged the introduction of an e-petitioning system to the House of Commons. The report recognised the potential that such a system would have in regards to public engagement. Along with outlining how an e-petitioning system could be established and implemented, the Committee discussed the admissibility and content of the petitions.⁵² Furthermore the report recommended that the Procedures Committee should be put in charge of dealing with e-petitions. In addition, the report proposed that three separate one and a half hour periods should be dedicated to debating petitions in Westminster Hall each year.⁵³ The Procedure Committee followed up this report in 2009 with another report that

⁴⁸ Public Petitions to the House of Commons, on-line guide: <http://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/have-your-say/petitioning/public-petitions/>

⁴⁹ House of Commons Procedure Committee: e-Petitions paper, First Report of Session 2007-08, on-line guide: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmproced/136/136.pdf>

⁵⁰ House of Commons Procedure Committee: e-Petitions: Call for Government action, Second Report of session 2008-09, on-line guide: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmproced/493/493.pdf>

⁵¹ Public Petitions, pp10, o-line guide: <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-information-office/p07.pdf>

⁵² House of Commons Procedure Committee: E-petitions, First Report of Session 2007-2008, on-line guide: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmproced/136/136.pdf>

⁵³ House of Commons Procedure Committee: E-petitions, First Report of Session 2007-2008, on-line guide: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmproced/136/136.pdf>

called for the Government to act on their recommendations⁵⁴. The Committee recognised that although the Government endorsed their recommendations for an e-petitioning system in July 2008, there has been very limited action taken in order to establish and implement the system. The report further highlighted the need for an e-petitioning system due to its capability to enhance public engagement. The report concluded by encouraging the Government to allow the e-petitioning system to progress and be implemented⁵⁵.

The Coalition Government however has recognised the benefit of a public petitioning system to an extent and has proposed that petitions with a minimum of 100,000 signatures will qualify to be debated in Parliament. It is also proposed that “the petition with the most signatures will enable members of the public to table a bill eligible to be voted on in Parliament”⁵⁶. However as of yet there has been limited recognition of the e-petitioning system outlined by the Procedures Committee in the previous term.

Petitioning the House of Lords

4.6 Petitioning the House of Lords is a procedure that is seldom used. Although there is a process in place whereby a member can present a petition to the House by reading out the petitioners name and stating the point of the petition, it is infrequently made use of and “leads to no action”⁵⁷.

As of August 2010, only 28 petitions had been presented to the House of Lords during the previous 20 years. Due to the fact that petitioning the House of Lords is quite uncommon, The Chairman of Committees, Lord Brabazon of Tara, stated that a proposed e-petitioning system for the House of Lords could not be justified.

⁵⁴ House of Commons Procedure Committee: e-Petitions: Call for Government action, Second Report of session 2008-09, on-line guide: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmproced/493/493.pdf>

⁵⁵ As above

⁵⁶ The Coalition: Our Programme for Government, pp27, on-line guide: http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/409088/pfq_coalition.pdf

⁵⁷ Public Petitions House of Commons Information Office Factsheet P7, pp4, online guide: <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-information-office/p07.pdf>

5 The Irish Houses of the Oireachtas

5.1 At present, there is no system of public petitioning in either House of the Irish Parliament. Although the Standing Orders of the Seanad permit for a Public Petitions Committee⁵⁸, this committee has not been established. The Standing Orders also outline the procedure for the presenting of a petition; guidelines on what makes a petition admissible; and guidelines on how a petition should be properly closed⁵⁹.

However, within the context of political reform, Fine Gael has proposed that a petitioning system should be employed in order to enhance public participation in the Dáil⁶⁰. They propose that a petitions committee be set up and that petitions that are passed through the committee should be open to consideration in the Dáil. Fine Gael intends to increase public participation by creating a system whereby the public can highlight key issues to the members of the Dáil.

⁵⁸ Standing Orders 91-94, on-line guide: <http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/proceduraldocuments/SeanadSO2007.pdf>

⁵⁹ Standing Orders 91-94, on-line guide: <http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/proceduraldocuments/SeanadSO2007.pdf>

⁶⁰ New Politics, on-line guide: <http://www.finegael.org/upload/NewPolitics.pdf>

6 Evaluation

6.1 Public Petitioning can enhance public engagement with parliament and also boost the public's role in the democratic process in the Government. The 2009 Audit of Political Engagement, carried out by the Hansard Society, stated that 47% of the public view signing a petition as an effective form of political participation.⁶¹ Furthermore the 2010 Audit of Political Engagement illustrated a 4% rise in the amount of people who signed a petition compared to the previous year.⁶² It is evident therefore that the public are willing to participate with parliament through the simple act of signing a petition. Through the review of the various petitioning systems implemented throughout the legislatures of the UK and Ireland, it would seem that the precedent set by the public petitions systems in Scotland and Wales presents a modern process that helps to increase public engagement with the Parliament and also the Government. The case studies outlined demonstrate how the petition process can impact on the policy and procedures of the Legislature as well as the Executive. It would seem that the procedures in place in Wales and, in particular, in Scotland are the most effective and have achieved various changes in relation to government policy.

Within the context of political reform there has been a recognition that the House of Commons needs to modernise its public petitioning system through the means of e-petitions; while Fine Gael has proposed that Dáil Éireann would benefit from a system of public petitioning. These proposals tie in with the recognition of the need for public participation within Parliament and the Government. However the participation should also mean that the public have a process by which they can achieve their goals. Although a system is in place, it may not achieve the results required by the public and therefore lose support; the outcome is almost as important as the implemented system. 'The report of Power: An independent inquiry into Britain's Democracy 2006' recognised the progressive work of the Public Petitions System in Scotland and recommended that the House of Commons should have greater power to act on public petitions.⁶³ Although it is preferential that Parliaments have a process in place whereby the public can petition them; it is important that the system that is implemented will achieve results. There is confidence in the petitioning systems in place in Scotland and Wales as they have demonstrated the ability to attain results.

⁶¹ Audit of Political Engagement 7, on-line guide:

http://hansardsociety.org.uk/blogs/parliament_and_government/archive/2009/04/01/audit-of-political-engagement-6.aspx

⁶² Audit of Political Engagement 7, on-line guide:

http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blogs/parliament_and_government/archive/2010/03/02/audit-of-political-engagement-7.aspx

⁶³ The report of Power: An independent inquiry into Britain's Democracy 2006, on-line guide:

<http://www.powerinquiry.org/report/index.php>

Table 1 – The Process of the Public Petitioning Systems*The Scottish Parliament and The National Assembly for Wales*

Public Petitions System	The Scottish Parliament	The National Assembly for Wales
Is there a petition system in place?	Yes, The Standing Orders of the Scottish Parliament allow for a public petitioning system as follows; Rule 15.4 Bringing the Petition; Rule 15.5 Admissibility of petitions; Rule 15.6 Action on a petition; Rule 15.7 Closing Petitions; and Rule 15.8 Notification	Yes, The Standing Orders of the National Assembly for Wales allow for a public petitioning system as follows; 28 - Public Petitions 28.4 - Admissibility of Petitions 28.8 - Action on Petitions 28.11- Closing Petitions
How do members of the public submit a petition?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members of the public can submit a written petition sent to the Clerk to the Committee. • Alternatively petitions can be set up and signed online known as E-petitions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members of the public can submit a written petition; however a petition proposal form must be submitted first to the petitions committee. (See Annex 2) • An e-petitions system is in place to allow for electronic submission.
What guidelines are in place regarding the style and content of the petition?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written petitions should use the petition template available online and include particular information. (Details in Annex 1) 	Petitions should follow particular guidelines regarding their style and content. (See Annex 2)
Who deals with a petition after it has been submitted?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The petition is dealt with by the Public Petitions Committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Presiding Officer decides if the petition is admissible. However the Presiding Officer has assigned this duty, generally to the Petitions Clerk. • All petitions deemed admissible are then forwarded on to the Petitions Committee.
Who is on the Petitions committee?	The committee is made up of nine MSPs and includes a Convener and a Deputy Convener. The committee also has four substitute Members.	The committee is made up of four AMs and includes a Chair.
What is the committee's remit?	<p>To consider public petitions addressed to the Parliament in accordance with these Rules and, in particular, to—</p> <p>(a) decide in a case of dispute whether a petition is admissible;</p>	<p>The committee may;</p> <p>(i) refer the petition to the government, any other committee of the Assembly or any other person or body for them to take such action as</p>

	<p>(b) decide what action should be taken upon an admissible public petition; and</p> <p>(c) keep under review the operation of the petitions system.⁶⁴</p>	<p>they consider appropriate.</p> <p>(ii) report to the assembly; or</p> <p>(iii) take any other action which the committee considers appropriate.⁶⁵</p>
What happens to admissible petitions?	The committee may request oral or written evidence from the petitioner to gain further understanding of the petition.	Admissible petitions, are decided by the Presiding Officer and are referred to the committee for consideration.
What action can be taken?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A decision will be taken as to whether the issues raised merit further consideration. • The PPC may also refer a petition to the relevant subject committee of the Parliament for further investigation. • It can also bid for parliamentary time for a petition to be debated by the whole Parliament. • Having considered a petition the PPC (or relevant subject committee) may agree that no further action is required and close it. In all cases, the petitioner will be notified of any action.⁶⁶ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The committee will scrutinise the points raised within the petition. • They commission work from the research and legal teams in order to gain a better understanding of the issues raised. • They make contact with the Chair and relevant Ministers to gain understanding of the Welsh Assembly's current position on the subject. • Written and oral evidence can be requested from relevant bodies.⁶⁷
Do petitions have an impact on the government?	In some cases the committee decide that no further action can be taken with regards to the petition however many petitions have resulted in impact on policy. (See Case Study 1, 2 and 3)	<p>With some petitions there has been limited impact. (See case Study 4,5 and 6).</p> <p>However the system allows for petitions that raise concerns that are substantive to result in;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a National Assembly legislative or scrutiny committee holding an inquiry on the issue; • Individual Assembly Members taking action

⁶⁴ Present remit of Public petitions Committee, quotes from online guide;

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/petitions/responsibilities.htm>

⁶⁵ Standing Orders, 28.9, quoted; online guide; <http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-docs-third-standingorders.pdf>

⁶⁶ The Scottish Parliament. How to Submit a Petition (2nd edn, July 2008). Accessed on-line:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/vli/publicInfo/htsapp/documents/Petitionleaflet-EngFINAL.pdf>

⁶⁷ The National Assembly for Wales's Petitions Process, online guide;

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/petitions/inquiries/petitionsProcess/5NAWPC.pdf>

		themselves, for instance, by asking questions of Ministers or seeking time to debate an issue in the Assembly. ⁶⁸
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⁶⁸ The National Assembly for Wales' Petitions System – Guidance, quoted, on-line guide:
<http://www.assemblywales.org/gethome/e-petitions/get-petitions-guidance-2.htm>

Table 2 – The Process of the Public Petitioning Systems*The House of Commons and The House of Lords*

Public Petitions System	The House of Commons	The House of Lords
Is there a petition system in place?	Yes, The Standing Orders of the House of Commons outline the following; 153-Presentation of Petitions 154-Timing and manner of presenting petitions 155- Petition as a personal grievance 156-Publishing of Petitions and Ministerial Statements 157-Petitions against imposition of tax	Although the system is very rarely used, it is outlined within The Standing Orders; 29- Public Petitions.
How do members of the public submit a petition?	Petitions are submitted in written form. Although an e-petitioning system has not yet been implemented, it is being considered. Written petitions can only be presented to the House by a member. Petitions are usually presented before the adjournment debate at the end of the days' business.	Petitions are submitted in written form. A proposal for introducing an e-petitioning system was turned down as it was seen as unjustifiable as the house is rarely petitioned.
What guidelines are in place regarding the style and content of the petition?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> specifically and respectfully addressed to the House of Commons and should indicate clearly the origin of the petition and its author(s). A petition should contain one or more paragraphs setting out the reasons why the petitioner(s) is/are petitioning the House. A petition should contain a clear request to the House which is within its power to grant. A petition should conclude with a short set phrase indicating the end of the effective part of the petition. (There are two styles to follow, see Annex 3) Every petition must be respectful, decorous and temperate in its language. No reference may be made to any debate in Parliament, nor to any intended motion unless notice of that motion stands 	

	<p>upon the Notice Paper.</p> <p>7. No application may be made for any grant of public money, except with the recommendation of the Crown, unless the petition requests a grant of money by Bill (Standing Order No. 48).</p> <p>8. A petition may be handwritten, printed or typed, but there must be no erasures, deletions or interlineations in it. (Petitions are no longer required to be handwritten.)</p> <p>9. Every petition must be written in the English language, or be accompanied by a translation certified by the Member presenting it.</p> <p>10. No letter, affidavit or other document may be attached to any petition.⁶⁹</p>	
Who is the petition presented to?	<p>The petition is submitted to the House of Commons by a member. There are two procedures in place to submit a petition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal, whereby the member presenting the petition gives a brief statement in the debating Chamber; • And Informal whereby the member simply deposits the petition into the green bag behind the Speakers chair. (Detail of each process in Annex 4) 	<p>A petition to the House of Lords can be presented in three different manners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firstly it can be presented by a member. The member gives a brief statement outlining the main point raised in the petition and how many signatures. • Alternatively, it can be given in at the table of the House; or • Lastly it can be deposited with the Clerk of Parliaments.
Who deals with a petition after it has been submitted?	<p>After the subject of the petition, a description of the petitioners as well as whether it was presented formally or informally is recorded. A copy of the petition is forwarded on to the relevant Government department. Petitions that are considered to raise a reasonable issue should receive a written observation from the</p>	-

⁶⁹ Public Petitions to the House of Commons, quoted, on-line guide: <http://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/have-your-say/petitioning/public-petitions/>

	appropriate Minister. The petition and any responses received are printed in Hansard. The petitions, along with any observations, are put onto the formal agenda of the appropriate select committee and copies are sent to the committee.	
Who is on the Petitions committee?	-	-
What is the committee's remit?	-	-
What happens to admissible petitions?	Substantive petitions are provided with a written observation from the relevant minister.	-
What action can be taken?	-	
Do petitions have an impact on the government?	There does not seem to be a major impact made on the policies of the Government by public petitions submitted via The House of Commons.	There does not seem to be any impact on government policy by public petitions presented in the House of Lords.
What has been the impact of the petition system?	The main impact seems to be the increase in public participation and an important process to help raise various concerns that affect particular individuals/groups in parliament. However there is a very limited impact on policy and procedure.	There has been no impact of this particular public petitioning system.

Annex 1 – TEMPLATE FOR PETITIONS PRESENTED TO THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

(For official use only) PUBLIC PETITION NO.	PE
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PLEASE REFER TO GUIDANCE NOTES AT THE BACK OF THIS FORM.

1. Name of petitioner
2. Petition title
3. Petition text Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to
4. Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition
5. Petition background information
6. Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website as an e-petition?

YES / NO (Delete as appropriate). If you answer “NO” please proceed to section 9.

7. Closing date for e-petition

8. Comments to stimulate on-line discussion

9. Administrative information (not for publication)

Name	
Address	

Telephone nos.	Home: Mobile:
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E-mail address	
No. of petition signatures	

Statement to the committee

Should the Public Petitions Committee consider it necessary to broaden its understanding of your petition, it may ask a petitioner to appear before it to speak and answer questions. If asked, would you wish to appear?

YES / NO (Delete as appropriate).

Signature of principal petitioner

When satisfied that your petition meets all the criteria outlined in [How to submit a public petition](#) the principal petitioner should sign and date below.

Signature

Date

Completed forms should be returned to—

The Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee

The Scottish Parliament

Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

petitions@scottish.parliament.uk

Tel: 0131 348 5982

Fax: 0131 348 5088

www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/petitions/index.htm
<http://scottishparliamentpetitions.blogspot.com/>

Section 100 of the Postal Service Act 2000 provides that petitions can be posted to the Parliament free of charge if handed in at a post office. To make use of this service, the envelope should be clearly marked "Petition to the Scottish Parliament" and should use the postal address provided below.

⁷⁰

"How do I submit a Petition?"

Petitions should be submitted using the template which can be obtained from the Parliament's website or by contacting the clerks. Petitions should include the following information:

- Details of the principal petitioner: include your name, a contact address where all correspondence will be sent to, an email address and a phone number (only the petitioner's name will be published).
- Text of petition: state clearly and concisely what action you want the Parliament to take.
- Additional information: provide additional information relevant to your petition and the reasons why you consider the action requested to be necessary. This information will be made available to the PPC prior to its consideration of your petition and should be limited to no more than three sides of A4.
- Action taken before submitting the petition: provide a summary of the action you have taken to resolve the issue of concern including details of elected representatives you have approached.
- Appearing before the PPC: the PPC may invite you to appear before it to speak in support of your petition and answer questions that Members may have. You should indicate whether you are willing to do so.

Completed petitions should be sent to the Clerk to the Committee. Section 100 of the Postal Service Act 2000 provides that petitions can be posted to the Parliament free of charge if handed in at a post office. To make use of this service, petitions should be clearly marked "Petition to the Scottish Parliament" and should use the postal address provided below. Where possible petitions should also be submitted in electronic format (see email address below).

Petitions should not include:

- Offensive, intemperate, inflammatory, sarcastic or provocative language or language to which those reading could reasonably take offence

⁷⁰ Template for petitions, This template allows the petitioner to specify whether they would like the petition to be available to sign on-line as well, online guide: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/petitions/guidance/petitionsTemplate.doc>

- False or defamatory statements
- Information which is protected by an interdict or court order
- Commercially sensitive or confidential material
- The names of individuals, or information whereby they may be easily identified, in relation to criminal accusations.

Petitions which do not follow these guidelines will be considered inadmissible, in which case you will be informed in writing of the reasons why" ⁷¹

⁷¹ How do I submit a Public Petition, quoted from on-line guide;
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/vli/publicInfo/htsapp/documents/Howtosubmitapublicpetition.pdf>

Annex 2 – ONLINE FORM FOR PROPOSING A PAPER PETITION TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES

“Start a petition

Starting a petition is easy. You just need to provide us with:

- Details of what your petition is calling on the National Assembly for Wales to do
- Some information about you, so that we can discuss your petition with you and keep you updated with what happens to your petition

By filling out this form you will provide us with the information we need to consider your proposal for a petition and to keep you updated.

One of the petitions team will be in touch within a few days of receiving your completed form to discuss the next steps with you.

If you have any trouble filling out this form, or if you would like it in a different language or format, please give us a call on 029 2089 8998 or email us at petition@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Please read this before filling out the form

Most petitions received by the National Assembly for Wales can be looked at by the Petitions Committee.

However, the National Assembly for Wales can only consider petitions that it has the power to do something about. This means it cannot look at local authority decisions or issues that are non-devolved (i.e. the responsibility of the UK Parliament or Government).

If you are not sure about this, please get in touch with the petitions team using the contact details provided at the end of this form. They will be happy to look into this on your behalf and advise you on the best place to lodge your petition, should it be concerned with something the National Assembly for Wales cannot look at.

1. Petition wording

- The wording of your petition should clearly state the action you are calling on the National Assembly for Wales to take.
- Please keep this wording short (about one or two sentences).
- Further information is welcomed, but please provide this separately (see the ‘Further information’ box below)
- Your petition wording should start with ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to...’ or ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to...’

Please enter your petition wording here:

2. Do you want your petition posted as an e-petition?

We can post your petition as an 'e-petition' so that it can collect signatures online.

Please indicate whether or not you would like this petition to be posted as an e-petition.

Yes No

If you do want to post your petition as an e-petition, how long do you want to keep it open for the collection of signatures?

Please enter the number of weeks or months you want to collect signatures. Alternatively, please enter the date on which you want your petition to stop collecting signatures. Please only fill one of the boxes below.

Months	
Weeks	
Specific date	

3. Further information

Please provide some further information that explains:

- Why you want to start this petition
- The action you want the National Assembly for Wales to take
- Any action you have already taken e.g. details of any letters you have sent to and received from the Welsh Government

This information will appear alongside your petition on the National Assembly for Wales website and the Petitions Committee will also have sight of it when it comes to considering your petition.

- This further information should be kept to a maximum of 300 words
- If you would like to provide a fuller account of your petition, then you can attach a longer statement to this form. This should be no longer than 1,000 words
- You can also provide a link to a website if you think that might be helpful.

Please enter your further information here:

4. Your details

We need the name and address of the lead petitioner – the person who is responsible for running the petition. This person's name will be published alongside the petition on the National Assembly for Wales website.

If you are submitting a petition on behalf of a group or organisation, then you will need to give details of a person who is willing to act as a point of contact for that group or organisation.

Name of the lead petitioner	
Address	
Email address	
Telephone number	Landline

	Mobile
Organisation on whose behalf this petition is being raised (if applicable)	

The name of the lead petitioner, or organisation, will be published on the National Assembly for Wales website.

Contact details will not be published and will only be used to keep the lead petitioner updated on their petition's progress and to seek feedback at the end of the process.

5. Send us your proposed petition

Please email your completed form to petition@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Alternatively, if you prefer, please post it to:

The Petitions Committee
The National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

6. What happens next?

One of the petitions team will be in touch within a few days of receiving a completed form to discuss the next steps with you.

They will talk you through the option of using our e-petitions system at this time.

7. Get in touch

If you would like some more information, or if you have any questions, about the petitions system, please get in touch with the petitions team.

Email: petition@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Tel: 029 2089 8998

We particularly welcome written correspondence via email, as this allows us to provide you with a more efficient and sustainable service.⁷²

⁷² Form for proposing a written petition; available at;
<http://www.assemblywales.org/gethome/e-petitions/get-petitions-create.htm>

STYLE AND CONTENTS OF PETITIONS BEING PRESENTED TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES

"Petitions Terms and Conditions

Proposed petitions must satisfy some basic conditions.

To propose a petition, please use the online template to provide:

- the title or subject of the petition
- a clear and concise statement covering the subject of the petition. It should state what action the petitioner wishes the National Assembly for Wales to take. We will liaise with you to edit the wording of your petition if it is unclear what action is being sought
- the lead petitioners name and contact address (in case we need to contact you about the petition. This will not be placed on the website)
- a duration for the petition (we recommend between four and eight weeks)

The information in a petition must be submitted in good faith. In order for the petition to be admissible, you must not include:

- potentially libellous, false, or defamatory statements
- information which may be protected by an injunction or court order
- material which is potentially confidential, commercially sensitive, or which may cause personal distress or loss to an individual, or individuals
- any commercial endorsement, promotion of any product, service or publication
- the names of individual officials of public bodies, unless they are part of the senior management of those organisations
- the names of family members of elected representatives or officials of public bodies
- the names of individuals, or information where they may be identified, in relation to criminal accusations
- language which is offensive, intemperate, or provocative. This not only includes obvious swear words and insults, but any language to which people reading it could reasonably take offence

We reserve the right to reject:

- petitions that are similar to and/or overlap with an existing petition that has been considered in the past 12 months
- petitions which ask for things outside the remit or powers of the National Assembly for Wales
- statements that amount to advertisements
- issues for which a petition is not the appropriate channel (for example, correspondence about a personal issue)
- Freedom of Information requests. This is not the right channel for FOI requests; information about the appropriate procedure can be found on the FOI section.

Petitions that do not follow these guidelines cannot be accepted. In these cases, you will be informed in writing of the reason(s) your petition has been refused. If this happens, we will give you the option of altering and resubmitting the petition so it can be accepted.⁷³

⁷³ Petitions Terms and Conditions, on-line guide: <http://www.assemblywales.org/gethome/e-petitions/get-petitions-terms.htm>

Annex 3 – STYLE AND CONTENTS OF PETITIONS BEING PRESENTED TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

“Style and contents of a petition

1. A petition should be specifically and respectfully addressed to the House of Commons and should indicate clearly the origin of the petition and its author(s).
2. A petition should contain one or more paragraphs setting out the reasons why the petitioner(s) is/are petitioning the House.
3. A petition should contain a clear request to the House which is within its power to grant.
4. A petition should conclude with a short set phrase indicating the end of the effective part of the petition.

To ensure that the above four rules are met, petitioners are strongly advised to adopt one of these two styles:

Modern wording	Traditional wording	Details to be inserted
To the House of Commons.	To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.	-
The petition of ...	The Humble petition of ...	Name(s) or description(s) of the petitioner(s)
Declares that ...	Sheweth That ...	Reasons why the petitioner(s) is (are) petitioning the House
The petitioner(s) therefore request(s) that the House of Commons ...	Wherefore your petitioner(s) pray(s) that your honourable House ...	Set out clearly what the petitioner(s) wish(es) the House to do (the request or "prayer").
And the petitioner(s) remain(s), etc.	And your petitioner(s), as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.	This is a complete closing phrase. There is no need to insert anything instead of "etc."

5. Every petition must be respectful, decorous and temperate in its language.
6. No reference may be made to any debate in Parliament, nor to any intended motion unless notice of that motion stands upon the Notice Paper.
7. No application may be made for any grant of public money, except with the recommendation of the Crown, unless the petition requests a grant of money by Bill (Standing Order No. 48).
8. A petition may be handwritten, printed or typed, but there must be no erasures, deletions or interlineations in it. (petitions are no longer required to be handwritten.)
9. Every petition must be written in the English language, or be accompanied by a translation certified by the Member presenting it.
10. No letter, affidavit or other document may be attached to any petition.”⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Public Petitions to the House of Commons, quoted, on-line guide: <http://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/have-your-say/petitioning/public-petitions/>

Annex 4 – PRESENTATION PROCEDURES OF PETITIONS TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

“Informal Presentation

19. At any time during the sitting of the House, a Member may drop a petition into the green bag behind the Speaker's Chair. The Member must sign his or her name at the top of the first page above the wording of the petition. If a petition received in this way does not conform to the rules, the Clerk of Public petitions will return it to the Member with an explanation as to why it is not in order and, if appropriate, suggested amendments. (To avoid this, a Member may have the petition checked by the Journal Office before dropping it in the bag.)

Formal Presentation (see Standing Orders Nos. 153 and 154)

20. A Member wishing to present a petition formally (on the floor of the House) should sign it at the top of the first page above the wording of the petition and then have it endorsed by the Journal Office as being in order. The Member should then, in person, notify the Journal Office of the intended day of presentation, at any time up to the rise of the House on the sitting day before he or she intends to present the petition. The Member's name and the title of the petition will then appear on the order paper for the day of presentation. Where notification is given in advance, the Member's name and the title of the petition will also appear on Future Business. The Member will then be called by the Speaker to present the petition immediately before the half-hour adjournment debate at the end of business.
21. The presenting Member rises and may make a brief statement as to whom the petition is from, what it concerns (defined in S.O. No. 153 as the "material allegations"), and the number of signatures attached, and then reads out the prayer (the section beginning "Wherefore your petitioner(s) pray that your honourable House ..." or "The petitioner(s) therefore request(s) that the House of Commons ..." to the end). The Chair has interrupted Members attempting to make a speech rather than a short statement and has directed them to present the petition forthwith and resume their seat (see HC Deb 2 November 1988 cols 1156-7). No other Member may speak on the presentation of a petition, except to raise a point of order.
22. After the petition has been read, the Member brings the petition directly from his or her place to the Table and gives it to the Clerk at the Table. The Clerk will read the title of the petition, as notified by the Member in the Journal Office. Once this has been done, the Member takes the petition and drops it in the green bag hanging behind the Speaker's Chair.
23. Alternatively, the presenting Member may ask the Clerk at the Table to read the whole petition. If this is done, the Member should not explain the petition as well (see HC Deb 23 January 1974 cols 1621-2, 22 January 1982 cols 526-8). A Member intending to ask the Clerk to read out a petition should inform the Journal Office when his or her name is entered on the list, and should ensure that the petition is fully legible, supplying a typed copy if necessary.”

⁷⁵ Presentation of Petitions, quoted, on-line guide; <http://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/have-your-say/petitioning/public-petitions/>