

WOC0060

## Written evidence submitted by the House of Commons Petitions Committee

The Petitions Committee is grateful for this opportunity to share our views with the Modernisation Committee. As the Leader of the House set out in her memorandum in July<sup>1</sup>, the Modernisation Committee provides an opportunity to consider how time and resources can most effectively be allocated to the different forms of backbench business, including petitions.

### **Current arrangements**

As the Modernisation Committee will be aware, the Petitions Committee considers e-petitions started on the House of Commons and Government [e-petitions site](#), and paper petitions presented by Members.

Under Standing Order No. 10(1), the Petitions Committee has a debating slot in Westminster Hall on Mondays at 4.30pm. If an e-petition receives over 100,000 signatures, it will be considered by the Committee for debate. The Committee has also sometimes scheduled debates on petitions with fewer than 100,000 signatures. The Committee has, on occasion, also secured debating time in the Chamber.

In advance of petitions debates, staff of the Committee email all Members to let them know about the debate, and how to find out the number of their constituents have signed the relevant petition(s). We know Members find this information helpful, and it can encourage them to participate in petitions debates. Very often, these debates are well-attended.

Since the e-petitions site opened in 2015, more than 30,000 petitions have been opened for signature, and over 350 petitions have been debated. In the last Parliament alone, 13,754 petitions were opened, and 202 were debated. Following the recent general election, the site reopened on 30 October, shortly after the appointment of the Petitions Committee. Since then, more than 200 petitions have been opened on the site, gathering almost 4 million signatures.

### **Public interest in e-petition debates and other parliamentary business**

When someone signs a petition on the site, they are asked if they would like to be emailed to be kept up to date. As a result, we contact millions of people every year to let them know about activity that is happening in Parliament that is relevant to their petition. This includes when the petition is debated, but also includes non-petition activity, such as other debates, or statements, that are relevant to the subject of the petition.

We know from House statistics that petitions debates are some of the most popular debates in Parliament, in terms of the number of people reading these debates on Hansard Online, and watching these debates on parliamentlive.tv. In 2023, seven of the 10 most read

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<sup>1</sup> [2024-08-02 - Memorandum to the Modernisation Committee](#)

debates on Hansard online were e-petition debates. Another two of the top 10, including the most read debate, were debates where the Petitions Committee staff team had sent links to petitioners who had signed petitions related to the issue being debated. We also know that people spend longer reading e-petition debates on Hansard Online than they do reading other types of business; petition debates are typically read for over six minutes, in comparison to an overall average of three minutes and 31 seconds for other material. E-petition debates are more often read on a mobile device than on a desktop computer.

Given the large public interest in petitions debates, we think it would helpful for the Modernisation Committee to consider other options for where and when Petitions Committee debates could take place. Although the Committee very much welcomes having a regular debate slot at its disposal, and would not want this to change, it is perhaps worth considering other, additional options – such as whether it might be possible to have more opportunities for the Committee to schedule debates in the Chamber. As a Committee, we are very happy to meet with the Modernisation Committee to discuss this with you further.

December 2024