

**E- PETITIONS SYSTEM**  
**FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES**

**Memorandum by the Accounting Officer**

1. The Leader of the House and Mr Charles Walker (Chair of the Procedure Committee) have tabled the following motion.

*That—*

- (1) this House approves the recommendations contained in the Third Report of the Procedure Committee, E-petitions: a collaborative system (HC 235), concerning the establishment of an e-petition system jointly owned by the House and the Government, and of a Petitions Committee with responsibility for overseeing both the e-petition and the existing paper petitioning system;*
- (2) the following new standing order accordingly be made, with effect from the start of the next Parliament—*

**“Petitions Committee**

- (1) There shall be a select committee, called the Petitions Committee, to consider public petitions presented to the House and e-petitions submitted through the House of Commons and Government e-petitions site.*
  - (2) The committee shall consist of not more than eleven members.*
  - (3) The committee shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to adjourn from place to place, and to report from time to time.*
  - (4) The committee shall have power to appoint a sub-committee, which shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to adjourn from place to place, and to report to the committee from time to time.*
  - (5) The committee shall have power to report from time to time the evidence taken before the sub-committee.*
  - (6) The quorum of the sub-committee shall be three.*
  - (7) The committee shall be responsible for determining whether a sitting should take place in Westminster Hall under paragraph (1)(a) of Standing Order No. 10 (Sittings in Westminster Hall) to consider one or more petitions or e-petitions, and shall report any such determination to the House.”; and*
- (3) the following amendments to standing orders be made, with effect from the start of the next Parliament—*

**Standing Order No. 10 (Sittings in Westminster Hall)**

*In paragraph (1)(a), leave out “Backbench Business Committee” and insert “Petitions Committee”.*

*In paragraph (1)(a), leave out “e-petition or e-petitions” and insert “one or more petitions or e-petitions”.*

**Standing Order No. 14 (Arrangement of public business)**

*Leave out paragraph (5).*

**Standing Order No. 122B (Election of select committee chairs)**

*Add the following new sub-paragraph to paragraph (1):*

*“( ) the Petitions Committee.”*

**Standing Order No. 152J (Backbench Business Committee)**

*In paragraph (8)(b), leave out “paragraphs (4) and (5) of Standing Order No. 10” and insert “paragraph (7) of Standing Order No. 10”.*

2. Further information on the proposed role and functions of the Petitions Committee can be found in the Procedure Committee’s report “[E-petitions: a collaborative system](#)”, Third Report of Session 2014-15, HC 235.
3. Standing Order No. 22C requires the Accounting Officer to produce a memorandum on the financial consequences of any motion to be considered by the House if the motion would have a direct consequence of additional expenditure under the House of Commons: Administration Estimate estimated to be £50,000 or more.
4. The proposal to establish a collaborative e-petitions website and a Petitions Committee would, if approved, incur the following costs:
  - a. one-off development costs to set up the technical infrastructure required to enable the e-petitioning process;
  - b. ongoing costs for running the system, and
  - c. ongoing staffing and related costs of the Committee.
5. The one-off costs of establishing the new technical infrastructure are estimated in the Report at £188,000. The report recommends that the Government bears half of these costs, meaning that the cost to the Administration Estimate would be £94,000. There could be further costs estimated in the report as £39,000, to enable the data produced by the e-petitions system to be made available through [www.data.parliament.uk/](http://www.data.parliament.uk/). The estimated total one-off expenditure falling on the Administration Estimate associated with the creation of the new website is therefore around £133,000. If the House agrees to the proposals in the Committee’s Report, these costs would be incurred late in the current financial year and early on in financial year 2015/16, so that the system is ready for use in the new Parliament.
6. The Report estimates annual ongoing running costs of the website as £115,000. The Report recommends that the Government bear half of these costs, meaning that the share borne by the House will be around £57,500.

7. I envisage that the Committee will be staffed initially by a team of four, at an estimated annual cost of around £200,000. Unless appropriate staff are released by abolition of other similarly staffed committees, or other measures, the total additional annual staffing costs paid out of the Administration Estimate will therefore be around £200,000. There are also likely to be further annually recurring costs for transcription of evidence, printing and publishing, visits and other associated costs, dependent on the Committee's pattern of work, but of at least £50,000.
  
8. The estimated total additional annual costs are therefore of the order of £250,000 attributable to the Committee and £57,500 attributable to the website: a total estimated additional annual cost falling on the Administration Estimate of £307,500

**David Natzler**

Accounting Officer

23 February 2015