Minute of Meeting

Petitions Committee
Day DD Month YYY
Item No

Midlothian

Petitions Committee

Date	Time	Venue
Monday 31 March 2025	11.00 am	Council Chambers

Present:

Councillor McCall (Chair)	Councillor Curran
Councillor McManus	Councillor Russell
Councillor Smaill	

In attendance:

Councillor Alexander (Virtual)	Councillor Bowen (Virtual)
Councillor Drummond	Councillor McEwan
Councillor McKenzie (Virtual)	Councillor Parry
Kevin Anderson, Executive Director Place	Saty Kaur, Chief Officer Corporate Solutions
Michelle Strong, Education Chief Operating Officer	Alan Turpie, Legal and Governance Manager/Monitoring Officer
Louise Middleton, Democratic Services Officer	Maria Perez Democratic Services Officer
Julia Gossip, Petitioner	Ben Miller, Petitioner

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

The Legal and Governance Manager/Monitoring Officer welcomed the Committee Members and Petitioners, Ben Miller and Jullia Gossip, to the meeting of the Petitions Committee.

Apologies were received from Councillor Winchester. Councillor Smaill confirmed they would substitute for Councillor Winchester.

2. Order of Business

Order of business was as per the agenda.

3. Declarations of Interest

Members were reminded they should declare any financial and non-financial interests they have in the items of business for consideration, identifying the relevant agenda item and the nature of their interest.

4. Minute of Previous Meeting

No items for discussion.

5. Public Reports

Report No.	Report Title	Presented by:
5.1	Terms of Reference and Nomination of Chair	Chief Officer Corporate Solutions

The Legal and Governance Manager/Monitoring Officer referred to the report which sets out the membership and Terms of Reference of the Petitions Committee and invited the Committee to appoint a Chair.

Following the Local Government elections in May 2022, at its meeting on 24 May 2022, Council agreed the Petitions Committee membership to be 5 members as stated in the Scheme of Administration. Furthermore, at its meeting on 25 February 2025, a change to the membership was agreed.

The Petitions Committee is recommended to:

- Consider the appointment of a Chair; and
- Note its Membership and Terms of Reference

Councillor McManus nominated Councillor McCall as Committee Chair. The motion was seconded by Councillor Curran.

Decision

Councillor McCall was appointed as Chair of the Petitions Committee and the Terms of Reference were noted by the Committee.

Report No.	Report Title	Presented by:
5.2	Newtongrange Primary School Playground Upgrade (2025/001)	Chief Officer Corporate Solutions

The Chief Officer Corporate Solutions presented the report for decision, which includes the petition from Newtongrange Primary School Parent Council, submitted on 6 March 2025, in respect of a request to upgrade the playground at Newtongrange Primary School for the Petitions Committee's consideration.

The Petitions Committee is recommended to:

- Consider the content of the petition and the information presented to the Petitions Committee in support of the petition from the Lead Petitioner.

- Determine what action should be taken from the following options:

- No action; or
- Pass the petition to the relevant Director or other Council Committee to look into, with or without any specific recommendation.

The Petitioners, members of the Newtongrange Primary Parent Council were in attendance to deliver a presentation to the Petitions Committee.

The Chair invited the Petitioners to address the Committee.

The Petitioners noted that Newtongrange Primary will shortly celebrate its 100th birthday. Newtongrange Primary was described as a great school with great teachers, but sadly the playground facilities are no longer up to standard. The following issues were identified:

- The playground is a hard tarmac surface, which gives parents concerns about the safety and comfort to children as it can lead to injuries.
- There is no play equipment, access to nature or stimulating activities. This is a stark contrast as Newtongrange Primary is the only school in Midlothian which does not have access to these facilities.
- Railings are rusty and in need of a coat of paint as they make the school look tired as well as posing a hazard.
- The School Premises (Scotland) Regulations 1967 provides guidelines on the size and proximity to playing fields relative to the number of pupils, and notes that schools should have access to properly surfaced play areas. The Petitioners stated that these guidelines are not met by Newtongrange Primary School playground.
- Midlothian Council Learning State Strategy 2022 has conducted condition surveys on all schools, and Newtongrange Primary scored "poor" in terms of external social facilities/environmental conditions and has been earmarked for an upgrade as part of the Capital Plan.
- P6 and P7 children have access to the adjoining park but this is not open to the younger children.

The Parent Council launched a petition on Change.org which collected 463 signatures from others who support the school playground being modernised.

The Petitioners noted that Councillor Drummond has provided some of their environmental funds to be used towards some play equipment and the Parent Council has also fundraised. The Petitioners noted the playground was recently resurfaced and they see it as a blank canvas. To that end, they shared some pictures from play areas from other schools in Midlothian that show what parents and children would like to see in Newtongrange Primary.

The Petitioners stated that the children in Newtongrange Primary deserve access to these facilities as much as the children in other Midlothian schools and added that the investment would be good value for money as the facilities are also used by the After School Clubs. Petitioners also shared the findings of the Learning through Landscapes collective position statement on school grounds, which describes school grounds as a unifying feature for all children, and notes that schools have the potential to significantly enhance children's health and mental wellbeing.

The Petitioners acknowledged the spatial constraints but suggested that this could be solved by providing secure access to Newtongrange Welfare Park and creating a multi-use space. Use of this area would be limited to Newtongrange Primary School during school hours, but the community would use it out with those times. The cost has been estimated as between £10,000- £20,000, and the proposal has already been raised with Councillor Scott and the Newtongrange Development Trust.

The Chair thanked the Petitioners for the presentation and opened it up for questioning.

Elected Members asked the Executive Director Place if there is provision for this upgrade in the Capital Plan. The Executive Director Place indicated that upgrading the school estate is an ongoing programme, and there are plans to upgrade all the schools that are rated "C" or worse. There are work packages that will be approved after May 2025, and will be aimed at schools in grade "C" such as Newtongrange Primary, and this includes external work. The Place Directorate is also investigating the use of other funding to upgrade the playground and whether Developer Contributions could be applied for upgrades. Petitioners noted that there are many houses built in the area and wondered whether these would be available. The Executive Director Place explained that Developer Contributions could be used for both education and community facilities depending on criteria and eligibility of the Developer Contributions received.

Elected Members welcomed the petition and noted that other Midlothian schools have been given environmental funds so the children could exercise while supervised by a teacher, which was shown to improve concentration of the children in the afternoon. It was also suggested that a parking area further away from the school would encourage walking to school. Petitioners stated this is beyond the scope of this petition but could be considered as a separate project to improve Newtongrange town centre.

The Executive Director Place added that the Council would need to contact Fields-in-Trust to enquire about what conditions would need to be met in terms of adopting the park and whether compensation would need to be considered for the space that is lost. This is a separate process, and the Elected Members and

Parent Council would be briefed on the progress of this, however the Executive Director Place warned this may be a protracted process. The Petitioners clarified that they are not suggesting incorporating the park for the sole use of the school but installing a double fence to close it off during school hours but then allowing it for use of the community after the school day finishes. It was recognised that part disposal, rather than full disposal, may be more acceptable to Fields-in-Trust. The Chair noted that the process is not as straightforward as if the Council owned the park, but it would not be out with the realms of possibility. Councillor McManus motioned to uphold the petition to extend the play area and explore funding routes to improve areas for play and referred to the Place and Education Directorate. The motion was seconded by Councillor Smaill. The Legal and Governance Manager/Monitoring Officer confirmed that the Petitions Committee has the capacity to pass the petition to other Directorates. The Chair congratulated the Petitioners and noted the importance of children having access to adequate play space. The Petitioners thanked the Committee and asked whether painting the railings on the school fence would be included in the petition. The Chair confirmed that if funding was not available through the Place Directorate any Elected Member could use their environmental funds to pay for this.
Decision
The Petitions Committee upheld the petition to extend the playground at Newtongrange Primary and improve the playground equipment and referred it to the Place and Education Directorates.
Action
Place Directorate / Education Directorate.

6. Private Reports

No private reports were presented for discussion.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The date of next meeting is yet to be confirmed.

The meeting concluded at 11.32.