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05 September 2023

Dear Clare,

National Centre for Remote and Rural Health and Care

Thank you for your letter of 23 June. I welcome this opportunity to update the Committee.

When Mr Yousaf, the then Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care gave evidence to the Committee on 17 January, he said that the Scottish Government was working closely with NHS Education for Scotland (NES) to scope a centre for remote and rural healthcare, with an initial focus on Primary Care. Since then, a great deal of work has been undertaken to finalise phased plans to deliver the centre and I am grateful for the detailed work that has been carried out.

I am very pleased to be able to inform the Committee that I have approved the establishment of a National Centre for Remote and Rural Health and Care (the Centre) and that the Scottish Government has commissioned NES to deliver the Centre. The Centre is due to launch this Autumn and will have an initial focus on Primary Care. The Centre will ensure equitable reach across all of remote, rural and island Scotland, using virtual learning and networks to full advantage.

The Centre will take forward a programme of work to improve the capability of remote, rural and island Primary Care and community-based service delivery. The Centre is designed to provide a resource to support Health Boards and Health and Social Care partnerships in their responsibilities and drive essential improvements to the sustainability of rural health and care services. This will include improvements to rural workforce and retention, developing a more highly skilled workforce and developing innovative delivery models that drive reform and deliver better results for patients. Our aim is that the learning generated from this work will be shared to benefit other healthcare services in all areas of Scotland.

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I have been clear that the Centre must focus on deliverables and impact and that it must add value over and above the good work that is already being taken forward in remote and rural areas. In terms of impact, I expect the Centre to identify and promote approaches that measurably improve remote and rural primary care recruitment of staff, to increase skills of remote and rural GPs and other practitioners and increase capacity to deliver care close to home, to increase support networks and career development opportunities for rural GPs and other practitioners and to support development of skilled mixed workforce teams

Establishing the Centre is a significant undertaking. It demonstrates Scottish Government's commitment to supporting and developing remote, rural and island communities and has the potential to position Scotland as a global leader in developing health and care services in remote and rural locations.

Yours sincerely,



MICHAEL MATHESON MSP

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