

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

3rd Meeting, 2021 (Session 6), Wednesday 8
September 2021

PE1845: Agency to advocate for the
healthcare needs of rural Scotland

Note by the Clerk

PE1845: Lodged 23 November 2020

Petitioners	Gordon Baird on behalf of Galloway Community Hospital Action Group.
Petition summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to create an agency to ensure that health boards offer 'fair' and 'reasonable' management of rural and remote healthcare issues.
Webpage	https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1845

Introduction

1. The Session 5 Public Petitions Committee (PPC) last considered this petition at its meeting on [10 March 2021](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to continue this petition and include it in its legacy paper for the Session 6 successor Committee, along with a suggestion to seek views from the Remote and Rural General Practice Short Life Working Group, chaired by Sir Lewis Ritchie, and rural NHS boards, and to write to the Scottish Government to request an update on the National Centre for Rural Health.
2. A summary of past consideration of the petition and suggested areas for future investigation is provided for the Committee's consideration.

Background

3. The petition seeks the establishment of an agency to ensure that policy implementation by health boards is both 'fair' and 'reasonable' to rural and remote communities.
4. The petitioners cite examples including care pathways for cancer patients in Dumfries and Galloway. Under the current arrangements patients must travel to Edinburgh for treatment, rather than Glasgow, which for many in Dumfries and Galloway would be easier to get to.
5. The petitioners argue that by establishing this agency, there would be an advocate for the needs of patients in remote and rural areas.

Committee consideration

6. In her submission of 28 January 2021, the then Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport, stated that it is the role of NHS Boards to determine and deliver the services required by their local populations. Boards that cover remote and rural settings are expected to take account of the needs of these populations in their local planning.
7. She further stated that Health Boards' decisions, on the provision of services, will be based on ensuring fair and equitable access to services wherever this is possible. She acknowledged, however, that "this is not without challenges".
8. The collaboration between NHS Boards and organisations such as integration authorities and the National Planning Board was highlighted. It was explained that such collaboration should support NHS Boards to deliver services which help improve outcomes
9. The Cabinet Secretary concluded that while the Scottish Government supports, and promotes, the fair and reasonable management of remote and rural healthcare issues, it does not consider the establishment of a separate agency to be the most efficient way of delivering that outcome.
10. Submissions received from the petitioners, rural GPs and patients' groups highlighted examples of where, they believe, an agency could help. These included—
 - patients travelling long, often awkward, journeys for outpatient appointments;
 - outreach clinics to rural communities being dependent on individual consultants rather than organised programmes; and
 - a failure by the Scottish Government and other organisations to understand the importance of dispensing GPs to rural and remote communities.

11. These submissions also pointed out that these issues are not new, but have still not been addressed.
12. The PPC concluded that the evidence indicated a lack of understanding about the needs of, and how health services are delivered in, rural and remote areas.
13. The evidence also seemed to reflect a lack of awareness within the Scottish Government and senior officials within the NHS of the challenges around travel and the delivery of services that need to be addressed.

Action

14. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe

The following submissions are circulated in connection with consideration of the petition at this meeting-

- [PE1845/P: Tom Mitchell submission of 16 March 2021 \(88KB pdf\)](#)
- [PE1845/Q: Petitioner submission of 7 July 2021](#)
- [PE1845/R: Caithness Health Action Team submission of 30 August 2021](#)

The Scottish Parliament launched a new website between the end of Session 5 and the beginning of Session 6. All written submissions received on the petition before May 2021 can be viewed on the petition [webpage](#) on the archive site. All submissions received since May 2021 can be viewed on petition [webpage](#) on the new site.