

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

1st Meeting, 2024 (Session 6), Wednesday 24
January 2024

PE2053: Stop the cuts to community link workers and help secure their long-term future within GP practice teams

Petitioner	Peter Cawston on behalf of Scottish GPs at the Deep End
Petition summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to take action to ensure that the number and hours of current community link workers serving the poorest communities are not cut in the next financial year; and take binding steps to secure long-term funding for community link workers in GP practices across Scotland.
Webpage	https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PP4036

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 9 October 2023.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. Every petition can collect signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 2,554 signatures have been received on this petition.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from the Scottish Government and is included at **Annexe C** of this paper.
6. A submission has been provided by the petitioner. This is included at **Annexe D**.

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE2053: Stop the cuts to community link workers and help secure their long-term future within GP practice teams

Petitioner

Peter Cawston on behalf of Scottish GPs at the Deep End

Date lodged

9 October 2023

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to take action to ensure that the number and hours of current community link workers serving the poorest communities are not cut in the next financial year; and take binding steps to secure long-term funding for community link workers in GP practices across Scotland.

Previous action

GPs at the Deep End have made representations to Scottish Government ministers and officials.

We have also written to Glasgow City Integrated Joint Board members and councillors about the situation facing community link workers in Glasgow, as well as writing to MSPs representing the areas in which impacted practices are based.

Background information

Community link workers (CLWs) are based in GP surgeries across Scotland. They offer patients help with housing, benefits, debt, food insecurity, fuel poverty, physical inactivity, loneliness, abuse and much more when these impact on their health. They also listen to people about what they need to be well, and support them to achieve this. This allows doctors and healthcare staff to focus more of their time on diagnosing and treating medical conditions.

Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) plan to cut the number of CLWs by at least one third from April 2024. Across Scotland, the funding for community link workers is short term, insecure and

unstable, meaning this is not a local budgetary decision, but one rooted in national funding arrangements.

The gap in healthy life expectancy between the richest and poorest in Scotland has never been wider. We believe cuts in CLW numbers during a cost-of-living crisis will only widen these health inequalities.

Annexe B

The logo for SPICe, featuring the text 'SPICe' in white on a purple-to-blue gradient background.

The Information Centre
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE2053](#): “Stop the cuts to community link workers and help secure their long-term future within GP practice teams”, lodged by Peter Cawston on behalf of Scottish GPs at the Deep End

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

[PE2053](#) calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to take action against proposed cuts affecting community link worker services in Glasgow. The petition further asks for binding steps to be taken to secure long-term funding for community link workers across Scotland.

Community link worker services

[Community link workers](#) (CLWs) are social practitioners based in GP practices in Scotland’s most socioeconomically deprived communities. CLWs can offer patients support across a variety of areas, including housing issues, social security, debt, mental health, and food and fuel insecurity.

The [primary purpose of community link workers](#) is to mitigate the impact of social determinants of health among people experiencing socioeconomic deprivation. The [Leave No-One Behind report](#) published by The Health Foundation in January 2023 noted a widening gap in healthy life expectancy between people living in Scotland’s most and least socioeconomically deprived areas. In 2019, there was a 24-year gap in the years spent living in good health between people in Scotland’s least and most socioeconomically deprived 10% of areas. By

supporting patients to address some of the socioeconomic challenges that exacerbate health inequalities, CLWs aim to improve patient health and wellbeing, and ease pressure on GPs and other practice staff.

Although evidence concerning the impact of CLWs is relatively limited due to the newness of the initiative, [research conducted with early adopters of the service](#) indicated that CLWs helped to reduce frequency of GP attendance, positively impacted how GPs spend their time, and supported patients with unmet non-medical needs.

Proposed cuts to community link worker services in Glasgow

There are currently 308 full-time equivalent CLWs [working in Scotland](#), with [69.8 full-time equivalent posts based in Glasgow](#). However, a [tender issued by Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership](#) (GHSCP) on 7 August 2023 sought to renew only 42 of those contracts for 2024-25. A [spokesperson for GHSCP stated](#) that the number of CLW contracts available for 2023-24 had been reduced due to an anticipated decrease in the funding allocated to GHSCP by the Scottish Government to provide community link worker services.

The Scottish Government's [Primary Care Improvement Plans progress report](#), published in June 2023, stated that 253.5 of the CLWs currently working in Scotland are funded by the Government's Primary Care Improvement Fund, an increase from 242.5 in the previous year. The Primary Care Improvement Fund is allocated annually, and the [funding allocated can vary](#) depending on wider budget considerations. The petitioner expressed concern that the short-term nature of the funding can create difficulty when planning CLW services in the longer term.

During a [meeting of the Scottish Parliament on 13 September 2023](#), the Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health, and Social Care stated that the proposed cuts to Glasgow's CLW service were not a result of decreased Scottish Government funding. The Cabinet Secretary reported that GHSCP had exceeded the funding allocated to it by the Scottish Government for the delivery of community link worker services, affecting the sustainability of the service.

Organisations including [the ALLIANCE](#), [GMB Scotland](#), and the organisation represented by the petitioner, [GPs at the Deep End](#), have campaigned against the proposed cuts, citing the value added by CLWs to GP practices in Glasgow's most socioeconomically deprived areas.

Scottish Government actions

The Scottish Government's [2023-24 Programme for Government](#) committed to “deliver targeted support to practices serving the most disadvantaged communities in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and work with local areas to ensure vital specialist services such as Community Link Workers can respond to local needs.”

In response to written question [S6W-16809](#) on 2 May 2023, the Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health, and Social Care, Michael Matheson MSP, stated that the Scottish Government had committed to provide Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership with up to £1.35m to underwrite the costs of existing CLWs in 2023-24, to address the Partnership's funding shortfall. The Cabinet Secretary added that the Scottish Government was reviewing community link worker provision to determine whether the approach should continue or be revised.

Scottish Parliament actions

During a [meeting of the Parliament on 13 September 2023](#), Sandesh Gulhane MSP, Paul Sweeney MSP, and Ivan McKee MSP asked the Scottish Government for its response to the proposed cuts to CLW services in Glasgow. The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health, and Social Care replied that his officials were engaging with GHSCP on its plans for primary care in 2024-25, exploring options to avoid a reduction in CLW services.

Sarah Swift
Researcher

6 November 2023

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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Annexe C

Scottish Government submission of 29 November 2023

PE2053/A: Stop the cuts to community link workers and help secure their long-term future within GP practice teams

Thank you for your email of 9th October 2023 on behalf of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee in relation to PE2053, regarding proposed cuts to the Glasgow City Community Link Worker (CLW) programme and seeking the Scottish Government's help to secure the long-term future of link workers within General Practice.

The Scottish Government is pleased to offer the Committee our views on the action called for in the petition.

Background

Community Link Workers aim to bridge the gap between General Practices and communities. Link Workers offer one-to-one support for issues such as debt, housing and loneliness, reducing pressure on GPs which allows them to focus on patients' medical needs. They are particularly valuable in areas of high deprivation where poverty and inequality contribute to poor health. Link Workers also work with organisations in the local community to develop and promote available services and support, and help identify gaps in provision.

Most CLW services in Primary Care multidisciplinary teams across Scotland are funded from the Scottish Government's Primary Care Improvement Fund (PCIF), which funds Integration Authorities to deliver six services (one of which is CLWs) that support the 2018 GP contract. In 2021, Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) expanded its CLW programme beyond PCIF posts, using previous years' reserves and a one-off payment from the Scottish Government. For 2023-24, the HSCP could not identify funding for those non-PCIF posts and, to avoid their imminent loss, we made an additional funding

guarantee to the HSCP, of up to £1.35 million, in non-recurrent funding. This guarantee was in addition to the HSCP's current allocation from the PCIF of almost £23 million within £190 million of nationwide PCIF investment this year.

We also made it clear, when we gave them this guarantee for 2023-24, that we expected the HSCP to identify a more sustainable footing for its CLWs beyond the current financial year. However, the HSCP identified a funding gap for 2024-25 which would see CLWs numbers reduced to around pre-2021 numbers from April 2024.

Funding Announcement

After extensive discussions with Glasgow City HSCP, in recognition of the levels of need in Glasgow City, Mr Matheson announced an additional £1.2 million per annum for three years from 2024/25 - £3.6 million in total, to preserve the existing Community Link Worker programme within Glasgow City HSCP. Funding has been offered for three years to provide staff and practices with stability. This funding is in addition to the Partnership's expected Primary Care Improvement Fund allocation for 2024-25 and will ensure that the number of posts remain at current levels.

We wholeheartedly share the view that Link Workers are central to our efforts to tackle health inequalities and inequity. The Scottish Government also reinforced its commitment to CLWs in this year's Programme for Government and is taking forward work to ensure that that CLW services are consistently available where there is greatest need for support.

I hope that the announcement last week makes very clear the high value that Mr Matheson and the First Minister place on CLWs and the Scottish Government's commitment to sustain the role in the years to come.

I hope this reply is helpful to the Committee's consideration of the petition.

General Practice Policy Division, Primary Care Directorate

Annexe D

Petitioner submission of 9 January 2024

PE2053/B: Stop the cuts to community link workers and help secure their long-term future within GP practice teams

We welcome the [announcement made on 16 November 2023](#) that an additional £3.6 million of funding over three years is being provided by the Scottish Government to preserve the existing Community Link Worker (CLW) programme within Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership. We believe that this addresses the first and most pressing request to ensure the number (and percentage time) of current community link workers based in GP practices serving the poorest communities in Glasgow City is not cut from April 2024. We are grateful for this announcement, and to all those within and outwith Government who worked to make this possible. However, we would draw attention to the fact that this announcement was made late in the day and not before insecurity and uncertainty around the roles had impacted on the CLW workforce. We have been advised that a number of valued colleagues had already left post, with the loss of their expertise and trusted relationships.

We do not believe that the second request in the petition “to take binding steps to secure funding in the long term for community link workers in GP practices across Scotland” has been addressed yet.

We would like to bring to the attention of the committee a social return on investment report by Biggar Economics, which found that in 2022 the ALLIANCE Community Links Worker Programme in Glasgow supported 7,800 people and cost £2.1 million to deliver, while generating around £2.0 million gross value added (GVA) for the Scottish economy, £0.8 million in cost savings and around £0.5 million in tax and, most importantly, £18.2 million in wellbeing benefits for communities in the west of Scotland – £8.79 benefit for every £1 of public funding invested (report available from the [Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland](#)). We would also draw attention to a [research report](#) which explores in depth

the range and scope of community link worker programmes across Scotland.

We are grateful for any support the Committee can offer towards the goal of securing long-term funding for this vital service in areas of greatest need.