

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 9 October 2024
15th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

PE2041: Exempt community healthcare staff from parking charges

Introduction

Petitioner John Ronald

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to encourage local authorities to exempt staff working at community healthcare facilities and who don't have access to free on-site staff parking from on-street parking charges and allow them to care for vulnerable and sick people in our country without it costing them thousands of pounds per year.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2041>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 6 December 2023](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care, COSLA, the Royal College of Nursing, Unison, Unite, and the Allied Health Professionals Federation.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new written submissions from the Royal College of Nursing, the then Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery and Social Care, the Petitioner, COSLA, Unite the Union Scotland, and the Allied Health Professional Federation Scotland, which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage](#).
5. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. [The Scottish Government gave its initial position on this petition on 7 November 2023](#).
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 296 signatures have been received on this petition.

Action

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

CPPP/S6/24/15/7

**Clerks to the Committee
October 2024**

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2041: Exempt community healthcare staff from parking charges

Petitioner

John Ronald

Date Lodged

3 August 2023

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to encourage local authorities to exempt staff working at community healthcare facilities and who don't have access to free on-site staff parking from on-street parking charges and allow them to care for vulnerable and sick people in our country without it costing them thousands of pounds per year.

Previous action

I have contacted my local MSPs.

I have also contacted NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and local councillors.

Background information

I work alongside nurses, social workers, health visitors, doctors, admin staff, cleaners and other vital staff within a community health building, which is surrounded by parking meters. Parking charges have increased dramatically to £6 per hour. This means staff pay £48 when working an eight-hour shift. Working a 5 day week, this comes to around £11,520 per year – equivalent to nearly half of the salary of some staff.

We are living through a cost-of-living crisis.

We clapped for our emergency workers, we cheered them on through a pandemic, but now the council and government charge them to care for sick, elderly, and vulnerable people. Community staff need to use their cars but are being punished financially for carrying out their roles. A simple solution would be to provide permits exempting them from charges.

Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2041 on 6 December 2023

The Convener: The first of our new petitions is PE2041, on exempting community healthcare staff from parking charges. The petition was lodged by John Ronald. It calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to encourage local authorities to exempt staff working at community healthcare facilities, and who do not have access to free on-site staff parking, from on-street parking charges, to allow them to care for vulnerable and sick people in our country without it costing them thousands of pounds per year.

Mr Ronald told us that he works alongside healthcare staff who are based in community health buildings that are surrounded by parking meters, which have seen an increase in charges to around £6 per hour. Mr Ronald is concerned about the impact that that will have on community-based staff who require use of a car throughout their shifts, particularly in the context of the cost of living crisis.

The Minister for Local Government, Empowerment and Planning responded to the petition, noting that, as local authorities are responsible for setting parking charges on property that they own and for determining who is exempt from such charges, it is not a matter that the Scottish Government can intervene in. However, I argue that it is an issue on which the Scottish Government might have an opinion.

The briefing that we have received from SPICe also notes the role of local authorities in setting parking charges, as well as highlighting measures for NHS staff and volunteers to claim reimbursement for parking charges and the action that the Scottish Government has taken to abolish car parking at NHS hospitals in Scotland—which is of no use at all to the people whom we are considering here. Do colleagues have any comments or suggestions? I do not feel that, so far, we have had anything that helps that very important body of public service workers at all.

Fergus Ewing: I was astonished by the replies, quite frankly. The starting point for us in our work is to look at what petitioners say and what they complain about. This petitioner says that the parking charges that he and his cohort of community healthcare workers must pay—it is not quite clear whether he is an employee or a volunteer, but maybe I have not read the information properly—have increased to £6 per hour. That means that staff pay £48 for working an eight-hour shift, which, on a five-day week, comes to £11,520 year.

I would have thought that the health minister and NHS Scotland would have commented directly on what the petitioner said, but they have not. Why not? It is absolutely baffling and completely unacceptable. The idea that the Scottish Government can pass the buck to local authorities is completely at odds with what happened in September 2008—the information that I have suggests that, at that time, the Scottish Government announced that car parking charges should be abolished at NHS hospitals.

That directly contradicts what the minister is now saying. I find it absolutely baffling that we would be asked to regard this nonsense as in any way acceptable. We have to strongly rebut the response and write to COSLA and the health minister and ask

them to look again. We should ask whether it is the case that groups of health workers have to pay these extortionate charges and, if so, how on earth they can be expected to carry on in their jobs. If that is true, we will be driving people out of that kind of work. COSLA and the minister might question that evidence, which is fine, but surely the petitioner is entitled to a direct response.

The Convener: Yes. Curiously, I see that our colleague Jackie Baillie is in the public gallery, as she is joining us for a later petition. Jackie and I worked together on hospital car parking charges in an earlier parliamentary session. We wrote to the then health secretary—one Nicola Sturgeon—and managed, on a joint Opposition basis, to have hospital car parking charges in NHS-owned car parks abolished. You make the point very effectively, Mr Ewing, that the Government has previously intervened on a matter that it regarded as being in the ownership of the NHS.

The key thing for me is exactly the point that you make, which is that the Scottish Government says that it is not a matter for the Scottish Government. It may not be technically a matter for the Scottish Government, but the Government can have an opinion on it and can show some sort of moral leadership or lead in relation to our evidencing the petitioner's claim. It seems to me that we are talking about individuals who are community based and who need to use a car to get to the patients or people whom they are assisting. If they are having to pay significant car parking charges, whether that is back at headquarters or when they are with the patient, that is a disincentive to their continuing in the form of employment that they are in. Their loss would be hugely detrimental to that valuable service in the community.

I wonder whether we could also write to COSLA, the Royal College of Nursing, Unison, Unite and the Allied Health Professions Federation to see whether we can get further evidence on the statements that the petitioner has made to understand whether it is a widespread experience. I certainly think that we should go back to the Scottish Government and say, "We'd like to understand what your view is on the petition and not just to hear you argue that it's not a matter for you." Clearly, it would be a matter for ministers if we suddenly lost all the staff who are providing the service.

Fergus Ewing: It was of concern in the good old days, convener.

The Convener: Well, I am not going to lead the committee in a chorus of "Down at the Old Bull and Bush", Mr Ewing.

Are there any other comments? Are we content to proceed on that basis?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: I thank the petitioner very much. As he will have heard, we will be taking forward the aims of the petition.

Annexe C: Written submissions

Royal College of Nursing (RCN) Scotland submission of 11 January 2024

PE2041/B: Exempt community healthcare staff from parking charges

Thank you for your letter seeking RCN Scotland's views on the actions called for in PE2041. RCN Scotland supports the petition's call for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to encourage local authorities to exempt staff working at community healthcare facilities, and who don't have access to free on-site staff parking, from on-street parking charges.

The RCN believes that all staff should be able to access safe, sustainable, and affordable travel to work regardless of their role and working hours. The RCN expects all employers to enable their staff to travel to work sustainably without exposure to unnecessary cost and risk. This should include the provision of free onsite parking where available alongside a range of other sustainable travel options.

Parking arrangements form part of working conditions for RCN members and impact recruitment and retention rates.

We are clear that staff undertaking their duties should not be out of pocket for doing so. Where individuals are essential car users, for example because they are required to visit their patients, this should be taken into consideration in respect of the parking facilities provided at their base.

We are of course mindful of the need to expand environmentally sustainable travel options, however in many cases it is simply not practical for frontline nursing staff with a busy caseload to use public transport in relation to both the demands placed upon services and their personal safety.

While larger NHS premises do prioritise parking permits on NHS sites for those who are essential car users, we are aware of issues in some areas where community nursing staff have been unable to access free parking at their base. We would support frontline staff being exempt from parking charges in these circumstances.

Whilst travelling for business purposes, staff will be eligible to claim the cost of parking through the normal expenses process within each board. However, this will mean personal expenditure in the first instance. NHS staff should not unreasonably experience delays for expenses being reimbursed, particularly given the economic environment that currently prevails.

I hope that this response is helpful and supports the Committee's consideration of this important petition.

Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery Health and Social Care submission of 11 January 2024

PE2041/C: Exempt community healthcare staff from parking charges

Thank you for your letter on 11 December regarding the above petition, before addressing these specific points, I would like to clarify the Government's position regarding parking charges on NHS premises.

In 2008, the Government abolished all car parking charges on NHS owned car parks, we estimate this has saved patients, visitors and staff £54 million since the policy was implemented. That did leave three PFI owned car sites at Glasgow Royal Infirmary, Ninewells Hospital and Edinburgh Royal Infirmary which continued to apply charges, however, again re-emphasising our commitment to eliminating charges which we consider to disproportionately impact on people and families that are impacted by poor health, we removed these charges in 2020 so there is no NHS facility in Scotland that has car parking charges.

I do understand that at on occasions, NHS staff may need to travel and incur car parking charges, however local NHS policies allows for staff to be reimbursed for valid expenses. For example, NHS Lothian's staff expenses policy states:

There are occasions where employees incur expenses whilst performing their duties. If the nature of the expense is a validly incurred business expense, as determined by the employee's terms and conditions, then the employee can make a claim for reimbursement of the expense, or payment of an allowance (where appropriate) to cover the cost.

I would expect all NHS Boards in Scotland to have a similar policy that applies to their staff, including community healthcare workers. However, I do note that this policy does not cover staff who drive to their work and park their car all day at their base of work and I would not propose to extend the policy to cover these staff.

Changing the policy in this way would undermine our Sustainable Travel strategy and I know from Ministerial letters which I receive, that it can antagonise local residents if parking spaces are used by others, even if they work for the NHS. I would also be concerned at the precedent that it could create if Government became responsible for paying for staff parking. The work NHS staff undertake is of course vital and very much appreciated, but so is the work of teachers, Police, nursery workers etc and if we make an exception for NHS staff, then I am sure these groups would make similar claims and that would not be sustainable.

Finally, while I have policy responsibility on how parking arrangements should apply to NHS properties, I am not responsible for deciding parking policy outside the hospital. Local Authorities are responsible for managing the wider car parking policy and it is for them to decide how much they should charge and if any exemptions should apply.

In terms of your specific questions, I would note:

- **The level of charges being incurred by community healthcare staff when undertaking their role** – I would expect that parking charges if they are a validly incurred business expense, would be reimbursed by the community health worker's NHS employer.
- **That parking meter charges around the community health building the petitioner works in have increased to around £6 per hour** – that is a matter for each Local Authority to decide.
- **Based on a five-day working week, that could mean community health workers face yearly charges of up to £11,520** – this calculation is based on the assumption that a community healthcare worker spends £48 a day parking their car, eight hours a day, five days a week, 48 weeks every year. I would reiterate, that if they are a valid business expense, then I would expect them to be reimbursed for costs incurred doing their job. If these costs are as a result of someone driving to their base of work and parking their car all day, then that is a choice for the individual to make themselves and as noted above, I am not inclined to change this policy.

Our commitment to eliminating car parking charges on NHS sites for patients, visitors and staff is clear, however it is for Local Authorities to decide wider car parking arrangements and I have no plan to intervene on this matter.

Yours sincerely

MICHAEL MATHESON MSP

Petitioner submission of 13 January 2024

PE2041/D: Exempt community healthcare staff from parking charges

Thank you for sharing the responses received to my petition.

The one point I would like to raise is that of discrimination. Is it not discrimination if you have a group of people, i.e. nurses, and half of that same group is being treated different from the rest?

The Cabinet Secretary suggests it would be unsustainable to provide an exemption for NHS staff as it would likely lead to similar requests from police and teachers etc., but where is the evidence that those personnel use their own cars for work? As I believe the police have vehicles supplied, as do the fire service and ambulance service. The teachers don't use personal cars for business and as I can calculate, out of all the services, it is only community health staff who use their own cars for work. The Cabinet Secretary's excuse for not doing anything is flawed by what I can tell.

COSLA submission of 20 February 2024

PE2041/E: Exempt community healthcare staff from parking charges

At present COSLA does not have a position on this particular issue. We shall inform you if this should change.

Unite the Union Scotland submission of 3 April 2024

PE2041/F: Exempt community healthcare staff from parking charges

Unite is supportive of this petition and has previously made clear our opposition to workplace parking charges and workplace parking levies in particular. Workers in the health and social care sector (including community healthcare staff) should not be subject to what is by all accounts, an additional charge for doing their job. We would not expect paramedic or ambulance Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) to pay on-street parking charges when carrying out their job, why then do we expect health and social care workers to be penalised. We therefore support the principle that such staff should also be exempt from on-street parking charges as per the petition terms.

A copy of [the submission by Unite the union Scotland to Transport Scotland's Workplace Parking Levy Consultation is available on the Scottish Government consultation hub](#) for information.

Allied Health Professionals Federation Scotland (AHPFS) submission of 5 April 2024

PE2041/G: Exempt community healthcare staff from parking charges

Allied health professionals (AHPs) play a critical role in providing high quality health and care for the population of Scotland. They are key to the multidisciplinary teams outlined in the petition. They deliver support in community settings across Scotland, and many require access to a car to reach those in greatest need. Our members have highlighted the significant challenges of the cost-of-living crisis and the increased financial burden.

Allied Health Professions Federation Scotland (AHPFS) supports this petition, which aims to waive car parking fees for health and care staff. AHPs need to use health care facilities parking to access their workplace and deliver care. If AHPs are required to pay for parking, they would effectively be penalised for accessing their workplace. This would amount to unfair treatment of staff.

Should the Committee require any further information, we would be happy to provide this.