

# Finlay Carson MSP submission of 3 May 2022

## PE1845/Y – Agency to advocate for the healthcare needs of rural Scotland

Unfortunately I am unable to attend in person today's meeting of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee.

Can I voice my support for the petition PE1845 Agency to advocate for the healthcare needs of rural Scotland. I have met and spoken regularly with the petitioner Gordon Baird who has raised this on behalf of Galloway Community Hospital Action Group.

In summary, it calls 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.

The evidence previously produced before the committee points to the effects of unnecessary travel for cancer patients in rural and remote communities, and shows also that travelling negatively affects access to inpatient care.

Senior health officials have provided numerous undertakings to address the inequalities but this has not happened despite numerous undertakings. It is clear from issues in some areas, including my constituency of Galloway and West Dumfries, such matters cannot be raised centrally.

As Sir Lewis Ritchie, chair of the Remote and Rural General Practice Working Group, one of the recommendations in a report published in 2020 was that the Scottish Government should establish a National Centre of Excellence for Remote and Rural Health and Social Care, to foster and promote innovation and excellence in Scotland and internationally.

In its submission, NHS Grampian says its overall approach in both Moray and Aberdeenshire is to maintain services as locally as possible through general practice, community pharmacy, optometry, dental, out of hours provision and community hospitals.

Its network of community hospitals deliver many services which, in other areas, you might have to travel to a major centre to receive. It supports this work with local clinical and managerial leadership.

Indeed, this is something I have tried to encourage in Galloway and West Dumfries where we have three cottage hospitals that are presently mothballed.

More tellingly is the submission provided by a constituent engaging with Wigtownshire maternity services, who points out there has been a reduction in service without community engagement. This has resulted also in out of hours contact being limited to telephone support or a three hour round-trip of up to 180 miles.

Frequently those unable to advocate for themselves through poverty, lack of education or poor family circumstances have suffered disproportionately. Stranraer is home to the 1 per cent most deprived in Scotland.

I agree wholeheartedly that rural and remote issues need independent and informed advocacy, I would ask that the committee continue Petition PE1845 in the believe that further work has the potential to achieve this.