

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