

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.

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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

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