

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition PE2070: [Stop same-day-only GP appointment systems](#), lodged by Lorraine Russo.

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to stop GP surgeries from only allowing same-day appointment bookings, enabling patients also to make appointments for future dates.

Background

Most General Practitioners (GPs) in Scotland are independent contractors. A small number of GPs are in salaried positions employed directly by an NHS Board or a GP Partner.

GMS contract

In 2018 the Scottish Government negotiated a new [General Medical Services \(GMS\) contract](#) with the Scottish General Practitioners Committee of the British Medical Association.

[The National Health Service \(General Medical Services Contracts\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2018](#) and [The National Health Service \(Primary Medical Services Section 17C Agreements\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2018](#) regulate the agreements Health Boards can enter into with general medical practitioners to provide primary medical services under the [National Health Service \(Scotland\) Act 1978](#).

GP appointments

The 2018 GMS contract made reference to the availability of online appointment booking.

“Under the proposed new contract, GP practices will be required to provide online services to patients such as appointment booking and repeat prescription ordering, where the practice already has the existing computer systems and software required to implement online services safely”.

In response to a [FOI request on online services](#) the Scottish Government stated that:

“It will remain for GPs as independent contractors to make their own appointment arrangements based on their understanding of the clinical needs of their patients.”

In response to [S6O-02908](#), “To ask the Scottish Government whether it has reviewed the general practitioner services model, including in relation to whether patients are getting appointments when they need them”, the Cabinet Secretary for Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care, said:

“The issue that the member raises with regard to the appointment system is down to individual GP practices, because the vast majority of those practices are independent contractors. It is their responsibility to design a system that best meets the needs of the contract in order to deliver appointments to patients”.

The Health and Care Experience Survey

The Health and Care Experience Survey asks people about their experience contacting their GP Practice. [The 2021/22 results](#) reported a “sharp drop in percentage of people finding it easy to contact their GP practice in the way that they want”.

Three quarters of respondents (75%) found it easy to contact the GP practice in the way that they want compared to 85% in the 2019/20 survey. Conversely, the proportion of people who found it not easy to contact their GP Practice in the way that they want increased from 15% to 25%.

NHS England – Changes to the GP Contract

NHS England has made changes to the [2023/24 GP contact](#) “to make clear that patients should be offered an assessment of need, or signposted to an appropriate service, at first contact with the practice. Practices will therefore no longer be able to request that patients contact the practice at a later time.”

Scottish Government action

In October 2023 the Scottish Government published [The General Practice Access Principles](#), which state:

- People should have a reasonable choice about how they access services.
- Methods of access to General Practices teams should be clear, understandable, and transparent for people to access the right service for their needs.

Scottish Parliament action

Parliamentary question [S6O-02908](#): To ask the Scottish Government whether it has reviewed the general practitioner services mode

Debate on motion [S6M-06899](#) on protecting primary care.

Lizzy Burgess

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11/01/2024

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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