

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition PE1915: [Reinstate Caithness County Council and Caithness NHS Board](#), lodged by William Sinclair

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

[PE1915](#) calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to reinstate the Caithness County Council and Caithness NHS Board. Caithness is a historic county, registration country, and lieutenancy area with a land mass of 1,601km². [The 2011 Census showed that Caithness & Sutherland had a population of 40,330](#). demographic decline in rural areas, with 21.1% projected as the most severe population decline for Caithness between 2016 and 2041.

Background

- [The National Health Service \(Scotland\) Act 1972](#) established 15 health boards and other bodies. [Provisions in the Act were introduced in 1974 and the new health boards took over many of the health responsibilities of the local authorities.](#)
- [The Caithness and Sutherland National Health Service Trust operated from 1st April 1993.](#) With the introduction of the Internal Market in 1989, [NHS Trusts had their own autonomy as providers and were able to negotiate with health boards, who commissioned services.](#)
- In 1997, [‘Designed to Care’](#) merged the 47 Scottish trusts into 28.

- In 2004, the [National Health Service Reform \(Scotland\) Act](#) abolished trusts, which were absorbed into health boards, and Community Health Partnerships were established.
- Highland was created as a two-tier region (a regional council and eight district councils) in 1975 under the [Local Government \(Scotland\) Act 1973](#).
- The Highland Region was divided into eight districts, one of which was Caithness. In 1996, under the [Local Government etc. \(Scotland\) Act 1994](#), the Highland Regional Council and the district councils were transferred to the new Highland Council.

Related petitions

The subject of rural healthcare, including services in Caithness, have been the subject of previous petitions. Over recent decades, there has been a general trend towards the greater centralisation of some health services in Scotland. [The Kerr Report – National Framework for Service Change in the NHS in Scotland was published in 2005](#) and explored some of the issues surrounding centralisation.

- [PE1839: Review maternity models in remote and rural areas](#)
- [PE1890: Find solutions to recruitment and training challenges for rural healthcare in Scotland](#)
- [PE1845: Agency to advocate for the healthcare needs of rural Scotland](#)

Recent developments

- The consultant-led maternity unit at Caithness General Hospital became a Community Midwifery Unit Service in 2016. Only certain types of births can now take place in Caithness Hospital, with higher-risk births which may require greater intervention being transferred to other obstetric units.
- NHS Highland is undertaking a redesign of Caithness health and social care services. [The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport approved the redesign plans for Caithness in May 2019](#) and [the initial agreement was approved by the NHS Highland Board in November 2021](#).
- NHS Highland received [£800,000 new capital funding from the Scottish Government](#) in 2020 to enable the first stages of

the Development Plan for the Caithness Hospital site. Work will include an extended A&E department and the creation of a Community Midwifery Unit. The Community Midwifery Unit was expected to be complete by the end of 2021.

- The SNP's [2016](#) and [2021](#) manifestos stated included commitments to review the “number, structure and regulation of health boards.”
- The Scottish Government's [Programme for Government 2021-2022](#) includes a commitment to establish a centre of excellence for rural and remote medicine and social care in order to “ensure that our islands and rural areas are not left behind as we work to improve health services”. Scoping work is due to start in 2021.
- [The Highland Council recently received a motion in support of localism, raised by Cllr Struan Mackie. The original motion can be found in the agenda for the Highland Council's meeting for 9 December 2021 \(delayed until 10 December 2021\). The motion was discussed by Highland Council on 10 December, which was recorded \(See 8i. Notices of Motion\), and an amendment was raised.](#) 22 votes were received for the motion and 26 votes were received for the amendment.

Key Organisations and relevant links

- [Highland Council](#)
- [NHS Highland](#)
- [Caithness General Hospital](#)
- [Caithness Health Action Team](#)
- [The Scottish Rural Medicine Collaborative](#)
- [The Remote and Rural General Practice Working Group](#)

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[10/01/2022]

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

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