

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 14 January 2026
1st Meeting, 2026 (Session 6)

PE2128: Increase funding for post mastectomy (delayed) breast reconstructions and ensure that waiting time information is accurate

Introduction

Petitioner Christy Esslemont

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to:

- provide additional funding to reduce waiting times for post mastectomy (delayed) breast reconstructions in Scotland
- assess whether the communication section of its waiting times guidance is being followed by Health Boards

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2128>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 19 February 2025.](#) At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received a new written submission from the Scottish Government which is set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage.](#)
5. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. [The Scottish Government gave its initial response to the petition on 8 January 2025.](#)
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 191 signatures have been received on this petition.
8. [At its meeting on 24 September 2025, the Committee took evidence on thematic healthcare issues](#) that have been raised in multiple petitions, including this petition.

Action

9. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
January 2026

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2128: Increase funding for post mastectomy (delayed) breast reconstructions and ensure that waiting time information is accurate

Petitioner

Christy Esslemont

Date Lodged

28 November 2024

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to:

- provide additional funding to reduce waiting times for post mastectomy (delayed) breast reconstructions in Scotland
- assess whether the communication section of its waiting times guidance is being followed by Health Boards

Background information

While on the waiting list myself, I discovered that post mastectomy (delayed) breast reconstructions were stopped in the UK during COVID restrictions in 2020 and that there is still a long waiting list for this procedure. The information about waiting times is not clear when patients are told that they have breast cancer and need a mastectomy. Patients can still opt for a delayed reconstruction not knowing that it could take years or never happen at all!

It's a disgrace and the Scottish Government needs to address the waiting time for delayed reconstructions immediately. Communication with patients about waiting times must be improved to make sure they are aware of the realistic timeline for undergoing this procedure.

Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2128 on 19 February 2025

The Convener: PE2128, on increasing funding for post-mastectomy, or delayed, breast reconstructions and ensuring that waiting time information is accurate, has been lodged by Christy Esslemont. The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide additional funding to reduce waiting times for post-mastectomy, or delayed, breast reconstructions in Scotland and to assess whether the communications section of its waiting times guidance is being followed by health boards.

As the SPICe briefing explains, breast reconstruction can take place at the same time as a mastectomy, which is known as immediate breast reconstruction, or it can take place at a later point, which is known as delayed breast reconstruction. In July 2024, £30 million of targeted additional funding was allocated by the Scottish Government to health boards to address long waits across a range of treatment areas. Some health boards received funding specifically to address backlogs of mastectomy and immediate breast reconstruction surgery, but delayed reconstruction surgery was not included in the funding allocation. Indeed, I have recollections of such issues being raised in the chamber.

The Scottish Government's response to the petition states that it is currently working with health boards on developing a plan for patients waiting for delayed reconstructive surgery. However, the SPICe briefing states that waiting times for breast reconstruction surgery have not been routinely reported since 2020. In October 2024, the First Minister stated that the Scottish Government was currently "exploring issues on the quality of" existing "data"

so that it can

"determine what information can be published."—[Official Report, 10 October 2024; c 20.]

The Scottish Government's written submission explains that there are two types of breast reconstruction—implant based and free flap—and that although implant-based reconstruction is generally a short procedure, the free-flap procedure involves complex surgery requiring highly specialised plastic surgery services and can take many hours to complete. Indeed, in some cases, up to four theatre sessions can be required. The procedure also requires skilled aftercare and intensive monitoring.

The submission states that, because of a growing volume of cancer and clinically urgent cases, efforts have been concentrated on treating patients with trauma or after cancers. The Scottish Government also states that it intends to allocate funding from the 2025-26 budget—that is, the budget that we are currently considering—to delayed reconstructive breast surgery.

Do members have any comments or suggestions for action?

Maurice Golden: I think that the petition definitely requires further investigation. On that basis, we should write to the Scottish Government, seeking an update on its work with health boards on developing a plan for patients waiting for delayed reconstructive surgery. Furthermore, we should ask what information is available on the capacity of specialised plastic surgeons and whether the Government has considered how any gaps in the availability of specialised plastic surgery services can be addressed. Finally, we should seek an update on the Government's commitment to exploring the publication of data on the current waiting times for breast reconstruction surgery.

The Convener: Are we content to act on those proposals?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Thank you very much. We will hold the petition open and make inquiries as suggested.

Annexe C: Written submission

Scottish Government written submission, 8 April 2025

PE2128/B: Increase funding for post mastectomy (delayed) breast reconstructions and ensure that waiting time information is accurate

Thank you for the opportunity to provide further information on the Scottish Government's efforts to address waiting times for post mastectomy (delayed) breast reconstructions, and particularly free-flap procedures. I have outlined a response to each of your queries below.

- **Update on the work with Health Boards to develop a plan for patients waiting for delayed reconstructive surgery**

As outlined in my initial response of 9 January 2025, it will not be possible to identify a rapid solution for delayed free-flap reconstruction waits due to the theatre time required. Free-flap reconstruction can take many hours to complete and requires significant operative skill, along with input from both breast and plastic surgery. Unfortunately, this means that waiting times for free-flap procedures will not improve substantially in the short-term for the majority of patients.

However, I am pleased to report we are beginning to see pockets of real change following the allocation of our targeted funding for risk-reducing mastectomy and immediate reconstructive surgery as part of our £30 million additional funding for planned care in 2024-25.

To March 2025, thirteen long-waiting patients in NHS Grampian have had their delayed reconstruction procedures completed and another two have been booked, with thanks to the Board's hard-working staff. This is in addition to the activity that has been undertaken for risk-reducing mastectomy and reconstruction within the Board. Prior to last year's funding, NHS Grampian reportedly had some of the longest waiting patients across the country for these surgeries.

As part of this year's £200 million investment to reduce waiting times and improve capacity, we have already agreed to extend this funding for NHS Grampian for 2025-26 and thereafter our intention is for the Board to receive this on a recurring basis to ensure service sustainability in the long-term. The decision on recurring funding is subject to the current allocation exercise so cannot be confirmed at this time.

NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde provides regional breast reconstruction services via the plastic surgery unit at Glasgow Royal Infirmary for patients in the West of Scotland and therefore has the largest waiting list for a delayed free-flap procedure. From our £30 million investment, we provided funding for two locum plastic surgery consultants which were aligned to incoming breast cancer work to release the Board's existing oncoplastic consultants to concentrate on breast risk reduction surgery. This funding has also been extended for 2025-26 and similarly the intention is to provide this recurrently from this year onwards.

NHS Tayside is offering delayed reconstruction surgery as often as opportunity exists within their current capacity and the service is looking to recruit a new consultant within the immediate future to support these procedures. Similarly, NHS Lothian continues to offer these surgeries on a regular basis.

Both these Boards were also allocated funding in 2024-25 from the £30 million investment to support risk-reducing mastectomy and reconstruction. Further scoping is required to establish whether additional funding support will be required in future years.

- **Information on the capacity of specialised plastic surgeons and whether the Scottish Government has considered how to address any gaps in the availability of specialised plastic surgery services.**

Through our engagement with Health Boards we have identified a capacity gap across NHS Scotland in terms of the number of consultants who are qualified to provide microsurgical breast reconstruction.

We are engaging with NHS Education For Scotland (NES) to understand current training capacity and explore options to maximise training opportunities in this area, assessing the relative contribution of speciality training programmes and peri-/post-Certificate of Completion of Training (CCT) fellowships in this area.

- **Update on the commitment to exploring the publication of data on the current waiting times for breast reconstruction surgery.**

Public Health Scotland (PHS) uses the national waiting times datamart to collect electronic patient records covering the waits that patients experience waiting for treatment as an inpatient or day-case under the Treatment Time Guarantee.

This data source can be used routinely to identify the specialty of treatment. However, although the records are designed to collect coded information on the procedure that is planned for the patient, this information is often either incomplete, lacking in essential detail and/or its accuracy cannot be assured. In addition, the procedure(s) that was planned may not always reflect the procedure actually performed after the patient was admitted for treatment. The latter is not captured through the national datamart. Consequently, PHS is not currently able to report accurately on waiting times to this level of detail.

Regrettably, this means that it is currently not within our gift to publish quality assured information on waiting times for delayed breast reconstruction surgery.

**NHS Scotland Chief Operating Officer
Performance & Delivery Division**