

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

10th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday
8 June 2022

PE1915: Reinstate Caithness County Council and Caithness NHS Board

Note by the Clerk

Lodged on	29 December 2021
Petitioner	William Sinclair
Petition summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to reinstate Caithness County Council and Caithness NHS Board.
Webpage	https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1915

Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [23 February 2022](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to hear evidence from the petitioner and consider this petition alongside PE1845: Agency to advocate for the healthcare needs of rural Scotland and PE1890: Find solutions to recruitment and training challenges for rural healthcare in Scotland at a future meeting.
2. The Committee subsequently decided to consider PE1924: Complete an emergency in-depth review of Women's health services in Caithness & Sutherland alongside PE1845, PE1890 and this petition.
3. 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**.
4. The Committee has received a new response from NHS Highland which is set out in **Annexe C**.

5. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
6. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
7. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
8. A private SPICe questions paper has also been supplied to Members for this week's evidence sessions (Paper 8 in your papers pack).

Action

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

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE1915: Reinstate Caithness County Council and Caithness NHS Board

Petitioner

Willaim Sinclair

Date lodged

29/12/2021

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to reinstate Caithness County Council and Caithness NHS Board.

Previous action

I have raised these points in communications with Members of the Scottish Parliament and our Member of Parliament. I have also raised these issues at meetings of our local Community Council and have their backing on raising this petition. I have also raised these issues in letters to our local newspaper and have received positive feedback from members of the public.

Background information

Prior to the inception of the Highland Council and NHS highland, local people from Caithness were responsible for the delivery of both council and NHS. During that period both of these services were a massive improvement compared to what we have under the present regimes.

Under NHS Highland we have lost our consultant-led maternity services, are seeing more people than ever travelling the 115 miles to Inverness for appointments and treatment and had to protest at NHS Highland decision to close down two palliative care hospitals.

At present we in Caithness seem to have to fight the Highland Council and NHS Highland for money to be spent just for the upkeep of what little we have let alone any improvements.

We who live in rural areas see money being spent on vanity projects throughout Scotland when we are told there is no money for basic infrastructure maintenance here.

Annexe B

Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1915 on 23 February 2022

The Deputy Convener: PE1915, which has been lodged by William Sinclair, is on the reinstatement of Caithness county council and Caithness national health service board. The petitioner has highlighted particular concerns about the loss of consultant-led maternity services and the closure of two palliative care hospitals in Caithness.

In its submission, the Scottish Government states its commitment to ensuring that “decisions are taken at the right level, and as close as possible to those most affected.”

It highlights the joint local governance review with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, which it states “aims to strengthen local democracy by considering how power should be shared between national and local government, and with ... communities” and highlights on-going work to create a national care service and the recent consultation on this topic, stating: “there are currently no plans to bring about any changes to the structure of NHS Boards.”

The Government also states its intention to introduce a local democracy bill within the lifetime of this Parliament.

The submission explains that the decision to change from a consultant-led obstetric unit in the Caithness general hospital to a midwife-led community maternity unit was “taken on the grounds of safety”.

Moreover, in relation to palliative care, the submission advises that although Caithness has no “specific hospice facilities, the teams locally work very closely with the Highland Hospice located in Inverness.”

Do colleagues have any comments?

Ruth Maguire: Notwithstanding the fact that the Scottish Government has no intention to restructure the health boards, I think that at the crux of the petition is healthcare for individuals in Caithness. I wonder whether colleagues would agree to writing to NHS Highland for an update on the community midwifery unit, including a timescale for its completion.

I also wonder whether we should consider this petition alongside a couple of others mentioned in our papers—PE1845, on an agency to advocate for the healthcare needs of rural Scotland, and PE1890, on finding solutions to recruitment and training challenges for rural healthcare in Scotland—and invite the petitioner to give evidence.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you for that. Does the committee agree with those recommendations?

Members indicated agreement.

Annexe C

NHS Highland submission of 11 April 2022 PE1915/C – Reinstate Caithness County Council and Caithness NHS Board

The Community Midwifery Unit in Caithness has been completed and is now fully open. The Unit moved during the weekend of 29th-31st October 2021. It was fully operational on 1 November 2021 for all antenatal midwifery and obstetric clinics, obstetric scanning, labourers and postnatal care.

There have been some snagging issues which have been resolved and there is an on-going snagging list of incidental works that have no operational impact.

The unit saw its first baby born there on 22/12/21 which was later featured in the local press.