

# Petitioner submission of 25 July 2022

## PE1915/E: Reinstate Caithness County Council and Caithness NHS Board

I have studied two documents with excerpts from the Caithness and Sutherland NHS Trust which existed from 1993 until 1999. The example that this trust set in looking after the health of the people in Caithness and Sutherland should be used as a blueprint to the Scottish Government on how the NHS should operate in Scotland's rural areas.

One of the documents is titled "SIX YEARS OF SUCCESS" and I would urge the Committee to take note of the diary of achievement and the words of praise issued by NHS professionals and politicians on how this trust was managed. I would encourage the Committee to get copies of the Caithness and Sutherland NHS Trust Annual Reports and they will see for themselves why the people of Caithness are up in arms over what has happened to our local Health Service since being taken over by NHS Highland.

### **Quotes from the Caithness and Sutherland Annual Report:**

Chairman Mr George Bruce: *The list of achievements in this and the five previous reports clearly illustrate the successful improvements to facilities and services brought about by the trust. We leave behind a modern and well-maintained service ready to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

*The Trust has been successful for the sixth year in succession in meeting all its financial targets.*

The service set out above has, in our view, been systematically downgraded by NHS Highland with ward closures, staff and services transferred to Raigmore in Inverness and the attempted closures of Dunbar Hospital and the Town and County Hospital. There are many other examples of this downgrading.

Unfortunately, the SIX YEARS OF SUCCESS has been followed by twenty-three years of failure as far as the people of Caithness and Sutherland are concerned. There is a saying "if it ain't broke don't try

and fix it". We in Caithness and Sutherland had a health care system we were proud of but since NHS Highland took over the responsibility of looking after the health of the people in Caithness and Sutherland all we have seen is the systematic dismantling of services once available to the people locally.

**Quote from The Scottish Health Advisory Service (SHAS) on the contents of the annual report.**

*"We must emphasise that the health services we saw in Caithness and Sutherland were universally praised. Service users were full of gratitude and staff had high morale and valued their managers."*

Compare this comment with the bullying culture in NHS Highland, documented in the [Sturrock Report](#).

A comment in the annual report states: "As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 1999 the trust had succeeded in making appointments to all its proposed posts – an increase in medical staffing at senior level of nearly 50% from the inception of the trust.

*The Trust also in its six years completed four new medical centres: Brora, Helmsdale, Durness and Tongue. Town and County Hospital opened. Rehabilitation Gymnasium and occupational therapy area developed at the Queen Elizabeth Wing, Caithness General and many other improvements too numerous to list here."*

NHS Highland have closed down wards in Caithness General Hospital and attempted to close the only hospital (Dunbar) in Thurso and the palliative care unit at the Town and County in Wick, both without any consultation with the local population. They only backed out of these closures when there was a public outcry and demonstrations. The vital minor injuries unit located at Dunbar Hospital in Thurso was previously closed for two years and is now only delivering very restricted services due to staff shortages.

**Quote: Mr Sam Galbraith, Minister for Health and Arts, to the chairman of the Trust.**

*“I came away from this visit with a great sense of the very positive and warm rapport that you, your fellow board members and the Trust staff have built up both among yourselves and between the Trust and the communities it serves. In particular I was impressed by the intimate feel of the Trust Hospitals at Wick and Golspie. These are a credit to you and your staff.”*

It is worth noting that under the Caithness and Sutherland Trust 22,000 outpatients per year were treated locally. Now 14,000 outpatients lives are being put at risk by travelling on one of the worst roads (A9) in Scotland to access services they once received locally.

Being part of something big like NHS Highland has been to the detriment of the people who live in the rural areas of the Highlands of Scotland and this is not just the people of Caithness and Sutherland but is systemic to many of Scotland's rural areas.

For example, we have just been made aware of a care home closure in Skye with the residents now scattered throughout the highlands, many miles away from their loved ones.

Where is the care and compassion that should above all underpin any public service?

The concerns of the people of Caithness and Sutherland have been ignored for years. It seems to be a case of “out of sight – out of mind”.

The Dewar Report set up in 1910 to examine the provision of medical services in the highlands and islands and to advise as to the best method of securing a satisfactory medical service therein is now over 110 years old, yet here we are today with similar issues. The committee responsible for producing this report, which I believe was one of the fundamental reports considered when the National Health Service came into being, travelled to many of the towns in the highlands to hear first-hand about the problems experienced by the population. We would encourage the petitions committee to do likewise.

The local government review of 18<sup>th</sup> March 2021 said *“democracy works best when built from the people up, and that the true measure of democracy is how well power is shared out so that the bodies charged with running the servicing of our villages and towns, cities do so in the interests of those who live there.”*

We would urge the Scottish Government to accept and implement the findings of this report.

We can see no way forward under the present regime of NHS Highland and would urge Parliament to implement the much-needed change to improve the NHS in our local areas.