

Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery Health and Social Care submission of 11 January 2024

PE2041/C: Exempt community healthcare staff from parking charges

Thank you for your letter on 11 December regarding the above petition, before addressing these specific points, I would like to clarify the Government's position regarding parking charges on NHS premises.

In 2008, the Government abolished all car parking charges on NHS owned car parks, we estimate this has saved patients, visitors and staff £54 million since the policy was implemented. That did leave three PFI owned car sites at Glasgow Royal Infirmary, Ninewells Hospital and Edinburgh Royal Infirmary which continued to apply charges, however, again re-emphasising our commitment to eliminating charges which we consider to disproportionately impact on people and families that are impacted by poor health, we removed these charges in 2020 so there is no NHS facility in Scotland that has car parking charges.

I do understand that at on occasions, NHS staff may need to travel and incur car parking charges, however local NHS policies allows for staff to be reimbursed for valid expenses. For example, NHS Lothian's staff expenses policy states:

There are occasions where employees incur expenses whilst performing their duties. If the nature of the expense is a validly incurred business expense, as determined by the employee's terms and conditions, then the employee can make a claim for reimbursement of the expense, or payment of an allowance (where appropriate) to cover the cost.

I would expect all NHS Boards in Scotland to have a similar policy that applies to their staff, including community healthcare workers. However, I do note that this policy does not cover staff who drive to their work and park their car all day at their base of work and I would not propose to extend the policy to cover these staff.

Changing the policy in this way would undermine our Sustainable Travel strategy and I know from Ministerial letters which I receive, that it can antagonise local residents if parking spaces are used by others, even if they work for the NHS. I would also be concerned at the precedent that it could create if Government became responsible for paying for staff

parking. The work NHS staff undertake is of course vital and very much appreciated, but so is the work of teachers, Police, nursery workers etc and if we make an exception for NHS staff, then I am sure these groups would make similar claims and that would not be sustainable.

Finally, while I have policy responsibility on how parking arrangements should apply to NHS properties, I am not responsible for deciding parking policy outside the hospital. Local Authorities are responsible for managing the wider car parking policy and it is for them to decide how much they should charge and if any exemptions should apply.

In terms of your specific questions, I would note:

- **The level of charges being incurred by community healthcare staff when undertaking their role** – I would expect that parking charges if they are a validly incurred business expense, would be reimbursed by the community health worker's NHS employer.
- **That parking meter charges around the community health building the petitioner works in have increased to around £6 per hour** – that is a matter for each Local Authority to decide.
- **Based on a five-day working week, that could mean community health workers face yearly charges of up to £11,520** – this calculation is based on the assumption that a community healthcare worker spends £48 a day parking their car, eight hours a day, five days a week, 48 weeks every year. I would reiterate, that if they are a valid business expense, then I would expect them to be reimbursed for costs incurred doing their job. If these costs are as a result of someone driving to their base of work and parking their car all day, then that is a choice for the individual to make themselves and as noted above, I am not inclined to change this policy.

Our commitment to eliminating car parking charges on NHS sites for patients, visitors and staff is clear, however it is for Local Authorities to decide wider car parking arrangements and I have no plan to intervene on this matter.

Yours sincerely

MICHAEL MATHESON MSP