

Scottish Government submission of 19 February 2024

PE2053/C: Stop the cuts to community link workers and help secure their long-term future within GP practice teams

Thank you for your letter of 29th January 2024 on behalf of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee in relation to PE2053, regarding the Glasgow City Community Link Worker (CLW) programme and seeking further information on the steps the Scottish Government is taking to ensure the consistent and sustainable provision of Community Link Workers in general practice across Scotland.

The First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care have been very clear that Link Workers are central to our efforts to tackle health inequalities and inequity, and that we will make every effort to support the continued sustainability of that role. The Community Link Worker role aligns strongly with Policy Prospectus 2023 missions on Equality and Community and the Scottish Government also reinforced its commitment to CLWs in the 2023-24 Programme for Government.

A refreshed national approach to funding and policy is required to improve stability and sustainability for Link Workers in general practice. This will require detailed consideration and we recognise that change will be disruptive, that it will need to be managed carefully and will take time. As you are aware, in November 2023, we committed to provide Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership with up to £1.2 million per annum, for three years, to protect Community Link Worker capacity and provide stability, while we take forward work to address elements of how Link Worker services are delivered in general practice which may benefit from more national consistency.

We are now six years on from the 2018 GP contract, which saw the inclusion of CLWs within Primary Care Improvement Plans, and many local programmes have been underway for several years before 2018, therefore a review of CLW delivery is very timely. We have therefore collated detailed data and additional information about local CLW models, as well as views on present and future challenges from all Health and Social Care Partnerships.

In early 2024, Scottish Government will begin a two-year programme of work to address several matters around Link Workers in general practice which need national attention, including: funding; the professionalisation of the role and core skills/competencies for CLWs; contractual models; and the need for improved data and evaluation. The research that the Scottish Community Link Worker Network (SCLWN) published on 30 November 2023, and that you have provided a link to in your letter, will also help shape this work.

It is critical that Scottish Government's decisions about the future of CLW policy are informed and supported by informed discussion with expert stakeholders. A new National CLW Advisory Group is being set up and will meet for the first time in March 2024. Led by Scottish Government, the Group will formulate detailed proposals for changes in relation to specific features of GP CLW services which are to be reviewed.

I hope to provide a further update as the work of the National CLW Advisory Group progresses.

I hope this reply provides reassurance that the Scottish Government are committed to ensuring CLW Services are consistently available where there is greatest need for support and is helpful to the Committee's consideration of the petition.

Primary Care Directorate