

PE2210/A: Improve access to local healthcare in rural communities

Scottish Government written submission, 14 January 2026

The Scottish Government does not consider the specific asks of the petition to be practical or achievable.

The petition calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that GP practices resume inclusive emergency care pathways at all hours, ensure on-call doctors are available in GP practices and emergency clinics, including after hours, remove telephone triaging, telephone appointments and remote diagnosing and prohibit GP receptionists from requesting private health information or redirecting patients to other disciplines.

Modern general practice is based on services provided by a range of disciplines. This means that GP receptionists need to be able to signpost patients to the right clinician which in turn means asking patients for some information. It also means making appropriate use of modern technology. The Scottish Government (or Scottish Executive as then was) removed the obligation to provide Out of Hours Services from the GP contract in 2004 for most GP practices. A revision of the contract in 2018 removed the last residual responsibilities. This was to make general practice a more attractive profession by removing the requirement that partners were responsible for providing services at all hours. Where GPs work out of hours (and they do in most health boards), this is by specific agreement. The Scottish Government does not believe the profession would support any revision to their contracts for a proportionate cost whilst any such revision would endanger our progress towards recruiting more GPs.

The Scottish Government has recently announced the largest investment in core GP services to date in Scotland - worth over half a billion pounds over the next three years. This will boost recruitment and retention, expand appointment capacity, and make it easier for people to access GP services. In addition to this, the Scottish Government has invested an additional £50 million over the last 9 years to take forward the recommendations made in Sir Lewis Ritchie's Review of Out of Hours services.

I can confirm that the Scottish Government is not taking action to return Out of Hours Services to General Practitioner delivery nor to make all GP appointments in person.

General Practice Policy Division