

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition PE1924: [Complete an emergency in-depth review of Women's Health services in Caithness & Sutherland](#), lodged by Rebecca Wymer

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to complete an emergency in-depth review of Women's Health services in Caithness & Sutherland. The petition highlights issues with gynaecology, miscarriage, menopause and fertility services.

Background

The Caithness Health Action Team (CHAT) are a community campaign group, founded in 2016 to campaign on local healthcare services in Caithness, one of the remotest parts of Scotland. One of the group's main concerns is the long distance residents have to travel to access many health services. It has [recently called on the Scottish Government to undertake an independent review of health services in the North Highlands](#).

NHS Highland is undertaking a redesign of Caithness health and social care services. [The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport approved the redesign plans for Caithness in May 2019](#) and the initial agreement was approved by the [NHS Highland Board in November 2021](#).

NHS Highland had a [Women's Health Network from 2006 to 2009](#) when it was disbanded and replaced with the Maternity Services Committee. The membership of the Women's Health Network from

comprised a multidisciplinary team and members of the public which represented maternity, sexual health and gynaecological services.

Scottish Government's Women's Health Plan

In August 2021 the Scottish Government published the [Women's Health Plan](#) this sets out the following priorities:

- ensure women who need it have access to specialist menopause services for advice and support on the diagnosis and management of menopause
- improve access for women to appropriate support, speedy diagnosis and best treatment for endometriosis
- improve access to information for girls and women on menstrual health and management options
- improve access to abortion and contraception services
- ensure rapid and easily accessible postnatal contraception
- reduce inequalities in health outcomes for women's general health, including work on cardiac disease.

This was accompanied by an [Equality Impact Assessment](#). The implementation of the plan is overseen by the [Women's Health Group](#).

Maternity services

A report by NHS Highland into the [maternity and neonatal service provision at Caithness General Hospital](#) was published in 2016. Following this the consultant-led maternity unit became a Community Midwifery Unit Service. A Caithness [maternity and gynaecology group](#) was established in 2017 to influence the new arrangements at the community maternity unit at Caithness General Hospital.

Only certain types of births can now take place in Caithness Hospital, with higher-risk births which may require greater intervention being transferred to other obstetric units.

Waiting times for gynaecology treatments

A [freedom of information response from NHS Highland](#), in August 2021, provides information on the waiting times and number of women from Caithness waiting for gynaecology treatments.

Caithness Gynaecology Patients Still Waiting (Ongoing Waits)	as at 31/12/20	as at 29/07/21
Number new Outpatients	136	214
Number new outpatients waiting less than 12 weeks	81	84
Number new out patients waiting more than 12 weeks	55	130
Number inpatient/day case (treatment time guarantee TTG)	52	52
Number TTG waiting less than 12 weeks	16	15
Number TTG waiting more than 12 weeks	36	37

Gynaecological cancer services in the North of Scotland

The North Cancer Alliance (NCA) brings together the six health boards in the North of Scotland and aims to improve outcomes for cancer patients. Gynaecological cancer services are available from three main centres Aberdeen, Dundee and Inverness. Surgery for advanced disease is carried out at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary for patients in the North. A [Gynaecology Pathway Board](#) has been established to facilitate regional working between the centres, ensuring a focus on improving patient outcomes. It has a number of objectives including:

- Highlight risk and support service sustainability and equitability across the North of Scotland.
- Contribute to the strategic planning of cancer services across the North of Scotland.
- Oversee the performance of Gynaecology services against national Quality Performance Indicators and progress regional actions to improve performance where required.

- To develop and maintain a work plan which will detail, prioritise and progress specific areas of service improvement in Gynaecology.
- To collate general issues affecting Gynaecology service delivery across North Cancer and undertaken an analysis of risk, escalating to the North Cancer Clinical Leadership Group where appropriate.

[Quality performance indicator](#) reports for the North of Scotland for gynaecological cancers (ovarian, cervical and endometrial) are available.

Other relevant petitions and reports

Several relevant petitions have been considered by the Scottish Parliament including:

- [PE1839: Review maternity models in remote and rural areas](#)
- [PE1890: Find solutions to recruitment and training challenges for rural healthcare in Scotland](#)
- PE1845: [Agency to advocate for the healthcare needs of rural Scotland](#)
- [PE1915: Reinstate Caithness County Council and Caithness NHS Board](#)

Audit Scotland has published the [2020/21 audit of NHS Highland](#).

Key Organisations

- [NHS Highland](#)
- [Caithness Health Action Team](#)
- [Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists](#)
- [British Menopause Society](#)
- [Miscarriage Support Scotland](#)
- [Endometriosis UK](#)

Lizzy Burgess
Senior Researcher
17 January 2022

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe),
an office of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, The
Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP