

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

1st Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday 19
January 2022

PE1877: Provide body cameras for all
frontline NHS staff

Note by the Clerk

Lodged: 10 June 2021

Petitioner Alex Wallace

**Petition
summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government
to provide body cameras for all frontline NHS staff and paramedics in
Scotland.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1877>

Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [Wednesday 22 September](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Allied Health Professions Federation Scotland, the British Medical Association Scotland, the Royal College of Nursing and the Scottish Ambulance Service to seek their views on the action called for in the petition.
2. A summary of past consideration of the petition and responses to information requests are provided for the Committee's consideration.

Background

3. During its consideration of this petition, the Committee received 3 written submissions.
4. The Public Petitions Committee considered a similar petition, [PE1718](#), in session 5. This petition was calling for the introduction of body cameras for all NHS frontline and theatre staff and was submitted by the same petitioner.

5. The Committee closed the petition in November 2019 following receipt of submissions from the [Scottish Government](#) and [the Royal College of Nursing](#) (RCN) which detailed concerns about privacy, confidentiality and cost.
6. At its meeting on 22 September, the Committee considered a written submission from the Scottish Government.
7. The submission stated that the Scottish Government does not believe that bodycams would be necessary or appropriate for all frontline clinical staff as the safety risks would vary considerably in different job roles.
8. The Scottish Government indicated that the Scottish Ambulance Service advised that there has been 'no appetite' from trade unions to provide bodycams. It also highlights a feasibility study which led to the Scottish Government's position that the cost of this proposal would be prohibitive for Health Boards and not provide value for money.

British Medical Association

9. The British Medical Association (BMA) note that they are aware of an increase in the reporting of abuse and threats towards doctors and their staff in recent times. The submission points out that while abuse is unacceptable, the BMA recognises that 'much of this is born out of frustration and fear amongst patients trying to access health care services during these difficult times'.
10. The BMA notes that it shares many of the concerns raised by the Royal College of Nursing's submission to the previous petition. This includes issues of confidentiality, breach of trust and sensitivity. Additionally, the BMA raises concerns about data protection.
11. The BMA states that the patient-doctor relationship is built on trust and the right to confidentiality is 'a massive part of that relationship'. The submission highlights that many patients accessing frontline services are in crisis and that body cameras could prevent a patient from seeking help or being honest about their situation. This, the BMA suggests, could stop them from accessing appropriate health care or treatment.
12. The BMA submission also looks more widely at the key pressures in the NHS including a lack of capacity, resulting in shortages of doctors and an inability to meet demand. It is suggested that 'clear and honest' messaging about what can be realistically expected from NHS services is required. The BMA states that public communication 'is of key importance' and 'much of the frustration' from the public and health professionals is due to a 'mismatch of expectation and capacity'.

13. The BMA states that it is 'wary' that body cameras could or would be used as a shortcut to addressing the 'staffing crisis' and that it would only address 'one symptom of the problem, not the root cause'.
14. To conclude, the BMA states that 'in order to meet the demand for care that is required, much more needs to be done to retain the workforce that we have in place as well as increasing recruitment and comprehensive planning for the future.'

Scottish Ambulance Service

15. The Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) submission provides data on reports of physical or verbal abuse from SAS staff and notes that evidence from across the UK suggests that violence is an increasing trend.
 - 2020 recorded 260 incidents, down from 315 in 2019. It is suggested, however, that this decrease could be associated with a reduction in activity during lockdown periods;
 - 2021 (up to October 21st) recorded 208 assaults, comprising of 91 verbal assaults and 117 physical assaults.
16. The SAS submission highlights current safety measures in place such as CCTV in ambulances and an ambient listening function on Airwave radios for staff who feel threatened when away from the ambulance (e.g. in a patient's home).
17. The group in the Scottish Ambulance Service responsible for the oversight of Health & Safety recently considered and approved a limited trial of body cameras. The group 'acknowledged the perceived benefits' over other recording mediums, include deterrence.
18. In its submission, the Scottish Ambulance Service points to the roll out of body cameras trial across all 10 ambulance trusts in England following a successful trial in London. It is noted that the trial in London reported that, in addition to contributing towards protection of crews, footage had been requested on multiple occasions by the Metropolitan Police to support prosecutions.
19. It is noted that high-definition video footage will likely support prosecution better than audio only recording, particularly in the context of an offence under the Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act 2005.
20. On the issue of privacy, SAS states that when considering the use of bodycams, there is a need to balance the patient's right of privacy with staff safety and that this must include close engagement with patient and staff representatives.

21. In order to comply with data protection legislation equipment will need to be of a certain standard and the submission highlights the costs associated with this. The Scottish Ambulance Service suggests that this could run to an initial capital investment in the region of £1m, with recurring costs estimated to be in the region of £350k per year. The recurring costs are attributed to asset and data management equipment, staffing costs and digital cloud storage costs.
22. The Scottish Ambulance Service suggests that a cost benefit may be realised through potential reduction in assault related staff absence and improvements to staff wellbeing. The submission notes that improvement in staff wellbeing 'will likely also be associated with an increased sense of safety amongst staff which will undoubtedly have a beneficial impact on the care patients receive'.

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe

The following submissions are circulated in connection with consideration of the petition at this meeting –

- [PE1877/B: British Medical Association submission of 14 October 2021](#)
- [PE1877/C: Scottish Ambulance Service submission of 22 October 2021](#)

Written submissions received on the petition after May 2021 can be viewed on its [webpage](#).