

PE1845/N

Emma Harper MSP submission of 9 March 2021

I write to you with regards to the above petition from my constituent, Dr Gordon Baird, on behalf of the Galloway Community Hospital Action Group which is to be considered tomorrow. I would ask that the committee keep this petition open to be further considered and debated in the next session of Parliament, following our election recess on the 31st of March.

As you will be aware, this petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to create an agency to ensure that health boards offer 'fair' and 'reasonable' management of rural and remote healthcare issues. In doing so, my constituents are seeking to address the gap in access to healthcare services that people in rural areas of Scotland experience. This includes the distances people have to travel for treatment or consultations, which is a particular issue I have been engaging with the Galloway Community Hospital Action Group on since my election in 2016.

To provide an example of the scale of the issue, current cancer pathway arrangements in Scotland mean that many of my constituents living across Stranraer and Wigtownshire must make either a 260-mile round trip for cancer treatment to Edinburgh, or a 150-mile roundtrip for consultations and other treatments in Dumfries. I have been actively working with the Scottish Government so that these issues can be changed where appropriate.

To highlight and resolve issues affecting rural populations, such as the example I have provided, and on further conversation with Dr Baird, he is proposing to create a commissioner such as in Australia where a Rural Health Commissioner has been created. The role of this commissioner would be to oversee, advise and present evidence to policy makers and to ensure that health policy is equitable for rural areas.

I am unable to attend the meeting of the Committee as I am a member of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee which is meeting at the same time. However, I ask that committee members agree to keep this petition open for the Parliament's next session. I am keen to be kept informed of the committee's decision.