

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

Paul Sweeney MSP written submission, 16 October 2024

I was pleased to attend committee earlier this year to speak to the importance of this petition and I write to Committee Members today to underscore that importance before the next consideration of the petition.

The current model of yearly funding awards for community link worker posts is not sustainable. It does not provide job security for the workers or consistency for Deep End GP practice teams.

I was pleased to work with community link workers and the GMB trade union over the summer in opposition to proposals to cut the number of community link workers in Glasgow from 70 to 42.

Whilst that dispute was settled after the Government stepped in and awarded Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership the money to maintain the number of posts, the issue of yearly uncertainty for workers and practice teams remains.

As such, the ask of the petition to 'secure the long-term future' of link workers in GP practice teams remains valid and I would encourage the Committee to keep the petition open.

Link workers play an invaluable role in communities, particularly those with high levels of deprivation, working with patients on personal, social, and financial issues which are not necessarily clinical such as housing, benefits, loneliness, isolation, and debt.

Support for these vital roles will pay for itself in the longer term, through improving health outcomes and freeing up capacity in GP practice teams.

As referenced in my contribution to committee earlier this year, the social value of the programme is proven. The ALLIANCE community link worker programme in Glasgow supported 7,800 people in 2022 at the cost of £2.1 million, and £18.2 million in wellbeing benefits were produced for communities in the West of Scotland. This equates to an £8.79 benefit for every £1 of public money invested.

Long-term funding and stability are required to make sure that this positive impact is sustainable, to allow GP surgeries to plan ahead and to give the workforce the job security they need.

I would encourage the Committee to keep this petition open to invite further evidence from the Scottish Government on what work they are doing to ensure the viability of community link worker posts for the long-term; to improve the sustainability of community link worker funding going forward and to support longer-term planning for GP practice teams.