

# Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

4th Meeting, 2021 (Session 6), Wednesday  
22 September 2021

PE1877: Provide body cameras for all  
frontline NHS staff

## Note by the Clerk

<b>Petitioner</b>	Alex Wallace
<b>Petition summary</b>	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide body cameras for all frontline NHS staff and paramedics in Scotland.
<b>Webpage</b>	<a href="https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1877">https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1877</a>

## Introduction

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 10 June 2021
2. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. While not a formal requirement, petitioners have the option to collect signatures on their petition. On this occasion, the petitioner elected not to collect this information.
4. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from the Scottish Government and is included at **Annexe B** of this paper.
5. The Public Petitions Committee considered a similar petition, [PE1817](#), in session 5. This petition was calling for the introduction of body cameras for all frontline and theatre staff and was submitted by the same petitioner.

6. 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.

## Scottish Government submission

7. In its submission, the Scottish Government states that it 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. Although NHS England have announced that bodycams will be provided to all ambulance trust staff, the Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) has advised that there has been “no appetite” from the trade unions to provide bodycams.
9. The submission notes that SAS have also confirmed that attacks on paramedics in Scotland have decreased in recent years.
10. When considering the safety of staff, the submission highlights that policies and arrangements are in place to provide a safe working environment. The NHS Scotland ‘charter for patient rights and responsibilities’ makes clear to patients that they may face legal action if they are abusive, violent or aggressive towards NHS Staff, or members of the public, when using NHS Services.
11. CCTV cameras are noted as an existing deterrent and method of recording incidences of violence and aggression.
12. The submission points out that a feasibility study found that the price per bodycam and the supporting software would be £6,540 and £1,109 for accessories. Therefore, the Scottish Government believes that the cost of this proposal would be prohibitive for Health Boards and not provide value for money.

## Action

13. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

**Clerk to the Committee**

# PE1877: PROVIDE BODY CAMERAS FOR ALL FRONTLINE NHS STAFF

## Petitioner

Alex Wallace

## Date Lodged

10 June 2021

## 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.

## Previous action

I have contacted Bob Doris MSP who has advised he supports the action called for. I also submitted a similar petition a few years ago.

## Background information

Providing body cameras would protect NHS staff and are vital for their security. Frontline staff including paramedics are verbally and physically abused during working hours. Body cameras would be a deterrent to stop this abuse. All other emergency services have these cameras so why not the people that are saving lives. I believe body cameras would also help staff in relation to data protection issues. Any recordings could help if the NHS is sued by patients or families. It could prove there has been no negligence, being beneficial for NHS lawyers and staff. Most NHS staff want these body cameras as they believe it would give them a bit of security. There are cameras on houses, streets, in shops, in hospital wards and main hospital buildings. These can help in insurance claims, so why not on the people that are saving lives? NHS England is going to provide body cameras to frontline staff including paramedics, NHS Scotland should follow.

**Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE1877](#):  
Provide body cameras for all NHS frontline staff,  
lodged by Alex Wallace**

**Background**

The petition is calling for all frontline NHS staff to be given body worn cameras. The rationale given by the petitioner is that it would protect staff from abuse and violence.

Body worn cameras are mobile audio and video devices that allow the wearer to record what they see and hear. Devices can be attached to various parts of the body, including the head, a helmet, glasses, or to the body by pocket, badge or other means.

Body cameras are now a common feature for professions like the police but they are rare in a healthcare setting and so far have largely been limited to NHS security staff.

Previous staff surveys have found significant levels of verbal and physical abuse from patients and the public towards NHS Scotland staff. For example, the last Dignity at Work survey<sup>1</sup> found that 29% of staff had received verbal/emotional abuse from patients or the public in the last 12 months and 7% had experienced physical violence.

Abuse was most commonly experienced by staff working in the ambulance service and the State Hospital.

**Advantages and disadvantages of body cameras**

The effect of body cameras has mainly been studied in law enforcement and a report<sup>2</sup> by the International Association for Healthcare Security and Safety details their benefits as; a

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<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government (2018) [Health and social care staff experience: report 2017](#)

<sup>2</sup> International Association for Healthcare Security and Safety (2015) [Body worn camera use in health care facilities](#).

reduction in the use of force by police officers, a reduction in complaints against police officers, preventing confrontational situations and helping to resolve complaints.

The report also details some studies of their use by security officers in a healthcare setting which found a reduction in violence and a reduction in injuries to security personnel.

However, in a healthcare setting, their use by clinical staff raises concerns around privacy, patient confidentiality and the relationship between staff and patients.

It also raises issues around data protection. This is because body worn cameras record images and other information which can be used to identify individuals. They are therefore covered by data protection legislation and operators must ensure that the way they process the data adheres to the legal framework.

A key consideration is ensuring that there is a legal basis for processing the data. Consent can only be used where it is possible for the person whose data is being recorded to withdraw consent. This will not be the case in many healthcare settings.

Other issues which must be taken into account include how to minimise the need for processing personal data, how to keep data secure and how to ensure data is retained for no longer than is necessary.

### **Use in a healthcare setting**

Use by frontline clinical staff has been piloted in parts of England including Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust where they were used in five inpatient psychiatric wards.

The UK Government also recently announced they would be distributed to all Paramedics following a pilot in the North East of England Ambulance Service<sup>3</sup>.

### **Scottish Government Action**

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<sup>3</sup> Department of Health and Social Care (2 July 2018) [Paramedics to be given body cameras to protect them from abuse](#)

In session 5 of the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government [submitted evidence on a previous petition on a similar topic](#). In this submission, the Scottish Government raised concerns around patient confidentiality, cost and the impact on relationships between patients and staff. It also stated that it felt it would not be appropriate for all frontline staff.

### **Scottish Parliament Action**

As detailed above, the Scottish Parliament considered [PE1817 in session 5](#). This petition was calling for the introduction of body cameras for all frontline and theatre staff and was submitted by the same petitioner.

The previous Petitions Committee closed the petition following receipt of submissions from the Scottish Government and the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) which detailed concerns about privacy, confidentiality and cost.

### **Key Organisations and relevant links**

Healthcare unions – e.g. BMA, RCN, UNISON, Allied Health Professions Federation

Medical Protection Society

Patient Advice and Support Service

Scottish Ambulance Service

**Kathleen Robson**  
**Senior Researcher**

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](mailto:spice@parliament.scot)

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# Scottish Government submission of 8 July 2021 PE1877/A

It may be helpful if I explain that staff/patient safety and security arrangements in NHS Scotland settings are the responsibility of individual Health Boards. However, it is Scottish Government's view that the safety risks of introducing bodycams for all frontline staff and paramedics in Scotland would vary considerably in different NHS settings and for different job roles, such as security staff and ambulance crews. Therefore, we do not believe that bodycams would be necessary or appropriate for all frontline clinical staff. For example, in theatre settings, patients are under the care of a team and would be under anaesthetic.

The Scottish Government is clear that violence or aggression against staff or patients is unacceptable and we have policies and arrangements in place to provide and continuously improve a safe working environment, including de-escalation training. We also expect Health Boards to take appropriate action against anyone who assaults a staff member or patient. The NHS Scotland 'charter for patient rights and responsibilities' makes clear to patients that they may face legal action if they are abusive, violent or aggressive towards NHS Staff, or members of the public, when using NHS Services.

NHS England recently announced that it will be providing bodycams to all ambulance trust staff by the end of June 2021. The Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) has advised Scottish Government that there has been no appetite from the trade unions to provide bodycams to SAS staff to date. SAS have also confirmed that on the contrary to England, attacks on paramedics in Scotland have decreased over the last few years. SAS are in regular contact with trade unions on this subject. SAS have also confirmed that they intend to discuss this matter at their next digital and ICT meeting on 15 July. The Scottish Government fully support SAS with this approach and will continue to liaise with the service as discussions progress.

We are not aware of calls for other frontline staff to be provided with body cameras and CCTV cameras are already used in hospital wards and main hospital buildings as both a deterrent and to record incidences of violence and aggression. Cases involving claims of negligence are complex and often involve a variety of organisations and specialists. We have



insufficient evidence, at this point in time, to suggest that footage from body cameras would be useful in this process.

As you will be aware, from our response to the previous petition on this matter, a feasibility study commissioned by Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, found that the price per bodycam and the supporting software would be £6,540 and £1,109 for accessories. This would make the costs of such a proposal prohibitive for Health Boards and would not provide value for money.

I hope this reply is helpful in outlining the Scottish Government's position on the introduction of bodycams in NHSScotland settings.