

David Stewart MSP
Convener
Public Petitions Committee
Scottish Parliament

10 August 2012

Dear Mr Stewart

Petition PE1424 – Road to Health

The "Road to Health" CPP3 team has been following the progress of our petition (PE1424) with great interest and are pleased that the Public Petitions Committee has followed up on the health aspects which result from the lack of coordination and provision of transport for older people in remote and rural areas.

Our petition also expressed a second concern, that of the provision of transport in general for older people living in remote and rural areas.

Action is needed to address the shortcomings which are clearly affecting the quality of life (and eventually the health) of thousands of older people.

Amongst the issues which were highlighted by our study were:

- Over a third of the older people sampled were unable to do their own shopping;
- Two thirds of those that can do their own shopping lived more than a mile from shops and nearly 10% lived more than 10 miles from shops;
- Over 40% had difficulty in getting out and nearly half of these found it almost impossible to get out;
- A quarter didn't get out every month.

Extrapolating these figures across the whole of Dumfries and Galloway, where there are approximately 45,000 people over the age of 60, implies:

- 15,000 are unable to do their own shopping;
- 3,000 live more than 10 miles from shops;
- 18,000 have difficulty getting out and;
- more than 10,000 get out less frequently than once per month.

A number of respondents added comments to their questionnaires and one wrote us a letter which highlights the above issues. The text of the main part of that letter is reproduced (with permission) below.

*"...I'm sure you are already hearing about transport problems.
It's an absolute health destroying cruelty no accessible affordable buses for people who have wheelchairs and need a bit of help out and about. The horror of being shut in four walls year after year is totally inhumane plus considering mind over matter is a universal law.*

The Doctors work so hard to keep people healthy only to be pulled down by the stress of facing enclosure for life, when we haven't family members living near (folks have to leave Galloway for work).

A few years ago I attended a day centre, it wasn't uplifting though I understand people's stressful conversations; country folks are born to being outdoors, looking and learning, seeing the four seasons, sharing knowledge and arriving home hoping to find a book about things seen and heard.

Health is wealth, we can't dwell on aches and pains all the time and sit with negative thoughts. No wonder hospitals, Chemists and Doctors are run off their feet.

We should be doing things we're able to do and treated as equal citizens, surely. I have a taxi card but if your family live a long way away it's not affordable. Thank you for listening..."

There are examples of excellent transport practices in Scotland which begin to address the quality of life and wellbeing issues. Our petition cited the successful, but under pressure, Buchan Dial-a Bus and the embryonic Rural Transport Solutions (RTS) in Dumfries and Galloway as examples of practice which should be strongly supported because of the improvement they have made to the provision of transport to vulnerable groups in rural areas.

We respectfully ask the Committee to ensure that the resolution of these quality of life issues is given at least as high a priority as the issues which directly affect health.

Thank you

Joyce Harkness
on behalf of the "Road to Health" CPP3 Team.