

PE1432/A

Petitioner Letter of 23 May 2012

Petition calling for improved emergency ambulance provision in remote and rural areas

Unfortunately, work commitments mean that neither of us is able to be present in person to present our petition. We hope that the following statement will serve to summarise our case.

Since experiencing a delay in ambulance response after dialling 999 for an elderly neighbour, early in April, we have come across numerous accounts of similar delays in and around the Dalbeattie area of Dumfries and Galloway. We understand from our community councillors and MSPs that this has been an on-going issue for a number of years. With only one ambulance based within 5 miles of the town, in Castle Douglas, Dalbeattie, despite being the largest town in the Stewartry area, with a number of outlying villages and holiday parks, seems to stand little chance of an ambulance reaching us within the target 8 minutes for a life-threatening emergency. Certainly if this ambulance is otherwise occupied, the whole area is very vulnerable, being dependent on a unit attending from Dumfries (14 miles) or even Newton Stewart (40 miles). This is reflected in the figures quoted by the Scottish Ambulance Service, who, while claiming the overall average response time for a life-threatening emergency in Dumfries and Galloway is 7.64 minutes, for Dalbeattie this is 12.7 minutes. The government's target for remote and rural areas is that 75% of such emergencies will be attended within 8 minutes:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/193400/0093097.pdf>.

We understand from local councillors that because of such concerns across the region, all the local fire appliances are now equipped with a defibrillator machine and are frequently called out because paramedics cannot reach the scene quickly enough.

There have been calls for an extra ambulance to be based in Dalbeattie, but these have been rejected by the Ambulance Service as not the most appropriate solution. A scheme to base volunteer First Responders in the town was proposed by the Ambulance Service a couple of years ago, but those putting their names forward never heard any more. We have gathered over 400 signatures to date for a petition which we hope to present to the Secretary for Health in the next few weeks, which shows that this is an issue which weighs heavily with local residents. From articles in the press, we gather similar issues are experienced in the more remote areas across Scotland. Clearly there is a need for something to be done to improve the situation, and we feel there is a need for an urgent review of how ambulance services are

provided in areas such as ours, to ensure that local residents stand the best possible chance of receiving prompt attention in medical emergencies.

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23.5.12