

**PE1845/O**

Colin Smyth MSP submission of 9 March 2021

I understand the Committee are considering this petition tomorrow morning, and I would like to express my support for this petition submitted by Dr Gordon Baird and urge the Committee to keep it open and include it in its legacy paper for the next Committee to consider further.

As one of the MSPs covering Galloway, I am aware of the fantastic work the Galloway Community Hospital Action Group do, and I have no doubt that their petition is rooted in a strong understanding of the key issues affecting both health care systems and rural communities. They have campaigned on behalf of the local community to retain health services locally and have seen at first hand the challenges of achieving this in rural areas at a time more and more services are being centralised.

Indeed, as an MSP covering a largely rural region, I am acutely aware of the unique and persistent challenges rural healthcare services face, as set out in detail in the petition and a number of the submissions the Committee has already received. Moreover, as the petitioners have made clear, as policy will always impact rural communities differently, improving rural healthcare in the long-term requires consideration of all large policy decisions on an ongoing basis.

For these reasons I agree that a dedicated agency would be appropriate and potentially highly beneficial, and given the time constraints we are facing I believe the most appropriate way forward is to ensure this petition receives further consideration.

Many thanks in advance for your consideration.