

West Lothian Council votes to lobby health minister for GP improvements

West Lothian Council is to write to the Scottish Health Minister demanding improvements to GP surgeries across the county.

The council passed a motion raised by Conservative group leader Damian Doran-Timson. It comes after capital spending on NHS projects was stalled for two years.

Councillor Doran-Timson told a meeting of the council his constituents in East Calder “need to know what the plan is.”

The move comes as the surgery in the rapidly growing town faces major structural issues. Locals have campaigned for 20 years for new facilities.

The surgery was built for a patient list of 4,500 but currently has 14,000. That figure will continue to grow as the Calderwood Core development Area of 4,000 new homes develops.

Similar problems face Winchburgh, Bathgate, Armadale and parts of Livingston.

Councillor Doran-Timson told a meeting of the council: “We need to look at what is going to happen going forward. It’s not in our remit but it is with the Scottish Government. We need to know what the plan is moving forward because we have not heard anything from the health minister.

“The status quo simply isn’t good enough GP surgeries need to

keep up with the number of new homes. To me it's nonsense that planning does not take into account GP surgeries. You can have a GP surgery that's at capacity and yet you can build 2,000 houses next to it.

"Let's see what we can do to make things better."

Councillor Peter Heggie, seconding the motion, pointed out that those not registered with a GP practice had no option but to turn up at St John's hospital in Livingston adding to the pressures at the hospital.

In an amendment SNP group leader Janet Campbell pointed to the investment the Scottish Government had made in the development of multi-disciplinary teams which were now rolling out across communities bringing services into the community. This would help to reduce GP workloads; the problems in surgeries were caused by the lack of space needed for the new multi-disciplinary teams.

She accused Councillor Doran-Timson of "virtue signalling" having never pursued the plans for the surgery with Lothian Health Board or the NHS.

She told the meeting that Lothian Health Board had "sat on" plans for three years for a new surgery in East Calder.

The freeze of capital spending in the NHS was forced upon the government by Tory cuts from Westminster, she said.

Fellow SNP Councillor Carl John spoke of the frustration of the community. He was one of the first to campaign for new facilities only to see successive promises for plans to be broken.

He told the meeting: "I have been involved since 2004 we have met several times a year. We were led along by Lothian Health Board and NHS. We gave up an awful lot of our time on the project we were led to believe two or three times that we had

go to the top of the waiting lists and we seem to have been gazumped by other surgeries.”

Independent Councillor Andrew McGuire made the case for Armadale GP surgeries which faces similar pressures and a lack of space to accommodate services.

He said the SNP assertion that NHS Lothian had stalled the plans was baffling, adding that any capital spend over £5m would have to be approved by ministers. “The SNP can body-swerve it all it wants but all roads lead back to the minister.”

The motion to write to Neil Gray the Scottish Health Minister was passed by 16 to 14.

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter