

PE1472/E

Bòrd SSN nan Eilean Siar
Western Isles NHS Board

Chief Executive Office

37 South Beach
Stornoway
Western Isles HS1 2BB
Telephone 01851 702997
Fax 01851 704405
www.wihb.scot.nhs.uk



Mr Andrew Howlett
Public Petitions Committee
T3.40
Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

Date: 2 October 2013
Your Ref:
Our Ref: GJ/MMD
Enquiries to: Margaret MacDonald
Extension: 3063
Direct Line: 01851 708063
E-mail: margaret.macdonald15@nhs.net

Dear Mr Howlett

Scottish Parliament Public Petition PE 1472

Thank you for your letter dated 12th September 2013 seeking a response from Western Isles Board in relation to two specific questions.

I will address each in turn

Question 1

What requests have been made asking NHS Western Isles to participate in work, and share information, with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and other stakeholders in relation to economic studies on the issues raised in the petition, and how has NHS Western Isles responded to these requests?

NHS Western Isles has not been asked specifically to participate in work in relation to economic studies. The board has been involved in and engaged on the issue of inter-island air travel since June 2012.

Below I have outlined some examples of engagement which are important but not exhaustive.

Example 1

Oifisean Bòrd na Slàinte
37 Mol a Deas, Steòrnabhagh, Eileanan Siar, HS1 2BB

Headquarters
37 South Beach Street, Stornoway, Western Isles, HS1 2BB

Cathraiche: N. Mac a' Bhreatannaich
Ceannard an Gníomh: G. MacSheumais

Chair: Neil Galbraith
Chief Executive: Gordon Jamieson



Western Isles NHS Board is the common name of Western Isles Health Board

“The best at what we do”

NHS Western Isles will work actively with patients, the public and our partners to improve our community's health and wellbeing, to tackle inequalities, and to deliver high quality, reliable clinical services.

In June 2012 NHS Western Isles received communication from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Director of Technical Services stating that the Local Authority subsidised the air services that currently operated between Stornoway and Benbecula and between Benbecula and Barra. These services were provided on the basis of Public Service Obligation Contracts, of which there were two and both operated by Loganair. The contracts were due to run until March 31st 2013 and, in advance of deciding on what basis they were to be re-tendered, the Local Authority had decided to undertake a review of these air services.

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar had appointed Reference Economic Consultants to provide specialist consultancy support in carrying out the review.

I met with Naomi Coleman of Reference Economic Consultants on Tuesday 3rd July 2012 and following discussion it was agreed I would provide:

- a) Activity levels
- b) A clinic schedule for the Uists, Benbecula and Barra.

The agreed information was provided.

We also discussed important local service provision issues that were affected by the inter-island flights e.g. local chemotherapy administration, the transport of medicines and blood supplies.

A schedule of clinics and visiting services was also provided outlining the clinic specialty, the origin of the service i.e. Stornoway, Inverness, Glasgow, and the clinic frequency.

Example 2

In January 2013 following a request, NHS Western Isles confirmed to the Scottish Government Health Department that the total amount spent in 2012/13 with Loganair/Flybe was expected to be around £2.5 million of which approximately £250,000 related to inter-island flights. This represented about 1,700 return flights, of which about 70 % were for public/patients and 30% staff.

Example 3

In January 2013 NHS Western Isles' Director of Finance received a document outlining the comprehensive list of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's 2013/15 Budget Consultation details. NHS Western Isles responded to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar on 1st February 2013.

A significant number of additional communication and engagement exchanges exist.

Recognising that a reduction in the inter-island flight schedule was likely, much of the work undertaken within NHS Western Isles related to comprehensive clinical and service risk assessment with consequent actions to mitigate risk and to maintain the current levels of service and safety. Action plans were agreed to minimise risk.

It was also recognised that any changes to the inter-island flights would result in extended travel arrangements and travel times. The actual level of disruption and inconvenience to members of the public using the flights to access health services was difficult to quantify and qualify.

Members of the public and patients supported and transported by the Scottish Ambulance Service for elective and emergencies were not affected.

Example 4

On 6 September 2013 NHS Western Isles' Chairman received a letter from the Leader of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar asking the Board to provide any evidence of the effect, positive or negative, on the economy of the Western Isles and to the services provided which have resulted from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Budget Strategy decisions.

The evidence gathering is underway with a response date of no later than 21 October 2013.

Question 2

What are the additional annual costs of transporting patients from the Western Isles to Glasgow and the mainland for treatment?

Two main issues are important.

Firstly, there has been a substantial increase in travel time and undoubtedly inconvenience for members of the public, patients and their escorts who require to travel between islands and to and from the mainland to access health care and services.

Patients travelling from the Uists and Benbecula to Stornoway for an appointment on a Monday or Friday face a lengthy journey by car and ferry that can, in the worst cases, extend to a fifteen hour period away from home.

For patients travelling to Raigmore Hospital the situation is similar. Travel costs associated with these two journeys have not increased to any material extent.

An issue that was not predicted is one that relates to the Barra to Glasgow flight. It appears that the flight from Barra to Glasgow is often full with the only alternative being to travel by ferry and road to Benbecula and then taking the flight from Benbecula to Glasgow. Although there may be a seasonal impact for the Barra to Glasgow flight, if this were to continue it would represent a substantial inconvenience and extended travel time for members of the public and patients using the flights to access healthcare.

Between 1 April and 30 September 2012, three patients travelled by this route, whereas for the same period in 2013 forty nine patients have travelled by this route.

On the issue of additional annual cost, the changes have not been in place for a full year and in addition clinical activity of this nature is not easy to predict with accuracy. The Board was always clear that the actual level of disruption for members of the public and patients would be difficult to predict until the flight changes were in place.

Given the evolving picture the current issues giving rise to additional costs being borne by NHS Western Isles and the Highlands and Islands Patient Travel Scheme include diverted journeys and delayed discharges.

The potential annual increased cost for diverted journeys could be £47,000 per annum.

NHS Western Isles gave a commitment and continues to work with individual patients and members of the public to minimise any disruption and keep travel to a minimum. The actual practicalities of the current flight schedules make it extremely challenging to retain the previous journey experience.

NHS Western Isles has re-scheduled clinics to accommodate flight changes as far as possible.

I hope the above is helpful and should you require any further assistance please, do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Gordon Jamieson
Chief Executive
NHS Western Isles