

## **PE1890/K: NHS Ayrshire and Arran submission of 8 December 2022**

Thank you for your letter of 28th October 2022 in relation to the consideration of petitions and the general ask for issues associated with access to healthcare in rural areas.

There is no doubt that there are particularly difficult workforce issues associated with delivering services in rural areas, these are exacerbated by depopulation, demographic profiles (including dependency ratio), availability of housing and accommodation and the ability to deliver sustainable and resilient services through smaller teams. The most challenging area for Ayrshire and Arran in terms of rurality and where the workforce issues are most acute is the delivery of care and support on Arran.

Promoting Employability opportunities and engaging with our key partner organisations (including Local Authorities) enables NHS Ayrshire & Arran to promote career development and employment opportunities. This also provides access to career and educational pathways. Employability is a key element enabling us to promote local jobs and aligns with our shared Community Wealth Building ambitions. Our health and care services and teams work closely with local higher and further education bodies to provide routes into employment with specific targeted approaches in rural areas, for example on Arran work experience opportunities supporting placements in the local nursing home and hospital are supported in partnership with the Local High School and the Health and Social Care Partnership. We also have links with Argyll College who deliver an Access to Nursing course which has proven beneficial to local recruitment. Our local College is not always able to deliver some specialist Healthcare related training topics and therefore we have to look towards larger colleges/providers in the central belt.

The rural challenges on Arran have required a creative approach to growing our own workforce and career pathways into our integrated health and care teams which sit under one management structure spanning community and hospital care. The Arran Medical Group is a training practice and also participates in the Rural Fellow programme which has enabled a number of GPs to be recruited over the years. In addition we currently have nursing assistants training to become nurses, along with new Advanced Nurse practitioner roles in our Emergency Department and GP practice which local nurses have

been supported to train for. Our new Emergency Department nurses at Band 6 are another pathway on Arran for local development and opportunities to progress.

Our ambition for a single nursing team continues to develop and we continue to expand and develop clear pathways and training with good examples in our work on Frailty with a new Health Care Support Worker role and Advanced Nurse practitioner for Frailty at Band 7. Further work to develop these pathways is now underway. This is part of our new Clinical Nurse Managers role with a focus on a new combined nursing role to support our nursing home and community. In addition we are working closely with our mainland colleagues to support newly qualified nurses working on Arran.

Attracting staff to jobs on the Isle of Arran is our main challenge when considering recruitment for hard to fill posts within rural areas. Feedback from both candidates and staff has highlighted that the cost of buying or renting property and the housing availability on the Island is a significant contributing factor to them either applying for a post or remaining in post.

The first council housing to be built on Arran for more than 20 years was completed in June 2022, creating much needed affordable homes. North Ayrshire Council Housing services have also incorporated the award of additional housing points to key workers with jobs on the Island via their housing allocation policy, this applies to all health and social care roles.

A key ambition is to have resilient and sustainable health and care services on the Island, it has been acknowledged that the provision of staff accommodation for visiting and covering staff from the mainland is essential to allow the safe provision of services and also to provide support when the Island is cut off from the mainland, e.g. ferry cancellations. The HSCP currently rent a small house for this purpose and are in the process of purchasing a larger property on the Island to fully meet the temporary accommodation needs of staff, this is expected to be in use from February 2023 and will future proof the provision of staff accommodation and the ongoing need to provide specialist services and staff cover from the mainland.

Whilst NHS Scotland offers distant island allowance payments these do not apply to the two Islands in Ayrshire & Arran (e.g. Arran or Cumbrae), there is a need to also consider the conditions which may incentivise recruitment and retention of hard to fill areas. Other incentivised offers such as changes to the working week, more flexible working for those with carer commitments and childcare, support with housing and relocation and access to supported housing and accommodation for newly qualified staff may be more sustainable ways of recruiting and retaining workforce.

In Arran in 2019 an application was made to STAC for a Recruitment and Retention Premium of 15% for 12 Band 5 nursing posts on the island. This was approved for 4 years and has made a significant difference to the ability to recruit. Further discussions are underway to look at an "island allowance" for Arran to bring us in line with other islands.

We do not agree with the need for a dedicated agency, as the approach to delivering and advocating for healthcare needs should sit with local leadership and management. With local solutions to provide equity of access and the assurance of the delivery of safe and sustainable services for communities, with a tailored approach to meet individual community, locality and neighbour-hood needs. The Islands Bill refers to Island proofing

and considering how the Island Councils are and can be supported to use existing powers to engage communities to deliver improved, more responsive public services and better outcomes for communities. This shared responsibility is reflected in our Island Plans which include the ambitions for resilient health and care services on the Islands.

We hope this is helpful. Should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely

Claire Burden  
Chief Executive