

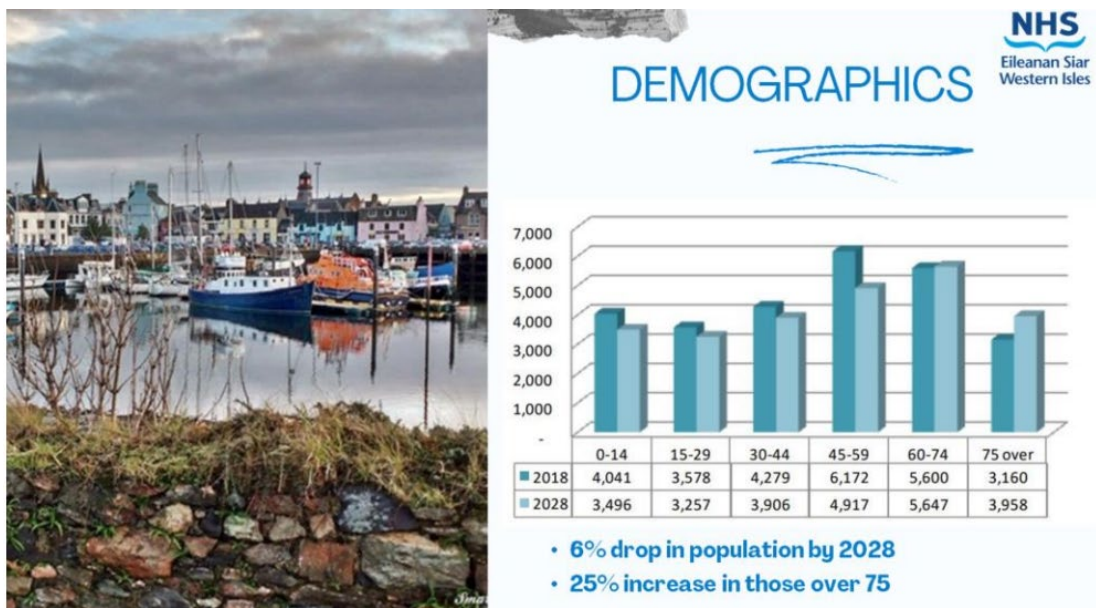
PE1924/G: NHS Western Isles submission dated 2 December 2022

The biggest problem the Western Isles faces is the reduction in population which has a knock-on effect on the local workforce. In the last 15 years the population has drop 2% (450) but with a more rapid decline expected in the next 10 years of a further 5% expected. The increased decline is mostly due to the reduction in births against deaths. Current ratio between death and births is very disturbing with the first 9 calendar months ratio of 1: 0.47, which means for every 2 deaths there is just under 1 birth, compared to a Scottish average for the same period of 1:0.75. To put it in perspective 120 years ago the population of the islands was 46,172, estimate census for 20/21 was 26,500 a reduction of 42.6%.

NHS WI is facing workforce issues as a result of being a rural island Board with a declining population. The demography of the Western Isles is predicted to decline significantly with outward migration at 18 when young people leave for training opportunities. NHS WI workforce is ageing with 48% of employees aged over 50 and the highest proportion of employees in the age 55-59 category. NHS Western Isles workforce plan details further information on the age profile for nursing and midwifery where 14.25% (63 employees) were in the 60+ age group. This sees the possibility of employees retiring at any point in the coming 12 months.

It is estimated that over 50% of school leavers attend college and or University the majority in Glasgow or Aberdeen. Majority of these school leavers do not return.

The available local workforce has reduced by 7% in the last 15 years and is expected to reduce further - due to a combination of reduced births over the last 30 years and outward migration of the young. It is noted there is inward migration, but a large majority are people who have retired and are not therefore of childbearing age and do not wish to work in the semi-skilled arena.



Access to local training is imperative for future workforce planning as evidence shows that accessible training allows people to remain and work in their local community. The cost for students to study on the mainland is prohibitive and local opportunities for study, either through a remote/flexible route or through attendance at a local centre of learning has the dual advantage of enhancing positive destinations for young people and the development of skills for the health and social care workforce. A positive example is training for nurses through UHI which has provided a steady supply of nurses for NHS Western Isles. This has been strengthened with the development of a number of newly qualified nurse posts designed to provide a breadth of experience over different settings. Replication in other professional areas, for example AHPs, would be of benefit.

In work training has allowed development of staff into specialist roles but this relies on access to training through flexible routes. A training pathway has recently been identified for the development of Health Care Assistants from Band 3 to Band 4 which will allow those currently working for NHS WI in a Health Care Assistant role to develop their skills and career opportunities.

Early conversations are taking place with the NHS Youth Academy on opportunities to developing skills at school level to provide entry skills for health and social care. The apprenticeship pathway is in development with plans to expand.

NHS WI has difficulties in finding accommodation for workers. These generally fall into two categories. The first is those in substantive posts that require to be located outwith the town of Stornoway, for example Uist and Barra. The second are short-term workers employed on an interim basis where the short-term rental market is dominated by tourism. The Board has limited accommodation available for workers which is often at capacity. Key Worker status provides some measure of support through the local Housing Partnership but stock levels remain low in Uist & Barra. There are no collated statistics on those who are deterred from living and working for NHS Western Isles due to availability of housing.

Distant Islands Allowance is paid at different levels to public service workers in Island communities, with health workers being paid the least. The current rate of Distant Islands Allowance for NHS Western Isles is £1,117 compared to over £2,000 for a local authority worker. There are additional costs when living in an island community including transport, food and fuel. The Western Isles has the highest levels of fuel poverty in Scotland.

Yours sincerely,

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