Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

**Petition Number:** PE1591

**Main Petitioner:** Catriona MacDonald on behalf of SOS-NHS

**Subject:** Major redesign of healthcare services in Skye, Lochalsh and Wester Ross. Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to reverse its approval of the major service change to healthcare services in Skye, Lochalsh and South West Ross.

**Background**

Skye, Lochalsh and south-west Ross has a population of 14,680 with main population centres being Portree, Broadford, Kyle and Lochcarron. In February 2015 the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport, Shona Robison, approved proposals to modernise community and hospital services in Skye, Lochalsh and south-west Ross.

Whilst the petition background information states that “NHS Highland has decided to close two hospitals and build a single new one for the area” the detail of the proposals included a new hospital in Broadford, alongside the development of Portree community hospital. These proposals were approved by the board of NHS Highland in December 2014, but were referred to the Scottish Government for a final decision as they were considered a “major service change”.

The purpose built “hub” at Broadford is to have enhanced diagnostics (x-ray, ultrasound), out of hours medical cover and all inpatient beds with 24/7 medical cover. The proposed “spoke” in Portree would continue to have a minor injury unit, primary care emergency centre and outpatient services, but would have no inpatient services.

A campaign group with a [website](#) and [Facebook page](#) has been established and is actively campaigning against the Scottish Government and NHS Highland decision. It was [reported](#) in *The Herald* on 10 September 2015 that a judicial review was being sought in the Court of Session.

*Consultation and engagement in Skye, Lochalsh and south-west Ross*

When considering making changes to a service, NHS Boards are required to work with health service users, patients, staff, members of the public, carers, volunteers and voluntary organisations – how this should happen is set out in the Scottish Government guidance “[Informing, Engaging and Consulting](#)”
People in Developing Health and Community Care Services”. Where the Scottish Government considers a service change to be “major” the Scottish Health Council takes on a quality assurance role and reviews the process. Changes that are considered to be a significant service redesign require the approval of Scottish Ministers.

In some cases the Scottish Government can choose to establish an Independent Scrutiny Panel (ISP) to carry out an expert and impartial assessment of proposals being developed by Boards, and the assumptions which underpin them. Such a Panel can assess the safety, sustainability, evidence base and value for money of proposals, and that proposals are robust, person-centred and consistent with clinical evidence and/or best practice, national policy, and that all practical options have been considered. A panel was not established for the NHS Highland proposals – details of the three panels which have been established to date can be found online.

There are previous examples of Ministers overturning approved major service changes, for example the decision to reverse the downgrading of A&E departments in Lanarkshire and Ayr. This happened following the establishment of ISPs which looked at the decisions in retrospect. However, the Scottish Government guidance details that ISPs are expected to be convened before the NHS Board undertakes its public consultation. Therefore the guidance is not clear as to what circumstances the Scottish Government would consider convening an ISP to look at a decision already taken.

The Scottish Health Council report relating to this case was produced by the Scottish Health Council in time for the NHS Highland Board meeting in December 2014. The Scottish Health Council found that there had been a number of phases of consultation in Skye, Lochalsh and south-west Ross. These included:

- During 2012 and 2013 NHS Highland and local clinical staff met with community councils, local councillors, the area’s two Public Partnership Forums (PPFs), MSPs, council ward forums and other local groups to discuss the current status of the services provided for the area and explain the reasons why change is required
- A local steering group was set up in December 2012 to start to develop the options for new models of service. Invites were sent to partner organisations such as Highland Council, all local councillors, community councils, and groups representing potentially affected people and communities.
- Three workshops were held in 2013 with the steering group to develop a long list of options, which included a range of options from having no local hospital services on Skye to rebuilding new hospitals on the existing sites. From this, a short list of three options was identified. There were around 25 to 35 participants at each event with

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1 The Scottish Health Council was established by the then Scottish Executive in April 2005 to promote Patient Focus and Public Involvement in the NHS in Scotland
approximately half coming from community members, patients or service users.

- The scoring of options took place using the agreed criteria at the January 2014 workshop. Option 2 (‘Hub’ and ‘Spoke’ model) was selected as the preferred model and a further option appraisal exercise was undertaken to identify where the ‘Hub’ and ‘Spoke’ could be located (April 2014).
- In May 2014, the steering group identified four potential sites in Broadford. The consultation survey asked people to indicate if they had a preferred site within Broadford, should the proposal be approved. NHS Highland will use this information to complete the option appraisal on the site.

The preferred option highlighted a community resource centre and hospital ‘Hub’, based in Broadford and ‘Spoke’ based in Portree. This option was subject to a public consultation between 19 May 2014 and 19 August 2014 (later extended to 29 August). NHS Highland reported that it received a total of 2,275 responses to its survey (with 2:1 in favour of Broadford as the location for a new ‘hub’ facility), around 48 letters or emails, and held over 50 meetings and events during the consultation. However a 65 signature petition was also received asking for the new hospital to be in Portree. A separate petition set up by SOS-NHS has been signed by some 1,895 individuals – this calls for Portree Hospital to stay open, for 24 emergency care to be restored and all beds retained.

The main issues raised by people through the consultation included the following:

- Feedback from the north of Skye indicated some strong resistance to the proposed location of the ‘Hub’ in Broadford. This was partly linked to criticism of the membership of the steering group and the process used to identify the proposed location.
- Some concerns relating to travel and access to proposed new ‘Hub’ from north of Skye.
- In Kyle and South West Ross there were positive comments about reduced travel if the ‘Hub’ was located in Broadford
- Queries about ‘future proofing’ (i.e. how adequate services would be for the future population of the area).
- Clarification on what services are delivered at the sites currently and what could be delivered at the proposed ‘Hub’ and Spoke’.
- The need for Palliative care and care beds was mentioned.

Overall the Scottish Health Council was satisfied that NHS Highland had followed the guidance on involving local people in its consultations. Its report stated:

“Overall, feedback received indicated that the majority of people had understood the reasons for change, how the proposal had been developed, felt listened to, and that there had been sufficient opportunity to take part in the consultation. Where people have
requested further meetings or information NHS Highland has been responsive”.

The Scottish Health Council also identified some areas of good practice, together with some “learning points” for future NHS Highland service changes. These can be found in the Scottish Health Council summary report.

**Scottish Government Action**

As stated above, the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport approved the proposals in February 2015. More on the Scottish Government position can be found in the PQ referenced below.

**Scottish Parliament Action**

In parliamentary question S4O-04438 on 10th June 2015, Mary Scanlon asked the Scottish Government “whether it will provide an update on the review of provision of NHS services on Skye”. Shona Robison replied that “NHS Highland undertook formal public consultation between May and August last year on its proposals to modernise community and hospital services in Skye, Lochalsh and south-west Ross. The proposals to build a new hospital in Broadford, alongside the development of Portree community hospital, were endorsed by the board of NHS Highland last December. As the proposals were considered a major service change, they were subsequently submitted to the Government. I carefully considered all the available evidence and representations and I approved the proposals in February. I have been clear that NHS Highland must continue to involve fully all local stakeholders as plans are developed and this important work is taken forward."

Mary Scanlon responded “In the Highlands, we want a centre of excellence in Raigmore hospital in Inverness, but we also want appropriate NHS services throughout the region. Given the £6 million overspend at Raigmore hospital this year, can the cabinet secretary assure people across the Highlands, and particularly on the Isle of Skye, that local, accessible NHS services will not be cut and that local voices and concerns will continue to be heard and heard with respect?”

Shona Robison replied “I absolutely agree that local voices should be heard with respect. The board had a difficult decision to make and, had it made a different decision, I am sure that other voices would have been raised by people who were not happy with that. It made a decision based on what it thought was the best available evidence. It has taken that forward, and it continues to engage with local people about that process. It is important to say that the independent Scottish Health Council confirmed that the board’s public engagement process was consistent with national guidance. The decision is made and the board is getting on with the work in hand. It will continue to discuss with local people further enhancements that can be made across the Isle of Skye and beyond.”
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