

Cabinet Secretary for Transport submission of 27 February 2024

PE1862/K: Introduce community representation on boards of public organisations delivering lifeline services to island communities

Thank you for your letter of 26 January 2024 seeking a further update on our work to address the issues raised in this petition. You have asked that I provide a response to each of the 4 points summarised in the petition, and to address 2 further points. I am copying this letter to Mr Fairlie MSP as Minister with responsibility for islands connectivity.

In our previous correspondence, and during earlier evidence sessions with the Committee, I and my predecessors have explained the process followed when carrying out public sector recruitment exercises. The appointments process is based on merit and regulated appointments are monitored by the Ethical Standards Commissioner (ESC). The process aims to be clear and transparent for everyone who applies for an advertised position.

The appointing Minister agrees who should sit on the selection panel for each recruitment exercise, and that panel makes recommendations to the Minister on all aspects of the recruitment exercise.

In considering what the key criteria should be for each vacancy the selection panel agree what skills, knowledge and experience is required. My officials work with the Board Chair to develop a skills matrix prior to each recruitment exercise. The skills matrix will vary depending on the skills of the current membership of the board, and any other particular requirements identified. For example, sometimes it may be necessary to consider applicants who have specific financial, audit, HR or other skills.

To support the advertising campaign for all future recruitments I will encourage recruitment panels to take a similar approach to that taken in a recent CMAL recruitment – highlighting in all of the recruitment paperwork, including the advert itself our encouragement for island residents to apply. We can also make clear that the required knowledge and skills can be gained in a variety of ways. On every occasion, regardless of what other skills may be required, applicants are asked to demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of how lifeline services affect our island communities.

We want our appointments to be based on the experience and abilities of each candidate, and they must reflect the outcome of an open and fair recruitment process. Scottish Ministers do not wish to limit the field of potential applicants by specifying that they must live or work within the islands themselves, or that they already work for a particular organisation. Our view is that the best way of ensuring each board is able to operate as efficiently and effectively as possible is to encourage applicants from a range of backgrounds.

Scottish Ministers' believe that the best way of achieving this is to advertise as widely as possible. As you know we have already taken steps to do this but I would like us to consider if we can go even further. We currently advertise each vacancy on the vessels travelling to and from our island communities, and highlight the opportunities to key bodies, including local authorities and other relevant organisations. It may be that there is scope to do this at a higher level, e.g. by Ministers' writing directly to local councils, and other relevant organisations asking them to highlight the opportunity within their communities. I have asked my officials for advice on this. I have also asked officials to ensure interested candidates are given the opportunity to be interviewed remotely.

I hope this reply provides assurance to the Committee of Scottish Ministers' on-going commitment to address the concerns raised in this petition. I would be happy to provide the Committee with an update on our further progress in due course.