

North (Sutherland) Coast Redesign: Communication & Engagement Stakeholder Group

Thursday 27th November 2025

Teams

Present: Michelle Johnstone (MJ)	Interim Head of Service (Chair)
Cllr Michael Baird (MB)	Highland Councillor
Joe Dunn (JD)	Wildland
Sara Harkins (SH)	Kinlochbervie Community/Northwest 2045
Cllr Marianne Hutchison (MH)	Highland Councillor
Kolin King (KK)	North Coast Connection; Unpaid Carers Project
Frances Gunn (FG)	Up North! /Northwest 2045
Gemma Mackenzie (GM)	Manager, Melvich Care Home
Andrea Madden (AMdm)	North Coast Connection / Hubs United
Ngairé Mingham (NM)	Caladh Sona Action Group
Christian Nicolson (CN)	Interim Area Manager
Michael Simpson (MS)	Tongue, Melness & Skerray CC
Zhen Ron Tan (ZRT)	Project Manager, NHS Highland
Anita Wilson (AW)	Durness Community Council

Action

1. Welcome & Apologies

Apologies were received from:

Lynn Garret (LG)	Primary Care Manager, NHS Highland
Lesley Martin (LM)	NHS Highland (Service Improvement)
Marion Milligan (MMgn)	North Coast Connection
Jenny Peasley (JP)	ITM, N&W Sutherland/West Caithness
Fiona Thomas (FT)	District Manager, Sutherland
Audrey Sutherland (AS)	Depute Manager, Melvich CCU

2. Notes of the Previous Meeting

The notes of the previous meeting were approved.

Action

3. Matters Arising/Actions from Previous Meeting

- **ToR:** It was noted these were to have been circulated prior to the meeting. CN apologised for the error and said that she would arrange for them to be circulated post meeting for discussion at the next. CN
- **Pop-Up Hubs:** CN noted that due to annual leave and illness the meeting to discuss dates had not yet take place. It is planned to arrange in coming weeks. CN
- **Vaccinations:** MJ reported that she has raised the concerns expressed within NHS Highland and will discuss further with the Service Manager when he returns to work from Paternity Leave.

SH said that she had attended the Vaccination Clinic in Kinlochbervie today (27/11) and noted that everything was very well organised and went very smoothly. She expressed her thanks to the team and said it was important to note how well it had gone.

MB noted that the recent clinic planned for Bonar Bridge had had to be cancelled due to weather but that it was his understanding that arrangements for an alternative date have been made.

4. North Sutherland Health & Care Hub Workstream(s): Updates

▪ **Health & Wellbeing Hub (incl. timescales/programme):**

- **Wildland:** JD noted the ongoing meetings between the three partners which are focusing both on operational issues and the legals. While it can be challenging to demonstrate progress due to the nature of the work i.e. legal documents going back and forth things are progressing which he added was good to see.

While this work is taking place JD noted that he has been working with the architects and project managers to take forward any actions required to ensure that work can commence in early 2026. He noted work around the planning conditions; things like the speed limit on entry and exit of the village at the site location, provision of sample build materials to Highland Council etc.

In terms of the timeline, he noted that with work to commence early 2026 (February) the date for completion will be late 2028.

Finally JD said that in addition to the Care Home build work is progressing on the housing site located above the Care Home site. It is reassuring to see he said and provides a good insight into aspects of the Care Home i.e. how it will look on the site, views etc.

- **NHS Highland:** ZRT reiterated on behalf of NHS Highland JDs comments re the work between the three partners. In terms of taking that work forward from an NHS Highland point of view he noted it is expected that the work on the lease will be completed early in the New Year. He further noted Business Case/Report to NHS Highlands Asset Management Committee on 11 December 2025. This it was reiterated was not around approval for the project overall, both Highland Council and NHS Highland have stated their commitment to the project but relates to internal requirements.
- **Highland Council:** There was no update from Highland Council.

AMdm asked GM about staff at Melvich CCU and how they are feeling about the new build, the move etc. GM responded that in terms of the current staff group at Melvich there is a mix of views and emotions. Honestly, she said some of the staff will not make the move as they will be retired by completion and some staff will chose to work in services such as C@H to remain on the Melvich side but there are a group of staff who are excited about the new build and are extremely keen to see things progress. She noted that when recruiting she has been very clear with staff what the plans are and that has helped. She added that in terms of applications for posts she is seeing an upturn in applications from the Tongue end as people know it will be temporary to travel to Melvich. She said she will continue to engage with staff re the new build and that as time goes on and there is re-engagement with design process etc this will ramp up and staff will become even more involved.

▪ **Primary Care**

○ **Armada:**

- **Staffing:** Practice is working well with Dr Racey settling in along with Dr Applebee “backfilling” on his week’s off. This also provides a female GP on

Action

site too

- **Building/Estates:** Lease discussions are ongoing. It was noted that in terms of building and estates issues the main issue is the generator which is of an older style and has a limited life span. The team are aware and reviewing options.
- **Bloods Transfer:** There have been challenges in terms of reliability for the transfer via Royal Mail of bloods transfer to CGH. Alternative options are being reviewed. Request that anyone who has been disadvantaged by this contact the practice.
- **Scourie, Kinlochbervie & Durness:**
 - **Staffing:** It was noted that the practice remains staffed by locum GPs, many of whom are regular which provides patient continuity
 - **Building:** There are no significant estates concerns in the Health Centres. Any issues are being taken forward via either the landlord (Scourie) or via NHS Highland Estates Dept.
- **Tongue**
 - **Staffing:** Substantive GP remains in place, and it is hoped to secure a locum who will provide support each month which will provide continuity.
 - **Dispensing:** This is working well with Lairg. NHS Highland Pharmacy Team have been asked to visit and evaluate the process to ensure that support is being optimised.
 - **IT:** There have been some IT challenges over recent weeks which should now be resolved with the support of telecoms teams and IT
 - **Estates/Buildings:** Some minor works taking place to enable staff to have dedicated space for breaks along with the addition of a reception window (for confidentiality reasons)
 - **Accommodation:** There is significant challenges in securing accommodation for locum GPs with process having risen sharply in recent weeks. An appeal for support from the community made.

There was some discussion about potential solutions with SH noting the work she is doing across the area around housing. She is happy to take this up with the consultants that she is working with. MH also noted the role of the Empty Homes Officer. It was agreed that CN would link both with LG regarding.

CN

MS asked about Caladh Sona and whether it could be used for accommodation. GM noted that she believed that Melness Crofters Trust have taken over Caladh Sona. She said she would make enquiries.

GM

- **Community Care & Support:** It was noted that due to staff absence there was no update.
- **Workforce Plan:** It was noted that there has been some generalised work around staffing and workforce locally, but detailed work is to take place.

It was noted that Angus MacDonald MP had at a conference organised by himself and held in Fort William called on the Scottish Government to take forward to form a Working Group to look at Adult Social Care incl. workforce. MJ noted that it was her understanding that this will be a local plan and will be taken forward by Arlene Johnstone, Chief Officer for NHS Highland Communities Division

Action

- **Communications & Engagement:** To be taken forward in conjunction with plan for Pop-Up Hubs.

5. Community Concerns

- **Hospital Discharge:** MH had been asked to raise concerns about recent discharges home by taxi. It was noted that this is not common practice from community hospitals but without more information it is hard to talk on the specifics. MH to provide further details to CN and/or MJ in order that it be investigated further.
- **Out of Hours:** MS asked about what the provision of out of hours is in the area as it hasn't been discussed for some time. He had been asked by someone who had had ill health at a weekend but wasn't sure where to contact. MJ said that it would be via 111 to NHS 24.

There was discussion about information and knowledge of who to talk to when. CN noted that it was an action for her from her role with the Caithness Urgent & Unscheduled Care Programme to link with the communications team about a "know where to turn" type information. She will include this area in that work she said.

There was further discussion regarding knowledge and awareness of resource locally when speaking to 111/NHS 24. GM reflected on previous experience with SAS and education to the staff at the Care Home about how calls are prioritised. This was noted but it was agreed that local knowledge is important.

6. AOCB

- **Membership:** CN noted that invites for the 2026 meetings are to go out in coming days/weeks. She asked that anyone wishing to be removed from the mailing list contact Suzi Stewart (suzi.stewart3@nhs.scot) If anyone is aware of others wishing to join could they please also let Suzi know.

Next Steps/Actions

- **ToR:** CN to arrange for these to be circulated post meeting. They will be discussed at the next meeting. CN
- **Pop-Up Hubs:** CN to arrange a meeting between LM and AMdn to look at dates and venues for 2026. CN
- **Accommodation Issues:** CN to link SH and MH with LG re the accommodation issues associated with locum GPs. GM to enquire re Caladh Sona, current state and plans going forward with a view to potential as an accommodation option. CN
- **Public Information:** CN to link North & West Sutherland to the work she is to contact Communications & Engagement Team regarding "Know where to Turn" CN

8. Close / Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on **26th February 2026 at 6:30pm via Teams**