

To NHS Highland re Covid booster programme, November 2022

Dear Ms Bussell

I am writing to you on behalf of the Durness Community Council to express their concerns, and those of local residents, as to the lack of joined-up thinking with regard to the recent roll-out of the Flu/Covid vaccination and booster programme.

It would seem that there has been a lack of understanding as to appropriate lines of communication and information-sharing and general disregard for the needs of our rural population.

We would draw your attention to the following concerns:

Lack of communication - The NHS Highland website states that those people over 65 and those at risk aged between 5 and 65 would be informed by letter. This has not been the case. Moreover, the advice from NHS Highland North that 'everyone would receive a phone call' was also not followed through. Many people in remote areas of the far north do not have access to the internet and yet it seems that the NHS Highland website was the only means by which people could obtain information about vaccination. No links to this information were sent out and it would appear that the entire enterprise was a well-kept secret: many people only found out about the programme on the day or by word of mouth.

Mis-communication - Individual instances of 'crossed lines' meant that some Durness residents were sent out of area (to Bonar Bridge, for example, which is nearly two hours' drive away) and that a criteria of 'age' superseded the criteria of 'vulnerable'. This resulted in costly wasted journeys for some of our most vulnerable residents.

Disregard for local expertise - The surgery at Durness has a reputation for efficiency and professionalism. To date, they have delivered all vaccination programmes without any problem. They had no objection to continuing to do so in a cost-effective manner and might have been able to offer temporary employment to other practitioners in order to complete the vaccination programme swiftly. This was not considered as an option.

Lack of attention to patient confidentiality - While the administering of vaccinations was done in a professional and friendly manner, nevertheless, residents were expected to discuss personal details such as date of birth in an open public space, were invited to 'shuffle along' the conveyor belt of seats despite mobility problems and had their vaccinations administered with no privacy screens or attention to individual needs. We accept that this vaccination roll-out was a trial but we would ask that our concerns are taken on board.

We would like some assurance that steps will be taken to ensure that our residents are made aware of future interventions in a timely, appropriate and responsive way.

Yours sincerely

Ron Tucker
Secretary, Durness Community Council