

Belford Replacement: Progress Update

We are delighted to be able to report on real progress in relation to the redesign of health services in Lochaber. This has been under discussion for a long time but we are sure that people will be relieved to hear that significant progress has been made recently with plans for real improvements over the coming 3-4 years, chief among which is a replacement Belford Hospital on the Blàr Mòr. With the support of the Lochaber Times we will be bringing you this monthly column to explain what we will be doing to bring the new hospital to fruition.

For any significant investment, NHS Boards need to submit a business case in three stages: Initial Agreement, Outline Business Case and Full Business Case. Following approval of the Full Business Case we can start construction.

The Initial Agreement is now complete and with Scottish Government's Capital Investment Group for consideration and, hopefully, approval.

This first stage of the business case focuses on services rather than buildings, and NHS Highland have worked with staff, public stakeholders and other public sector partners to develop a new and improved service model, designed to deliver as many services as possible, as locally as possible.

As well as service data, we sought feedback from patients and input from the Lochaber Stakeholder Group to understand what matters to people about their hospital services.

This information was then fed into a series of workshops held with staff working in the hospital and in the community, including social care, primary care (GPs and other healthcare delivered in the community) and the ambulance service. The workshops took a 3-stage approach to developing a new and improved service model for the new hospital.

The first workshop looked at what services a Rural General Hospital (RGH) should aim to deliver: the Core RGH model. This session included staff from our other RGHs, Caithness General Hospital and Lorn & Isles Hospital in Oban, as well as staff from Raigmore and community colleagues, to confirm a common understanding of the RGH role. The Core RGH model keeps all the services currently being provided at the Belford and uses the opportunities of a new building to further develop them.

The second workshop then looked at which services might be best delivered in a community setting such as a health centre rather than a hospital; and the third session explored the ambitions of the clinical team to do more, considering what services might be able to be delivered in an RGH in the future.

The outcome of these workshops was very positive. While it was agreed there are limitations to what services can safely be carried out in an RGH, there was a clear and enthusiastic aim from staff and community alike to deliver as many services as possible, locally.

The output from the workshops was then put to a group of community and NHS stakeholders, including community councillors, who compared different service options and reduced these to two options which will be further explored in the next stage, the Outline Business Case.

Both options will operate to the Core RGH model with introduction of an Intensive Rehabilitation Service, and for the second option, an increase in elective surgery.

There's a lot of work to do to detail what these services will mean in practice and assess what space we'll need in the new hospital to deliver them, but this work is ongoing now and will take us through the next year to the next business case stage.

We will continue to engage with communities across Lochaber in designing the new services and building: representatives from the community sit on the much-valued Lochaber Stakeholder Group who meet monthly, and two community representatives represent the Stakeholder Group on our Project Team: John Hutchison and Patricia Jordan.

We will explain our thinking and provide these regular progress updates in future editions of the Lochaber Times. Next month, we plan to focus on what a Rural General Hospital does and the services it will deliver.

We also want to hear your views: you can get in touch with our project team on nhsh.nhshighlandstatesprojects@nhs.scot, or contact the NHS Highland feedback team on nhshighland.feedback@nhs.scot or 01463 705997.

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