

NHS Western Isles: Consideration of Petition PE01524

NHS Western Isles has provided free wifi access to patients and public since early 2010, and this provision now covers all of our main sites:

Western Isles Hospital
Health Board HQ
Stornoway Health Centre
Uist & Barra Hospital
St Brendan's Hospital

This basic wifi access has been provided at minimum cost to the Board: this does constrain the extent of provision which is possible, but it is also recognised that few services are as valuable to patients and visitors as the availability of wifi, and we intend to continue to grow the network.

The network is physically separate from the corporate network and does not require users to login. Basic filtering is applied to help safeguard users. The equipment in use allows monitoring bandwidth consumption by device, and allows this to be throttled to prevent unfair consumption by an individual compromising the service for others.

NHS Western Isles is looking for opportunities to extend wifi coverage into GP sites and other remote centres, but poor communications infrastructure within the Western Isles remains a serious limiting factor. Every opportunity to encourage proper investment to improve connectivity whether from commercial sources or the state sector should be pursued, and we are working closely with partners in Scottish Government, local government and other sectors to obtain the best connectivity possible.

While many citizens have access to data plans from mobile providers, the infrastructure within the region often prevents meaningful take up of services. For example, there is virtually no 3G across the islands. This increases the demand for wifi in our premises considerably, and this additional demand will continue to increase into the future.

If it is proposed that wifi is provided by public sector bodies, then we should have documented standards to work to, and to align expectations against. Costs to be incurred and competing priorities for the Board would need to be considered. Poor regional infrastructure may mean that standards expected would be beyond our grasp: for example, Next Generation Broadband will have the lowest reach here of any region: only 70% of our population compared to the 90%+ expected elsewhere.

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