This update is being sent out to all Being Here evaluation participants on Islay. It outlines the findings following the final round of fieldwork in 2017.

Evaluation fieldwork summary

In April 2017 the UHI research team conducted interviews with health and social care professionals, third sector workers and community residents. Three community groups were also visited. A fieldwork summary has been given to the Being Here programme manager and the final report is due in January 2018.

Service development

Islay medical services operate independently of the Being Here programme. The practices have not received any Being Here funding and their changes have been introduced independently of the project. All three practices continue to be managed centrally by one GP partnership, which has been very successful recruiting the full complement of five GPs and a Rural Fellow. One of their GPs left in 2016 but the practice has recruited a replacement as well as an additional GP to create a team of six. Islay Medical Services continues to be a teaching practice and earlier this year held an event for 60 medical students to get to know the island and introduce them to rural medicine.

In order to enhance skills, they have also introduced a training system whereby all the GPs will work in Glasgow secondary care for up to two weeks a year. The three surgeries continue to be covered by a team comprising a specialist Diabetic Nurse, Health Care Assistant and a Practice Nurse. However, on-going IT problems have delayed further practice integration. The Health Implementation Board has now been replaced by the Locality Planning Group (LPG) which includes health and social care professionals, third sector representatives and community residents.

Evaluation findings

GP practice model

Satisfaction with the safety, standard and breadth of primary care was very high. Interviewees were generally satisfied with the practice re-organisation which offered both a sense of continuity and an element of choice. Although patient interviewees were uncertain about how the rotas worked, they were mainly confident of seeing the same GP if they wished. It was understood that there is only one GP on duty on any given day in each surgery, but at least two different GPs cover the same surgery during the week. Persistent IT problems still made it very difficult for a GP to access patient notes at different surgeries. However, appointments could be offered with the nursing team at all the surgeries. Interviewees were largely open to using more technology, e.g. telephone and VC appointments. Generally, they felt the GP service was sustainable but concerns were raised about bed reduction in the hospital which it was feared could undermine the future sustainability of what was regarded as a key island resource.
Mental health

Where interviewees had contact with mental health services whether as third sector workers, patients or professionals, they tended to see gaps in services which were less apparent to those less familiar with the area. A lack of CPNs, difficulty travelling to access services and lack of anonymity in small communities were cited as some of the main issues. Although some interviewees thought smaller communities could be more supportive, other thought living in a remote and rural location exacerbated stigma and social isolation.

Third sector and social prescribing

Unless interviewees worked in health and social care or the third sector, they were unlikely to have had any experience of social prescribing. On the whole people were positive about the concept. Generally, interviewees thought the third sector was undervalued by mainstream services in spite of providing an increasing number of services on which the statutory sector now rely.

Community involvement and communication

Lack of communication remained an on-going issue amongst the community. A consultation event or ‘conversation café’ on the health and social care budget had been held but was apparently poorly attended by the public. It was felt that using local knowledge and combining consultation with other community events would have worked better and captured the views of more people.

Unhappiness was expressed about the operation of the Locality Planning Group (LPG) and its perceived ‘top-down’ approach, which was not believed to be in the spirit of the original concept. A few interviewees criticised what they perceived was a lack of transparency and an insensitivity to the local situation. The health sub-group of the Community Council was to be re-instated to try to address some of these concerns. The Islay and Jura Health and Care Forum continues to meet about 6 times per year. It is an open meeting with links to the Islay Community Council and the LPG and is also attended by health and social care professionals.

Patient travel policy

The patient travel policy seemed to be operating as previously with patients being able to fly to the mainland for outpatient appointments if they wished. However, some interviewees felt the high cost of travelling, use of resources and potential abuses of the system had been raised. It is understood that savings had been made.

In summary, interviewees were generally satisfied with the quality, breadth and safety of primary care services. However, concerns were raised about the sustainability of the hospital, the operation of the
LPG and communication. Interviews suggested there was potential for more VC consultations, social prescribing and more integration with third sector to enable closer working with the community.

**Next steps**

Evaluation findings have been reported back to NHS management. The final evaluation report is due in January 2018.

As part of the wider Being Here project, short films were made about the new primary care service on the Small Isles and can be viewed via the following links:

Isle of Eigg: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dK-fi30TWUk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dK-fi30TWUk)
Isle of Muck: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iK8Zs3DRNf8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iK8Zs3DRNf8)
Small Isles (short version) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSmbi-kultg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSmbi-kultg)

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