



Fay Thomson
skyesosnhs@gmail.com

Our Reference: 202600526263

21 July 2026

Dear Fay,

Thank you for your correspondence of May 2026 to the First Minister, John Swinney regarding Urgent Care Services in NHS Highland specifically in Portree Isle of Skye. I hope you understand that the First Minister is not always able to respond personally. I work in the Primary Care Directorate, which has policy responsibility for Out of Hours, and have been asked to reply on the First Minister's behalf. I would like to apologise for the delay in providing you with a response on this matter.

We appreciate you taking the time to write and bringing this to our attention. Please be assured, the Scottish Government wants everyone to receive the best possible care and treatment from our health and care services. We have set out the wider policy within which NHS Scotland is expected to deliver services and expect all NHS Boards to provide high quality care that is safe, effective and person-centred.

We have contacted NHS Highland regarding the issues you have raised, who have advised us that they recognise the strength of feeling locally and the importance of providing clear, consistent information about where urgent care is available to the people in Skye, and how the service will continue to develop. The Board remains committed to 24/7 access to urgent care for the Portree community.

The current integrated 24-hour, seven-day urgent care model is in line with the plan agreed and shared with the Scottish Government in 2024 and is in line with Sir Lewis Ritchie's final report.

In terms of access to the services, the model in place is consistent with the national approach. People are asked to contact NHS 24 wherever possible so that they can be directed safely to the right care in the right place. Where people self-present at Portree Hospital, staff there will always respond to those individuals, but to ensure the safest route to access the Board continues to work with NHS 24 to promote access to urgent care via 111.

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The Board continues to have ongoing dialogue with the public and have been open and transparent about the current model of care and routes to access. Recruitment and retention plans are also routinely discussed at the Sir Lewis Ritchie Implementation Steering Group and NHS Highland has continued to build the urgent care workforce:

Advanced Nurse Practitioner (ANP) / Advanced Practitioner (AP)

- a Lead ANP commenced in 2025;
- additional ANP/trainee ANP, Paramedic and Trainee AP posts have been recruited; a further employment offer was made in early 2026;
- Band 6 nurses at Portree Hospital have commenced minor injury training.

GP Workforce

- The recent Scottish Government and SGPC agreement includes significant investment in general practice, including funding intended to support workforce capacity and sustainability.
- Funding is allocated directly to GP practices through nationally agreed arrangements.
- Portree Medical Practice is an independent contractor. NHS Highland will continue to work collaboratively with the Practice.

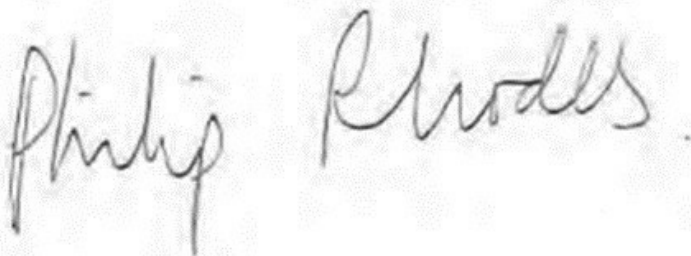
Recruitment is also supported through a dedicated recruitment group, with Highland Council and housing association involvement to help address accommodation barriers.

NHS Highland also recognises that some data gathered recently has highlighted a legitimate service design issue. Activity is highest during daytime, evenings and weekends, while night activity is significantly lower. This is why the Board is reviewing the model through the urgent/unscheduled care workstream, to ensure staff are deployed at the times of greatest need and that the model is safe, clear and sustainable.

NHS Highland has provided assurance that they will continue to work with community representatives, the Scottish Government, NHS 24, the Scottish Ambulance Service and local teams to improve the consistency, clarity and resilience of urgent care provision for Portree and the wider Skye community.

I hope you have found this information helpful.

Yours sincerely



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