



Practice Note 29

Outer Hebrides Visitor Safety Initiative

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Project Background and Aims

The Outer Hebrides covers an area of approximately 3,071 square kilometres stretching from Lewis in the north to Mingulay in the south, and including outlying islands such as St Kilda and the Shiant Isles. There are over 70 named islands spread throughout the chain, most of which have been temporarily or permanently inhabited in the past, though currently only 11 of the islands are now inhabited. The Outer Hebrides is one of the most sparsely populated areas in Scotland, with nine people per square kilometre¹ the terrain across the area varies dramatically from high sea cliffs, flat desolate moors, mountainous areas and low-lying loch covered machair. The area can also experience some of the most extreme weather conditions in the UK, with high levels of rain and very strong winds being brought in from the Atlantic Ocean.

The islands attract a high volume of visitors from within and outwith the UK. For example, An Lanntair in Stornoway attracted 201,005 visitors in 2009/2010 whilst Taigh Chearsabhaigh Museum on North Uist attracted 31,525 during the same year². The busiest period for visitors takes place over the summer months. This year tourist numbers have been driven by a variety of events such as the National Mod, the Lewis Chessmen Exhibition, the Tall Ships Race, the HebCelt Folk Festival, Ceolas Gaelic Summer School, Barra Live and Rally Hebrides. Domestic tourism is encouraged through Scottish Government's Road Equivalent Tariff Scheme, which aims to make island travel by ferry more affordable.

¹ Source: Office for National Statistics; General Register Office for Scotland. Population Density 2002.

² Source: Visit Scotland: http://www.visitscotland.org/pdf/vs_northern.pdf

The influx of tourists is welcome however it is not unproblematic. Statistical information provided by the Coastguard shows that 86 per cent of their call-outs in 2009/2010 involved visitors to the islands. Thus, the Outer Hebrides Community Safety Partnership (CSP) considered this risk to be the key safety priority and launched an intensive awareness-raising and information-provision campaign to address the trend.

The subsequent Visitor Safety Initiative is an intelligence-led intervention drawing on data gathered via our adoption of 'The National Intelligence Model' a priority setting tool used in the collation of statistical data collectively gathered from a range of public, private, community and voluntary sector partners.

Outcomes

National	9: 'We live our lives free from crime, disorder and danger', 11: 'We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others', and 15: 'Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs'.
Local	4: 'The physical and mental health and wellbeing of the people throughout the Outer Hebrides is improved', 5: 'The communities of the Outer Hebrides are stronger and more able to identify, articulate and take action and responsibility regarding their needs and aspirations', and 7: 'The services of the Outer Hebrides are of high quality, continuously improving and reflective of local needs'.

Resources

Funding:	Outer Hebrides Community Safety Partnership operating budget supplied by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council), essential staffing resource provided by individual partners.
Partners:	The Outer Hebrides Community Safety Partnership comes under the auspices of the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership whose full membership consists of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Isles Hebrides Search and Rescue, HM Coastguard, Maritime and Coastguard Agency, Scottish Ambulance Service, NHS Western Isles, Northern Constabulary, Safety Wise, Hebridean Housing Partnership, The Stornoway Trust, Visit Scotland, Caledonian MacBrayne, Visit Scotland, Highlands and Islands Airports, Western Isles Domestic Abuse Forum, Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service, Stornoway Port Authority, Outer Hebrides Alcohol and Drug Partnership, Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Outer Hebrides Community Safety Partnership meets every two months to review key area statistics and the impact of local initiatives. All of the materials produced from the Visitor Safety Initiative will soon be available on the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar website at <http://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/>. However, information on this and other CSP initiatives can be accessed immediately by contacting the Community Safety Lead Officer.

Activities

The first step the CSP took in setting up the Visitor Safety Initiative in May 2011 was to carry out a mapping exercise which identified pertinent local stakeholders who were not already formally engaged in the partnership. The mapping exercise extended beyond community safety to include transport and tourism service providers, both within and outwith the public sector. Thus, Visit Scotland, Calmac, Hebridean Search and Rescue, Highlands and Islands Airports, and the Stornoway Trust all became directly involved in the work of the CSP through the initiative.

Various materials were designed and produced to communicate safety measures to visitors to the islands. The costs of design and production were met by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, following a national tendering exercise to identify the most competitive printing company, and distribution costs were kept to a minimum as each key partner took responsibility of ensuring the materials were widely disseminated throughout their own networks. To engage effectively with the target audience the materials were produced solely in English rather than bilingually, albeit with a Gaelic welcome.

An A0 size poster was produced to show the range of partnership organisations engaged in community safety in the Outer Hebrides. The posters are now strategically displayed at all air and sea ports of entry to the Islands.

5000 booklets covering key aspects of outdoor safety in the Outer Hebrides were also produced. These guidance documents identify the dangers and suggesting safety tips for a variety of pertinent settings, with sections covering sea and coasts, roads, hills and general safety. For example, hill walkers are recommended not to rely on mobile phones (due to sporadic signal coverage in remote areas) and to check weather reports in advance of setting out. The booklet draws on a range of official guidance and signposts further information that is available online. Each section identifies the key partner to contact in an emergency, such as the coastguard or the local police. Other local key contact details are provided, including ferry offices, tourist information and NHS 24.

4,000 of the booklets were distributed through Calmac as they are the main transport provider in the area. The print run was decided based on the anticipated number of visitor cars using the various Calmac ferries which sail to the islands. The booklets are placed in ticket offices and ferries. The remaining 1,000 booklets were

distributed to Highlands and Islands Airports and local Visit Scotland offices who maintain mailing lists of all local hotels, B&Bs, hostels and tourism operators.

A hill walking route form was also produced and distributed electronically via Visit Scotland to all their member hotels and B&Bs on the islands. The form provides information on appropriate equipment and good practice when hill walking, noting the volatility of the local weather and the sporadic signal coverage for mobile phones. Hill walkers leave completed route forms with either the landlord, warden, receptionist or police to provide a system of monitoring the movements of visitors on the islands and a means of alerting the police if any hill walker is overdue and potentially lost and/or injured.

Impact

The Coastguard has had the lowest number of callouts for 10 years in the period between March 1st 2011 and September 1st 2011. The Visitor Safety Initiative, which was launched in May 2011, has likely contributed to this reduction in callouts. In addition, the initial anecdotal feedback from partner organisations suggests that awareness of safety issues amongst visitors to the islands has been raised and callouts have decreased. Moreover, as distribution tasks have been shared by partner organisations the initiative has been delivered with relatively small budgetary commitments.

The Outer Hebrides Community Safety Partnership's Visitor Safety Initiative has been widely commended in a very short space of time, now featuring as an example of 'best practice' on the World Health Organisation's Safer Communities Programme. Further details can be found at: http://www.phs.ki.se/csp/who_indicators_en.htm.

Lessons Learnt and Sustainability

As a targeted intervention the Visitor Safety Initiative has relied upon the successful engagement of local stakeholders beyond the parameters of community safety, particularly within tourism and transport. Forming the partnerships and its subsequent ongoing work has been smooth, as local stakeholders were keen to get involved.

The inclusion of these new members was vital to the dissemination of safety materials to visitors to the islands. The mailing lists held by Visit Scotland, for example, were used to disseminate electronic versions of route forms and printed versions of the booklets.

Engaging with the islands largest transport providers has also been fruitful and the CSP is now seeking to roll out membership of the partnership to include Bus and Taxi Companies and car hire firms operating in the islands.

The CSP has further built upon the relationships formed within the Visitor Safety Initiative on more recent initiatives such as the CCTV Networking Group. which seeks

to bring the Stornoway Town Centre CCTV operation under a single operational body (adhering closely to the recommendations contained within the Scottish Government's National Strategy for Public Space CCTV and has recently added Highlands and Islands Airports, NHS Western Isles, Lews Castle, University of the Highlands and Islands and Highlands, and Islands Enterprise to its network of CSP partners.

Summary

The Outer Hebrides Visitor Safety Initiative is an intelligence-led intervention which draws on a range of partners from the public, private, community and voluntary sectors operating within the remote islands. Approximately 86 per cent of Coastguard callouts in the Outer Hebrides involve visitors to the islands. Thus, the project aims to raise awareness of safety issues with the production of various materials that contain information on safety on the sea and coasts, roads and hills, as well as general safety.

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