



## **SMART Signs Comhairle nan Eilean Sair**

### **Executive Summary**

In 2010 National Intelligence Model statistical returns identified a high demand on rescue services in the Western Isles, which were constantly called upon to rescue, often ill prepared, visitors to the islands. A study was conducted to identify the cause of the increase, the outcome of which identified that 86% of rescues were in relation to visitors who had got into difficulty; often as a result of being poorly prepared or unaware of the wide variety of hazards present on the islands and their surrounding waters.

In response the Outer Hebrides Community Safety Partnership, under the banner of Smart Signs, launched a number of initiatives to better inform visitors and locals of the dangers on the Islands. The first part of the project was the production of two seasonal safety booklets which aimed to promote the “Keep Safe” message. The booklets, entitled summer and winter, recognised that residents as well as visitors to the islands were vulnerable to an array of seasonal hazards and aimed to provide an educational approach to incident prevention.

To provide visitors with an extra level of safety, route cards were formulated and distributed to holiday accommodation, campsites and hotels, at which visitors would leave details of their intended activity, route and instructions should they fail to return within a given time. These initiatives were further supported by the introduction of smart signage on signs erected in hotspot areas across the islands. The signs contain unique, location-identifying individual numbers, GPS references and Quick Responses (QR) codes providing information on local hazards and emergency information.

Research conducted at the end of the first year of the booklets and route cards identified that there was a large reduction in coastguard call outs and further reductions across the NHS, the Fire Service and other partner organisations.

This project was runner up in the Innovative Media Campaign category at the 2015 Safer Communities Awards.

### **Background and Aims**

During 2009/10 there was an increase of 9% in the number of journeys to and from the Western Isles, which resulted in more casual visitors to the island particularly during the summer months.

There were steady increases in the number of incidents along the cliffs and coastline and at sea and on lochs with pleasure vessels and fishing boats and swimmers. During the winter season the types of calls changed to environment, weather, health, crime and general safety, well-being and community safety which primarily affected

the elderly, vulnerable and isolated on the islands. The increase in the number and variety of incidents placed extra strain and demand on the islands available services. The aim of the Smart Signs project was to develop a three-pronged, multi-agency approach in addressing the evidence-based issue of visitors to the Islands getting into serious difficulties on the water, coast and in the hills; often due to them being unfamiliar with the inherent dangers of the exposed Hebridean terrain or being ill-prepared for often rapidly changing weather conditions.

The Outer Hebrides Community Safety Partnership's planned incident prevention and intervention programme comprises of the following:

- Safety booklets. Provided safety and guidance messages for the coastline, the sea, the hills, the weather, the local environment, fire and road safety, crime, alcohol, first aid and emergency contact numbers.
- 'Route Cards' distributed via holiday accommodation campsites and hotels, in which visitors would leave details of their intended activity and route with instructions to alert the Police should they fail to return within a given time-frame.
- The introduction of strategically placed Smart Signs with unique, location-identifying individual numbers, GPS references and QR codes.

## Activities

Two booklets were produced to educate on the different seasonal risks. The summer booklet targeted activity based risks which identified seasonal visitors to the islands, who are unaware of local dangers and are more at risk. These priorities were to provide safety and guidance messages for the coastline and sea, the hills and countryside, the weather and local environment, fire and road safety, crime, alcohol use, pets/animals and health. The winter booklet aims to reduce incidents which were often weather or health related, especially with those who were vulnerable, isolated or elderly.

The analysis of incidents identified that unlike the summer period the winter months tended to affect islanders more so than visitors with the priorities moving away from recreation and sport concentrating more on winter survival and health. The priorities identified for the winter were health which included keeping warm, alcohol use, eating well, staying active and preventing falls and local community concerns which looked at driving conditions, community monitoring of the elderly, vulnerable and isolated and the weather.

The summer booklets were distributed amongst the ferry companies, airports (with links to Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Inverness), all campsites, hotels, buses, taxis, local businesses, restaurants, visitor attractions and made available on the Councils website. The winter booklets were distributed to known vulnerable people within the community particularly through the local Home Care Service. In addition to the booklets over 1000 route cards were disseminated around the accommodation on the islands.

A short life working group was established to take forward the booklets and the route cards with the aim of further developing a smart signs project. Expertise was sought and support was forthcoming from multiple partners including the University of the

Highlands and Islands, the council's technical departments, the emergency services which included input from the RNLI in Dorset.

The short life steering group identified that visitors to the islands were often unaware of local hazards. This issue was further highlighted when there was a loss of life at one of the most scenic beaches, an area that 'locals know not to swim'. This promoted the development of proactive signs. Potential hotspots for hazards were mapped across the Islands and signs formulated to warn visitors of potential dangers. Grid-reference were incorporated into signs to speed up search and rescue and a QR codes installed containing data on the site and what to do in an emergency.

Phase II of the smart sign project will look at the possibility of installing solar panels to the signs to enable mobile telephone technology to be used as often the most scenic areas are remote and out of cell use areas.

## **Impact**

After the first year of publication of the booklets the Coastguard and Hebrides Mountain Rescue reported reductions in the number of calls with the coastguard stating that their calls had reduced by 50%. Although it is not possible to attribute the reductions to the booklets, partner's feedback suggests that the publication of the booklets corresponded with decreases in cross partnership calls.

The NHS in the Western Isles reported that following the publication in 2011 there was a decrease in the numbers of admissions due to accidents from 2905 (2010) to 2702 (2011).

## **Monitoring and Evaluation**

The first stages; safety booklet and route cards were evaluated and further evaluation of the Smart Signs initiative are ongoing. An additional evaluation was conducted by the Coastguard to ascertain the impact on service calls received.

The baselines and statistical evidence gathered prior to the implementation of the booklets identified that there was a fall in calls by almost half during the period 2011/12. The initial success of the booklets and route cards improved partnership working and attracted new members to the partnership who were keen to become involved. The partnership now comprises of 26 members with representation from public, private and third sector organisations, transport and tourist groups, emergency services and coastguard, ports and harbours and local and regional community groups.

The Coastguard evaluation identified that the reduction of a single 10 minute rescue flight would have a cost benefit saving of approximately £10,000 as a result of maintenance and crew costs associated with a flight. For a project that has only cost £7000 the prevention of one helicopter call would pay for the whole project.

## **Lessons Learnt and Sustainability**

The lessons identified throughout the project identified the value of partnership working, with the project attracting new members and developing relationships with

existing members. The project demanded more community based engagement which enabled the booklets and route cards to be disseminated to where they were needed. There has been a lot of interest in the booklets with calls from other islands and organisations who wish to publish their own versions; and the World Health Organisation has a copy of the booklet on their website.

## Resources

The community safety partnership utilised a multi-agency approach in formulating the Smart Signs initiative with partners including Hebrides Search and Rescue, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS), local authority departments, welfare and social work, third sector organisations, NHS, Police Scotland, Coastguard, community groups, businesses and tourist organisations. Partners and local residents also provided the images used in the booklets.

The project started with the introduction of the booklets in the summer of 2011 with over 25,000 booklets printed at a cost of £1341 per 5000 copies. The sole funder for the booklets was the Western Isles Local Authority, who has been unable to re-run the publications due to the lack of funds.

The booklets were distributed amongst transport providers (with links to Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Inverness), private companies providing services, accommodation and catering and visitor attractions. Copies of all the materials can be found on the Western isles Council website and portal. (<http://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/communitysafety/> )

## Outcomes

National:	8 - We have improved the life chances of children and young people 9 - We live our lives safe from crime disorder and danger.
Justice Strategy	Enhancing efficiency Reducing harm from fires and other emergencies

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### Practice Note Information

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