

Delivery of medical samples and specimens by unmanned drones

Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership

An example of how Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership is responding to the challenges of COVID-19

“Drones could transform the speed with which doctors can get results of diagnostic tests and improve treatment decisions for patients across rural communities.”

Stephen Whiston, Head of Strategic Planning and Performance,
Argyll and Bute HSCP



Challenge

Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) faces a variety of challenges in transporting medical samples and specimens within its network of hospitals and GP medical practices across its extensive rural and island geography.

At present this collection and delivery service is predominantly performed by NHS vans picking up pathology samples and dropping off equipment. The wide geographical distribution of GP medical practices and hospitals means that the frequency of collection services can be low. Relying on conventional road transport can have an impact on the timeliness of transport deliveries and collections.

Argyll & Bute
HSCP



What was done differently?

Argyll and Bute HSCP, along with a number of partners, conducted a drone delivery proof of concept trial. This was developed to assist the NHS with the COVID-19 response and investigate the feasibility of a drone delivery service operating in the Argyll and Bute region of NHS Highland.

This project was the first medical logistics drone delivery trial to be approved by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) conducted in the UK. It represents a critical step on the path towards establishing drone delivery as a viable, responsive and resilient logistics solution.

The HSCP has been working with Healthcare Improvement Scotland to design a robust evaluation to identify the clinical, operational and productivity benefits to support justification of the use of this technology in Argyll and Bute. It will also provide an evidence base for its use in other areas within NHSScotland.

An example of how Health and Social Care Partnerships are responding to planning and commissioning challenges in the context of COVID-19

Key insights: Stephen Whiston, Head of Strategic Planning and Performance, Argyll and Bute HSCP

“This initiative is in direct response to the UK Government’s call for help to address and mitigate the health impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak. It is an example of good planning, good communication and good collaboration between the following partners:

- the HSCP
- the CAA
- the UK Government
- Oban Airport, and
- Skyports (a drone delivery service based in London).

As COVID-19 testing rapidly gathers pace in the UK, the proposed delivery service could help to ensure that isolated communities have access to tests, delivered in a fast and efficient way.

A wider stakeholder group has been established and there is interest in the use of this technology by NHS Grampian, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and NHS Ayrshire & Arran.”

Experience of change

“The use of drones provides real opportunities to improve services and will help enable quicker diagnosis for our patients.”

Joanna Macdonald, Chief Officer, Argyll and Bute HSCP

“We have been sharing what we’re doing here with colleagues across Scotland, and there is significant interest about using it in the Western Isles, Clyde and the Grampians.”

Stephen Whiston, Head of Strategic Planning and Performance, Argyll and Bute HSCP

Good Practice Framework for Strategic Planning

The Strategic Planning support team at the ihub have developed a [Good Practice Framework for Strategic Planning](#) to enable practical and constructive local conversations on strategic planning.



This insight demonstrates the following good practice in strategic planning by:

- engaging with public, service users, workforce, providers from all sectors, professional groups and politicians as partners in planning, decision making and service delivery
- securing early commitment and agreement from all partners about the need for change, and
- researching evidence of good practice and identifies opportunities to apply innovative approaches locally.

Reflections

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought distinct challenges to rural communities and island communities, however innovation, determination, partnerships and community spirit can help to overcome them.

The trial in Argyll and Bute provides an important proof of concept step in developing a rapid response to the current pandemic and lays the foundations from which to grow a permanent drone delivery operation across a network of healthcare facilities around the country.

If you are interested in exploring something similar in your area or to find out more, please get in touch.

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