

PE1285/J

Health and Social Care Integration Directorate
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Franck David
Assistant Clerk
Public Petitions Committee
Scottish Parliament
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Your ref: PE1285
21 September 2011

Dear Franck

Thank you for your letter of 25 March 2011 seeking an update from the Scottish Government on an ongoing petition (PE1285) regarding the costs of calling NHS 24 from a mobile phone.

This issue is closely related to developments on the use of the 111 number. Since my letter to the Committee on 25 November 2009, Ofcom has released the 111 number for use across the UK on a 'free to caller' basis. By the end of 2010, the NHS 111 service had been launched in four pilot areas in England - County Durham and Darlington, Nottingham City, Lincolnshire and Luton – and these areas are being independently evaluated by the University of Sheffield over the course of a year of live operation. Details of the pilot sites, together with other related research and information, can be found at http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/Urgentandemergency/DH_115054.

Statistical and performance data is being regularly published and can be found at

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Statistics/Performancedataandstatistics/NHS111MinimumDataSet/index.htm>.

Informed by the evaluation and experience of the 111 number sites as they are rolled-out, the Department of Health intends to fully implement the NHS 111 service across England by April 2013. As I hope members of the Committee will appreciate, it is still too early to take a decision about adopting the number in Scotland. Monitoring information on the existing sites and the ones that are going live this year, together with the University of Sheffield evaluation which is due to be published early in 2012, will provide us with key information on the quality and impact of the NHS 111 service to inform our considerations. That said, we have already begun to look at the technical, financial and service delivery implications of adopting the number in Scotland in place of the existing NHS 24 number. Pending a future decision about adopting the 111 number in Scotland, we will not separately be changing the telephony and call costs currently in place for NHS 24.

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We will, of course, be very happy to keep the Committee updated on progress, particularly in relation to Scottish Government considerations on adopting the 111 number. I hope this is helpful, please get in touch if you require further information at this stage.

Yours sincerely

FRANK STRANG

Deputy Director for Primary Care