



MS Therapy Centre Inverness

PRESS RELEASE

PLEASE NOTE EMBARGO UNTIL 12 NOON ON TUESDAY 1 DECEMBER 2009

In the current economic climate, the board of the MS Therapy Centre Inverness has found it increasingly difficult to maintain services and make ends meet. In comparison with other centres in Scotland, Inverness incurs higher costs because it is the only centre that operates its own minibus and it appears, benefits from less volunteer help than many of the others.

Following a last ditch successful application on 13 May 2009 to the Common Good Fund, staff were advised in July 2009 that the situation was still fragile.

The board looked at a number of options for cost reduction and increasing income, from sharing minibus operation with others, reduction in operating days, remaining open for five days but reducing the number of days operating the minibus, all whilst making applications and identifying and preparing the ground for management to make funding applications to a wide range of trusts.

After months of struggling to obtain adequate financial information from the full-time management of the centre, the voluntary board was able to commission an external consultant (pro bono) to extract accurate information and prepare an adequate financial report and forecast.

On receipt of this information, on 22 October, immediately prior to the 2008 AGM, the board reluctantly advised staff that the financial position was critical and if the board was to fulfil its statutory obligations to the payment of staff notice, redundancy could not be ruled out. Redundancy notices were not issued but this notification would, in the event of follow-through, constitute the start of such proceedings.

The position was put to the members and staff attending the AGM that followed immediately and in a stormy meeting a number of accusations and allegations were made by members and others present. The board was labelled defeatist for looking at operational costs and comparisons with other centres were dismissed as irrelevant. One Highland Councillor claimed to be discussing a £30,000 payment from Asda and that the board should be securing donations from (unidentified) Highland millionaires.

Since that date, letters of concern and complaint from staff and members have been received by the board and calls for board resignations. Also since that date, the six-member board, which comprises volunteers, five of whom hold down full-time jobs, have been excluded by management and staff from prior knowledge of important events and activities taking place in the centre. (This, despite the fact that board members are also ordinary members of the MS Therapy Centre)

These events and activities include a petition to elect additional board members; an invitation for a TV crew to visit and carry out interviews; a visit by the local Member of Parliament; and the promotion of a 'friends of MS Inverness' project. The board would have been supportive and played a part in all of these activities – if it had been informed.

In the light of the foregoing, at a meeting intended to rebuild harmony between board, members and staff, led by a Highland Councillor and chaired by Inverness City Manager, David Haas, the board was accused of being both dishonest and non-transparent.

It has become apparent that members, for whatever reason, have become disillusioned with the current board and, despite having not taken the opportunity barely a month ago at a properly constituted AGM, wish to elect new board members. The board feels that the only way forward is to resign and clear the way for a new board to be elected. All six resigned, effective 1 December 2009.

The outgoing board thanks the Highland News, The Inverness Courier and the Press & Journal for the positive press that has been given to the plight of the MS Therapy Centre during the last month