

October Newsletter - Behind the Scenes

Date : 22nd October 2020

Planning in a pandemic

Richie Morgan, Health, Safety and Environmental Manager

“What about campervans and tents?”

The suggestion was put forward at the first of several emergency senior management meetings (via video conference) during the height of the pandemic. We were discussing accommodation needs for our engineers who might have to attend essential repairs during the COVID-19 lockdown. Almost every hotel and B&B near our harbour locations had closed their doors.

While lockdown meant that all our major projects were also shut down, we had to ensure a maintenance crew was available for critical repairs across the network to ensure lifeline ferry services continued to operate. Travel and accommodation logistics proved to be challenging.

Initially, we were advised that our engineers would have to secure “key worker permissions” from every local authority they passed through when travelling to a location. As an example, if we had an engineer travel from Port Glasgow to Tarbert (Harris), they would need permission from several local authorities – not really feasible when called to an emergency repair job! Working closely with Transport Scotland, we arranged for any team member travelling to a harbour to be given a key worker letter, allowing them free movement across the country. Between March and August, we issued 48 key worker movement authorisation letters; the system proved to be successful with no-one stopped or turned away.

As part of our COVID-19 risk assessments on each harbour project, we had to source accommodation and book travel on limited capacity ferries. We worked with CalMac to allocate places on board and, tapping into our island contacts, identified a network of B&Bs open to hosting key workers. It’s thanks to these local businesses that the back-up plan of campervans and tents was never put in place!