



ISLE OF WIGHT ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

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PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE DISTRIBUTION

Local Councils Call for Financial Help with Travel to the Mainland Hospitals

Local councils on the Island have joined growing calls for more financial help for patients needing treatment in mainland hospitals

The Isle of Wight Association of Local Councils (IWALC) has collected data on discounts available from the ferry firms - but has echoed a demand made by Island MP Bob Seely in Parliament for equal treatment with the Scilly Isles. Scillies residents pay just £5 for medical travel under special NHS rules.

IWALC, which represents a large majority of Island town and parish councils, felt parishioners were confused about available subsidies. It said plans to move some of St Mary's services to the mainland meant that even more patients would be affected in the future.

Wightlink, Red Funnel and Hovertravel offer varying discounts, of up to 50 per cent, for NHS patients. There is also an NHS Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme (HTCS) for those on certain benefits or with low income.

IWALC county officer, Maxine Warr said: "Even with these concessions, which are probably the most that can realistically be expected of the ferry firms in the absence of regulation, there are still large and increasing numbers of Islanders for whom mainland hospital treatment is a financial burden as well as a traumatic personal experience.

With the planned migration of more services to Portsmouth and Southampton, this burden can only increase. IW MP Bob Seely recently told Parliament that a £5 cap, to bring us in line with the Isles of Scilly, would be a fair and reasonable gesture for the Government to make, and we agree. He is also on record as calling for the Isle of Wight Council to be given powers to impose a public service obligation on the ferry firms. IWALC sees this as a possible way forward."

In recent weeks Mr Seely has also written to Ministers attacking the "effective duopoly" of Wightlink and Red Funnel. Speaking later, he also raised the prospect of the IWC raising finance to buy one of the ferry firms.

END

Caption for grid: A summary of cross-Solent discounts available. For the NHS travel costs scheme, search for HTCS on www.nhs.co.uk.

	Wightlink	Red Funnel	Hovertravel
Discount	50%	£10 day return. £10 period return if need for overnight stay demonstrated	£10.30 day or period return
Companion	One. More at manager's discretion	One. Two if patient is child	One
car/foot	Both	Foot passengers only from Cowes or East Cowes. Discretionary vehicle discount scheme. Expanded vehicle scheme under consideration	Foot
Restrictions		Southampton appointments only. After 0845hrs except by discretionary arrangement. Some exclusions, see website	
How to book	Call 0333 999 7333, or book on day. Appointment letter to terminal	Appointment letter and proof of address to terminal	Appointment letter to terminal