



Outcome of holiday homes review

January 2018

Summary of feedback received

74 items of feedback were received from holiday home users; 37 from volunteers or former volunteers and 33 from members. Four groups not directly impacted by the review also replied. The remaining responses were from other supporters we could not identify as members, volunteers or users.

The feedback demonstrated how highly valued the holiday homes are by those who use them. Many users also told us about the difficulties they have had in finding alternative suitable holiday accommodation, and their concerns about the cost. Responses from both volunteers and users demonstrated a belief that the risks around running holiday homes have been overstated and are being managed by current processes. There was also a feeling from some that it should be an entirely local decision as to whether or not to continue to run holiday homes.

It was clear how hard volunteers have worked to provide this service and how passionately they feel about the positive impact it is having on those who benefit from using the holiday homes.

We also received a small number of responses from those who agreed with our proposals that other organisations are better placed to offer this service, and that the MS Society should stop running holiday homes.

Our decision

We have made the decision that, after 2018 the MS Society's local groups will no longer own or manage holiday homes. However, where possible we'd like to see the holiday homes continue to be available for people affected by MS beyond 2018. If volunteers are interested in continuing to run the holiday homes, we're committed to working with them to find a way to make this a reality, outside of MS Society structures. We will be beginning discussions with our volunteers about this very soon.

We know people with MS have a need for accessible breaks and that these can sometimes be difficult to find and organise. However, as an organisation we do not feel we are best placed to provide this service directly, and we do not have the structures in place to ensure the quality and safety guests should expect – especially as the risks of running holiday homes are so high. We think we can best support people to access suitable breaks by providing tailored information and financial support - via our helpline and grants fund - which together enable people to choose from the wide range of accessible breaks and holidays available.

The risks involved in managing holiday homes are high, as are the legal and regulatory requirements. We know volunteers have worked hard to manage these risks within our health and safety guidance. However, ensuring the continuing

safety of all our guests requires a greater level of ongoing assurance than we can provide through our local networks, without putting in place significant additional resources. We believe this would be disproportionate to the benefit for people with MS.

We know many of the holiday homes are well run, and the feedback received showed how valued they are by those that use them. This decision isn't a reflection of how any individual group is running their home, but of our organisational structure not being appropriate to manage this type of activity.

Timescales

We've listened to feedback from volunteers and holiday home users and know how important it is to honour existing bookings, so we won't implement our decision immediately. We are contacting our volunteers to check whether they wish to continue running the holiday home in 2018 and, where they do, we will support them to implement some additional health and safety checks to address the concerns raised by the review.

If you have an existing booking at one of our holiday homes or would like to book one, please contact the local group running the holiday home directly to confirm if it is remaining open in 2018. Thank you for your patience while we carried out this review and we would like to apologise for any uncertainty you may have felt during this time.

Support Available

We know that holiday home users will have questions about accessing suitable breaks to meet their needs in the future.

There is information about planning a break on our website:

<https://www.mssociety.org.uk/ms-support/practical-and-financial-help/holidays-short-breaks-respite-care>.

You can also access specialist support by calling our MS Helpline on 0808 800 8000 or emailing helpline@mssociety.org.uk.

If you require financial support, there is information about applying for an MS Society grant on our website: <https://www.mssociety.org.uk/apply-health-and-wellbeing-grant> ,or you can call our Supporter Care Team on 0300 500 8084.

If you have any other questions or concerns about this decision, you can get in touch by emailing localnetworkprogramme@mssociety.org.uk or by calling our Supporter Care Team on the number above.

Thank you

We understand this decision might be upsetting for volunteers and holiday home users. We would like to acknowledge this and once again thank everyone who contributed their views and for everyone's patience while we considered these.