

Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Petitions Committee entitled Mandatory Welsh legislation to ensure Defibrillators in all public places - Report on the Consideration of a Petition (P-04-471)

The Welsh Government recognises rapid defibrillation by using an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) to patients suffering a cardiac arrest improves survival.

The Welsh Ambulance Service Trust (WAST) with support from the Welsh Government has been installing and promoting AED's across Wales in key strategic places. Where either there is high footfall or the possibility of a delayed response from the emergency services due to a remote location. WAST continues to offer AED training and support to individuals and groups.

In May 2013 the Minister for Health and Social Services launched the Together for Health – A Heart Disease Delivery Plan. The plan is designed to improve heart disease prevention and ensure those affected by any kind of heart disease receive timely access to quality services. Within Delivery Theme 3: Fast and Effective Care, there is a requirement to review provision of defibrillators in public places and community first responders to ensure adequate provision and training.

In February 2015, I launched the 'Be a Defib Hero' campaign which appeals for organisations to register if they have an AED that could be used to save a life in an emergency.

We are also developing an Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest (OHCA) plan for Wales. The plan will be published later this year and will correlate with the themes of these recommendations made by the Committee.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that:

We recommend that the Welsh Government takes steps to raise public awareness of the benefits of Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) including that they can be used safely by untrained people.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government agrees that there is scope to increase the public awareness of and access to defibrillators. In the past ten years the availability of defibrillators has grown significantly through work undertaken by the Welsh Ambulance Service Trust (WAST), charities, businesses, community groups and individuals. Defibrillators are becoming a common sight across cities, towns and villages.

We are developing an Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest plan for Wales. Publicity and increasing awareness of defibrillators and Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) will be key elements of the plan.

Financial Implications: Any financial requirements will be considered as part of the development of the plan.

Vaughan Gething AM, Deputy Minister for Health

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that:

We recommend that the Welsh Government ensures that all firefighting vehicles in Wales are equipped with AEDs.

Response: Accept in principle

The Welsh Government has no power to require Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) to install particular items of equipment on their fire appliances. However, we strongly support diversifying the role of FRAs, in particular to support the NHS, and have included this in the new National Framework for Fire and Rescue Services, on which we are currently consulting. Enhancing FRAs' capability to respond to cases of cardiac arrest is an important part of that. This requires more than just installing Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs): it also means training fire crews in their use and establishing clear understandings with WAST and the Emergency Ambulance Services Committee about how fire crews can support in response to patients in cardiac arrest.

At present, all front-line fire appliances in the South Wales FRA area are equipped with AEDs and all crews are trained in their use. The FRA has undertaken a highly successful trial in which fire crews responded to medical emergencies, including cardiac arrests; and there are plans to expand this programme to several other fire stations in South Wales shortly. In Mid and West Wales, 14 stations provide a 'co-responding' service on behalf of WAST, including to cases of cardiac arrest; this number will shortly rise to 21. All appliances at such stations are equipped with AEDs and all crews are trained in their use. In North Wales, there is a rolling programme of equipping appliances with AEDs and training crews, again covering all front-line provision in due course.

The Welsh Government, therefore, believes that FRAs are either already complying with this recommendation or making good progress towards doing so. We will, though, continue to monitor the situation, and will take further action if that proves appropriate.

Financial implications: None. The Welsh Government does not provide core funding to FRAs.

Leighton Andrews AM Minister for Public Services

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that:

We recommend that the Welsh Government takes steps to ensure that the location of all publicly available AEDs in Wales is registered with the Welsh Ambulance Service Trust.

Response: Accept

We have already taken steps to ensure AEDs are registered with WAST through a joint WAST and the British Heart Foundation (BHF) 'Be a Defib Hero' campaign, which I launched in February 2015. It asks local organisations, including workplaces, sports clubs and community centres to register if they have an AED that could be used by members of the public as a Public Access Defibrillator (PAD)¹.

WAST currently has over 1,200² PADs registered and available to members of the public in the event of a cardiac arrest and are working with the BHF on a UK wide PAD mapping project.

Financial Implications: None identified

Vaughan Gething AM, Deputy Minister for Health

¹ Public Access Defibrillators (PADs) are Automated External Defibrillators (AED); both terms are often used interchangeably.

² Provided by the Welsh Ambulance Service Trust to officials on 05/08/2015

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that:

We recommend that the Welsh Government considers taking steps to ensure that AEDs are available and made fully accessible in Welsh public places, for both responders and the general public to use. In doing so, the Government should consider what is reasonable and practicable given the size, location and footfall of the places concerned

Response: Accept in principle

Since 2006 WAST, with financial support, from the Welsh Government has been installing Public Access Defibrillators (PADs) across Wales. The sites selected have been determined due to a large public footfall, associated high incidence of heart disease and remote locations. Where appropriate, AEDs funded by the Welsh Government either directly or indirectly are registered with WAST and are available for members of the public to use.

The Welsh Government in partnership, with WAST, health boards and charities are working to proactively promote and install PADs across Wales.

Financial Implications: No further financial implications.

Vaughan Gething AM, Deputy Minister for Health

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that:

We recommend that the Welsh Government considers, and keeps under review, whether legislation is needed to underpin the need for the registration of publicly available AEDs in Wales and to provide 'Good Samaritans' reassurance to untrained members of the public who may use them to try to save someone's life.

Response: Accept in principle

There is already a system in place to register all PADs in Wales.

We do not believe that legislation is the best way forward at this time. It could deter business and organisations to invest in an AED if there was a requirement for it to be registered by law. It would be difficult to track existing and new AEDs and enforce. We want to allow time for current voluntary arrangements to bed in.

The law of negligence is not devolved, However, the UK Parliament passed the '*Social Action, Responsibility and Heroism Act 2015*' in February, which applies to Wales. This act aims to provide reassurance for people who are acting for the benefit of society or intervening to help someone in an emergency.

We agree that people should be supported and encouraged to use publically available AEDs when needed; but we do not believe legislation is a necessary or appropriate means of providing such encouragement.

Financial Implications: None

Vaughan Gething AM, Deputy Minister for Health