

Response to the Report of the National Assembly for Wales Public Accounts Committee Report on ‘Governance Review of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board: Lessons Learnt’

Provided by: Minister for Health and Social Services

Date: 8 July

The Welsh Government welcomes the findings of the report. I have already outlined improvements and challenges that remain in the Health Board in my Statement of the 4 June 2019. In addition, I offer the following response to the three recommendations contained within it.

Recommendation 1. We are unconvinced that sufficient resources are being devoted to turnaround action and although the Board has appointed a Director of Turnaround, we recommend the Board consider bringing in additional specialist external turnaround expertise to assist with this.

Accept – We have provided significant additional support, amounting to over £80 million, to the health board under the special measures arrangements including investment to improve mental health and maternity services and recurrent funding of £2.3 million per annum towards operational care structures. Welsh Government assessment of the recent progress report on the special measures framework recognises progress in governance and quality processes, board leadership, mental health services, engagement and partnership working and primary care but we have been clear with the health board that there is much more to do, especially in relation to securing sustainable improvement in financial and waiting time performance. We agree this will require an organisation-wide approach and further assistance and expertise on recovery and turnaround.

The health board recognises a significant shift is required in turnaround and recovery delivery. To ensure activities are aligned, co-ordinated and appropriately resourced it has restructured its turnaround function and leadership into three areas:

- Turnaround – under the leadership of the Director of Finance;
- Service & Productivity Improvement; and
- Delivery Management Office – both under the leadership of Executive Director of Workforce & OD

The Health Board is also appointing an external expert as Director of Recovery, which will help respond to the PAC’s turnaround recommendation. Further Welsh Government support for turnaround and recovery is to be finalised imminently and we would be happy to provide a further update to PAC.

Recommendation 2. We recommend that the Welsh Government writes to all NHS bodies advising on the publication of reports to ensure the handling is better managed in future. This advice should refer to providing advance notice of publication of reports along with an embargoed copy of the report, to all affected parties, ahead of the media. Adequate support should also be made available to those who may require it.

Accept – When reports on failures in care are published the needs of those affected should be the primary concern and we need to ensure they are properly supported.

Standard practice is to follow a publication and communications plan that provides the affected parties with copies of the report and expert briefing including an opportunity for them to ask questions of the authors. We also aim to provide other technical and emotional support including, where needed, a helpline or access to counsellors. In line with the standard practice, journalists receive copies of reports and a briefing at the same time as affected parties at different locations. Reports are also shared with Assembly Members and other interested stakeholders.

However, there is always a need to learn lessons from the experience on handling publication of reports and ensure we are both open and transparent while, at the same time, being sensitive to the needs of the people involved. This includes ensuring they are provided the appropriate information with the right technical and emotional support to meet their needs. This has been reflected recently in how the families and staff were involved in the publication of the Royal Colleges report into maternity services at Cwm Taf.

In light of the recommendation Welsh Government will further review how interested parties are involved and supported in future publications. Following the review we will write to advise all NHS bodies on handling of the publication of reports and share a copy of the letter with the PAC when it is issued.

Recommendation 3. We recommend that in the future, the Welsh Government ensures that any commissioned reviews into failings within any Health Board in Wales are established independently of the Health Board in question.

Accept – This learning has already resulted in action being taken to ensure commissioned reviews into failings are not led by the Health Board in question. This was recently demonstrated when the Minister for Health and Social Services asked for the Royal Colleges review into maternity services in Cwm Taf University Health Board to be commissioned and reported to Welsh Government, to avoid any conflict of interest and maintain independence.