

# Pre-appointment hearing – Chair of Hywel Dda University Health Board

April 2024

## 1. Introduction

### **Hywel Dda University Health Board**

- 1.** Hywel Dda University Health Board (Hywel Dda UHB) is the local NHS organisation for Mid and West Wales. As a health board, they plan, organise and provide health services for almost 400,000 people across Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, and Pembrokeshire. They manage and pay for the care and treatment that people receive in this area for physical, mental health and learning disabilities.
- 2.** Hywel Dda UHB provides NHS services across a quarter of the land mass of Wales in Mid and West Wales and communities are quite spread out in rural areas. Almost half the population, 48.8%, live in Carmarthenshire, 32.5% live in Pembrokeshire, and 18.7% in Ceredigion. They have a large border with other counties, and so communities in south Gwynedd, north Powys and Swansea / Neath Port Talbot also use the health services.



## 2. The pre-appointment hearing process

### The process

3. Welsh Government and the Senedd agreed to introduce pre-appointment scrutiny by Senedd committees of certain public appointments which are of significant public interest or which will have a significant impact on the public. The aim is to further improve the scrutiny and transparency of the public appointment making process.
4. Pre-appointment scrutiny generally takes the form of a public pre-appointment hearing with the preferred candidate. For appointments to these agreed roles, it is for the relevant committee to decide whether it wishes to carry out a pre-appointment hearing.

### Pre-appointment hearing

5. On 19 March 2024, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care announced that Dr Neil Wooding had been appointed as Chair of Hywel Dda UHB, subject to a pre-appointment hearing with the Committee.
6. The pre-appointment hearing took place on 25 April 2024. The meeting transcript is available on the [Committee's website](#).
7. To inform the hearing, the Welsh Government provided us with a briefing on the process ("[the Welsh Government briefing](#)"), Dr Wooding's [CV](#) and [supporting statement](#) and a copy of the [information pack for applicants](#)<sup>1</sup>. The Committee also asked the preferred candidate to complete a [questionnaire](#) in advance of the hearing.

## 3. The recruitment process

8. The post was advertised on the Welsh Government website and in paid advertisements between 26 September and 20 October 2023.
9. Stakeholder sessions were held on 7 and 8 March 2024. The stakeholder session members were representatives from the health board, their partners and stakeholders and Welsh Government. Candidates were asked to introduce

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<sup>1</sup> The information pack for the recruitment of a Chair for Swansea Bay UHB was also used for the recruitment of a Chair for Hywel Dda UHB

themselves giving a brief overview of why they applied for the role. This was followed by a 30 minute open discussion with panel members.

**10.** Seven applications were received. Four candidates were recommended for interview, although one candidate withdrew their application prior to the interviews taking place. Interviews took place on 29 February 2024. The Assessment Advisory Panel considered there to be one appointable candidate.

### **Role and person specification**

**11.** The Welsh Government set out the role of the Chair in the information pack for applicants. This included notification that, at the Committee’s discretion, appointment to the role of Chair could be subject to a pre-appointment hearing.

**12.** The Chair will be accountable to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care for the performance of the Board and its effective governance, upholding the values of the NHS, and promoting the confidence of the public and partners. Detailed responsibilities of the Chair can be found in the [information pack for candidates](#).

## **4. The Welsh Government’s preferred candidate**

### **Background**

**13.** Dr Neil Wooding, the Welsh Government’s preferred candidate, is currently Chair of the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA). He has spent his career as a senior public servant, working predominantly in Wales within local, regional and central government, the NHS and the voluntary sector.

**14.** In the pre-appointment questionnaire, he states:

*I am motivated to apply for this role for three primary reasons:*

*Firstly, I am profoundly passionate about people, community wellbeing and the critical role played by the NHS as a provider/facilitator of healthcare. Health is a universal building block and a prerequisite for creating a successful, prosperous, cohesive and fair society. Throughout my career, I have worked extensively within health services and engaged regularly with providers, I understand the scale of challenges facing the*

*Health Board and very much want to play my part in finding a long-term sustainable solution.*

*Secondly, I live in west Wales within the community served by the Health Board and hope to bring a local perspective and lived experience to the role. I see and experience the service at its best and worse, engaging with people across west Wales to build a picture of what is needed and the role played by everyone to secure good health and wellbeing. I fundamentally believe the communities we live in and the way we engage with each other are an essential part of the solution.*

*And finally, I have spent much of my career blending both paid and unpaid work to build a unique portfolio of experience which I am confident would enrich the work of the health board and hopefully strengthen its operation. I am service orientated, solutions focused and resilient. Over many years, I worked with Boards in both a non-executive and executive capacity to appreciate the factors which help to deliver success.*

## **Our view**

**15.** In line with the guidance on pre-appointment hearings agreed between the Welsh Government and the Senedd, our role is to set out our views on the suitability of the Welsh Government's preferred candidate.

**16.** During the pre-appointment hearing, we had a wide-ranging discussion with the preferred candidate, Dr Neil Wooding. We discussed his skills and experience of working both in the community voluntary sector and in public service, and how he would draw on these in his role with Hywel Dda UHB. We explored his knowledge and experience of working within the health and social care sectors in Wales, and he set out what he considered to be some of the challenges facing the health service currently, including issues around the availability of resources and an increasing demand for services. He touched on the issues facing primary, secondary and community care services respectively, and the need for the health service to support and enable people to help themselves to stay well. He also talked about the need to recognise that the health service does not operate in isolation; rather that it works with partners, all of whom need to come together in a model that is more collaborative in order to create a healthy population.

- 17.** We discussed with Dr Wooding the importance of Hywel Dda UHB having strategic relationships with its neighbouring health boards. He confirmed that he saw much of his role to be about building stronger relationships with those neighbouring boards and populations, and that having a more “outward-looking focus” would deliver a mutual benefit for all those involved.
- 18.** In terms of the health board’s staff, we asked Dr Wooding about the approach he intended to take to ensure a vision, structure and culture that all staff could be fully engaged with. He talked of the importance of having a culture that “people feel allows them to be instrumental, as opposed to just passive, in terms of the way that services are designed and delivered”. Part of his role, he told us, would be to make sure that the leadership shown on the board exemplified that.
- 19.** We also discussed the specific working relationships within the Board and how Dr Wooding felt he could develop a strong relationship between the Board and Chief Executive/staff, whilst also providing constructive challenge. He said that, in his experience, open, respectful conversations provided a “bandwidth” for that challenge, and that it was important to be able to “challenge without judgment, so people don't feel diminished by the challenge, they just feel that they can answer the question and respond appropriately”.
- 20.** We asked Dr Wooding about the skills and experience he was able to draw upon to promote equality, diversity and inclusion in his role within the health board. He told us that much of his professional experience has involved promoting diversity and inclusion, and that there was a need to build a “cultural base to encourage more people forward”. He also talked about the importance of working with communities to grow an appreciation for working for the NHS; to encourage people to “feel as if the NHS is theirs and they’re not just joining an external organisation”. In addition, he described needing to ensure that, when recruiting, “all the filters, that usually happen when we recruit people inside an organisation, are set at the lowest point of resistance as possible, so making sure that we aren't asking for anything that would either discriminate or disadvantage particular communities”.
- 21.** In relation to promoting and mainstreaming the Welsh language, Dr Wooding talked about the need to ensure that people can access services in the language in which they are most comfortable, and that this was an important way in which the health board could reflect the community it served.
- 22.** Finally, in terms of other appointments held by Dr Wooding, he is the Chair of the Wales Council for Voluntary Action, a civil service commissioner and a non-

executive director with the Scottish Government. While he did not believe these positions would give rise to any conflict of interest, he confirmed that, if appointed, he would likely stand down from his position with the Scottish Government to concentrate on his role as Chair of Hywel Dda UHB.

**Conclusion 1.** Based on his performance and responses to questioning at the pre-appointment hearing, we see no reason why the Welsh Government’s preferred candidate, Neil Wooding, should not be appointed to the post of Chair of Hywel Dda UHB.

**23.** We wish him well for the future and look forward to scrutinising him constructively in his role as Chair of Hywel Dda UHB during the course of this Senedd.