

Pre-appointment hearing – Chair of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board

January 2024

1. Introduction

Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board

- 1.** Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (UHB) is the largest health board in Wales, with a workforce of over 19,000. It provides health services to more than 700,000 people across the six counties of north Wales (Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham).
- 2.** It is responsible for the provision of primary, community and mental health as well as acute hospital services. It operates three main hospitals (Ysbyty Gwynedd in Bangor, Ysbyty Glan Clwyd Hospital in Bodelwyddan and Wrexham Maelor Hospital) along with a network of community hospitals, health centres, clinics, mental health units and community team bases.
- 3.** It also coordinates the work of 96 GP practices, and NHS services provided by 83 dental and orthodontic practices, 69 optometry practices and opticians and 147 pharmacies in North Wales.
- 4.** On 27 February 2023, the health board was escalated to special measures. The escalation to special measures reflected serious and outstanding concerns about board effectiveness, organisational culture, service quality and reconfiguration, governance, patient safety, operational delivery, leadership and financial management.



5. Special measures are the highest level of escalation in the NHS Wales escalation and intervention framework. There are a number of areas of concern that resulted in the special measures status of the organisation. These are set out in the special measures framework¹ which has been agreed with the health board. Each of these will receive directed intervention, support and de-escalation planning. The intervention plan for each domain will report into the overarching special measures process, this will incorporate areas previously subject to the targeted intervention status.

2. The pre-appointment hearing process

The process

6. Welsh Ministers 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.

7. 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 or not it wishes to carry out a pre-appointment hearing.

Pre-appointment hearing

8. On 24 January 2024, the Committee held a pre-appointment hearing with Dyfed Edwards, interim Chair of Betsi Cadwaladr UHB and the Welsh Government's preferred candidate. The meeting transcript is available on the [Committee's website](#).

9. To inform the hearing, the Welsh Government provided us with a briefing on the process ("[the Welsh Government briefing](#)"), Dyfed Edwards's [form, CV and supporting statement](#) and a copy of the [information pack for applicants](#). The Committee also asked the preferred candidate to complete a [questionnaire](#) in advance of the hearing.

¹ [Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board special measures framework](#), March to December 2023

3. The recruitment process

10. The post was advertised on the Welsh Government website between 27 September and 20 October 2023.
11. A stakeholder session was held on 28 November 2023. The stakeholder session members were representatives from the health board, their partners and stakeholders and Welsh Government. Candidates were asked to deliver a 15-minute presentation on the topic, “How do you change culture across a large area and multiple sites?”.
12. One application was received and the candidate was recommended for interview. Interviews took place on 29 November 2023.

Role and person specification

13. 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.
14. The Chair will be accountable to the Minister for Health and Social Services 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

15. Dyfed Edwards, the Welsh Government’s preferred candidate, is currently the interim Chair of Betsi Cadwaladr UHB. He has a background in local government, as a former leader of Gwynedd Council and as a Member and spokesperson for the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). He also has experience in education, both as a former small business owner and as a volunteer with third sector bodies.

16. In the pre-appointment questionnaire, he states:

I feel passionate about public services. Or, rather, about seeking to create excellent and forward-thinking public services that provide support, assistance and guidance to the people of Wales. For me, this is part of the agenda to create a Fairer Wales and a regime that will enable people to live their lives to their full potential.

Health, and the health and care system is an important cornerstone in this regard: it touches all our lives at different times and is a key part of the social fabric that sustains our communities across the north.

I've lived and worked in the north my whole life. Family members have worked or continue to work for the health service locally. I have experience of the NHS first hand literally from the cradle to the grave and have always felt grateful for the support.

But now it is fair to say that Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board is underperforming and falling short in terms of delivering world-class public services. Indeed, with the Board in special measures, the situation can be described as unacceptable and one where a new direction is needed.

Our view

17. 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.

18. During the pre-appointment hearing, we had a wide-ranging discussion with the preferred candidate, Dyfed Edwards. This covered his experience of working in other organisations, including roles in local government, education and the private sector. Mr Edwards confirmed that, if he were to be appointed, he would be standing down from those appointments he currently holds that could result in a conflict, or perceived conflict of interest.

19. We talked about culture and leadership; and the importance of staff being able to participate in the future of the health board. Mr Edwards highlighted the need to ensure that leadership is visible, so staff can see the Chair on the ward, or the Chief Executive in the canteen. He said that he had made several visits to

locations throughout the whole area and had visited Ysbyty Gwynedd on Christmas Day to thank staff for working on Christmas Day. A people and culture committee had been set up which enabled staff to speak directly to the board. He acknowledged that engaging staff would not be easy, because of the area the health board covered and the numbers of staff involved, but said he was really keen that all staff feel they have a role to play in helping to put things right in the health board. He also emphasised the importance of staff feeling valued by those in leadership positions.

20. We asked Mr Edwards about communication between the health board, staff, patients and the public and how he would instil a culture that encouraged people to raise concerns and be confident they will be appropriately addressed. He said that when an organisation was in a difficult place, as Betsi Cadwaladr UHB is currently in special measures, it was easy to retreat, pull up the drawbridge and be very defensive. He said he was trying to do the opposite and be open and transparent and engage with people. He gave an example of a recent public meeting that had taken place in Betws-y-Coed because of concerns about the surgery there. 150 people had attended and been able to talk to him, the Chief Executive and other key people from the health board, about their concerns. This willingness to be open, to be present, and to have those discussions was, he said, very important.

21. Finally, we talked about the importance of the relationship between the board, Chief Executive and Executive Team and the ability to provide constructive challenge and monitor performance while still supporting the achievement of the organisation's goals. Mr Edwards highlighted the importance of collective responsibility to ensure outcomes that would improve the health of the population. He said that everybody had a part to play, and it was a team approach but it was really important to set out, for people to understand, where their contribution lies and how that approach means that everybody can help the organisation progress.

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, Dyfed Edwards, should not be appointed to the post of Chair of Betsi Cadwaladr UHB.

22. Should Mr Edwards be appointed, we wish him well for the future and look forward to scrutinising him constructively in his role as Chair of Betsi Cadwaladr UHB during the course of this Senedd.