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Eich llais mewn iechyd | Your voice in health
a gofal cymdeithasol | and social care

Llais
Suite 5 Floor1
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Old Station Road
Carmarthen SA31 1BT

25/08/23

Dear Steve,

We are writing to set out our recommendations following public consultation related to paediatric services and to provide a balanced commentary on the issues and themes that were identified.

We will continue to represent the views of the public through the next stages of this programme and continue to welcome comments and views from the public as we do so.

Llais attended each of the public consultation drop-in events and online events. We have also monitored social media comments where possible. We felt that the Health Board's approach was very good and that public involvement in the early stages of design prior to consultation was meaningful.

Public events were welcoming and the staff present to support and discuss the options were generally excellent. In previous consultations we have praised the Health Board for ensuring that senior staff are present to discuss strategic vision but in this case we also commend the inclusion of front-line clinicians who were able to walk people through the detail of why services had changed and how the options will affect local paediatric services. We welcomed the flexibility and commitment shown in providing additional events where they were asked for. Acknowledging this, it was still notable that participation in local events was

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Croesewir gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg a'r Saesneg. Os byddwch yn ysgrifennu atom yn Gymraeg, byddwn yn ateb yn Gymraeg. Ni fydd hyn yn arwain at oedi wrth ymateb i'ch gohebiaeth.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh and English. If you write to us in Welsh, we will answer in Welsh. This will not lead to a delay in responding to your correspondence.

generally quite limited compared to previous public engagement around paediatric services.

Llais cannot highlight a favoured option, partly because we must represent the views of all but also because it was often difficult to discern a clear view amongst the public particularly as the options were more subtle in their make up. On balance we seemed to see more support for Option 3 on the basis that people felt this returned the greatest breadth of service in Withybush. We have not seen any written consultation replies from the public that would clarify a favoured option at the time of writing this response.

Themes coming through the events

Services closer to home

The overwhelming theme from families we saw in Pembrokeshire was the sense of distance from services, both after recent temporary changes to PACU and from the original women and children's service changes in 2014.

Many people have described inconvenience and unease around the perceived lack of service in Pembrokeshire to us in recent years. Transport is a regular concern particularly as some families have had to rely on others to help get poorly children to hospital for unscheduled care particularly if there isn't access to a car in some households or when the car is unavailable due to a working partner. Amongst those we have spoken to in the past and those who attended consultation events, this remains a valid and challenging concern.

We've also heard from people who have sometimes found paediatric unscheduled care very busy and uncomfortable in Glangwili. When PACU was functioning in Withybush we spoke to families who told us how much they valued it as a service.

Recommendation 1

We saw that option 2 and 3 were most popular as these bring services back to people in Pembrokeshire who feel geographically isolated from the current system. Visits to PACU showed it was valued. We feel that the Health Board's "care closer to home" vision should be applied here where it is clinically safe to do so.

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Uncertainty and decision-making for families

When speaking to families, one of the hallmarks of the system post-2014 was complexity around where to take a child. Additionally, advice from some primary care clinicians wasn't always accurate and could lead to confusion and wasted journeys.

It is clear that whichever option the Health Board favours, there must be clear guidance for families (particularly in Pembrokeshire) around where to go and all GPs including locums should be clear around which location is most appropriate to travel to. Parents who are worried about a poorly child cannot always be expected to know exactly where the right venue is. Public information produced during the Covid period was helpful in that it was widely circulated and that approach will need to be taken again. Llais would be happy to work with the Health Board to ensure that communication plans are effective and clear.

Recommendation 2

Clear communication with the public will be crucial after the Health Board decides which option is to be pursued. Although Pembrokeshire people will welcome the return of some services, the picture of paediatrics remains somewhat fragmented across the organisation at different times of day or days of the week with different clinical needs. People deserve the clearest possible picture of how and when to access services.

Conclusion

We are grateful to the Health Board for developing a careful and inclusive process around paediatric service development over the last 12 months. It remains a contentious issue particularly in Pembrokeshire but with families that have genuine and understandable worries about ease of access at the heart of the matter. We felt that there was an empathy and respect for this whilst discussing future services. We found that that the consultation was well designed and well executed with a genuine commitment to listening.

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It was clear that people would value the return of services to Withybush hospital accepting that pre-2014 levels were currently impossible.

We look forward to working with the Health Board as it seeks to implement the outcome of this consultation.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donna Coleman". The script is cursive and fluid.

Donna Coleman
Regional Director Llais West Wales

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