

Board meeting

Wednesday 21 May 2025

**Venue: Crown Building, Aberystwyth which moved to
Aberystwyth Park Lodge Hotel, Ffordd Parc y Llyn,
Llanbadarn Fawr, Aberystwyth SY23 3TL
and on Zoom**

Members:

Medwin Hughes
Grace Quantock
Alyson Thomas
Bamidele Adenipekun
Jack Evershed
Karen Lewis
Rajan Madhok
Jason Smith
Mwoyo Makuto

Chair
Deputy Chair
Chief Executive
Non-Executive
Non-Executive
Non-Executive
Non-Executive
Non-Executive
Associate member

Attendees:

Richard Bevan
Kirsty Contreras-Stacey
Ben Eaton

Joanne Bolton

Angela Mutlow
Donna Coleman
Samuel Dentten

Interim Board Secretary
Governance Officer
Strategic Director of Organisational
Strategy and Engagement
Strategic Director of Operations and
Corporate Services
Director of Operations
Regional Director - West Wales
Deputy Director - West Wales

Welcome, introductions

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, including those joining the meeting online.

Declarations of Interest

- 2.0 Medwin Hughes (Chair), Alyson Thomas (Chief Executive), Jason Smith (Non-Executive Member) and Bamidele Adenipekun (Non-Executive Member) explained that due to recent changes they would need to update their declarations of interest.

Spotlight on our activities: Mental Health

- 3.0 The Strategic Director of Organisational Strategy and Engagement made a presentation on the theme of mental health services.
- 3.1 It was confirmed that through Llais's engagement activities feedback had been received that generally there was a lack of adequate support for people with mental health issues, and long waits in Wales particularly for young people. Some people were indicating that there were experiencing negative psychological impacts as a result.
- 3.2 It was also suggested in these engagements that there were not enough day centres for older people and those with disabilities to attend to get help to support their current issues and conditions and also to promote improved mental health.
- 3.3 Llais had used the information gathered to develop some regional projects across Wales and further engagement activities, as well as continue to build relationships with representatives and organisations to help respond to the issues that had been raised.
- 3.4 The Strategic Director of Organisational Strategy and Engagement confirmed projects in regions, which included:

Gwent – Navigating mental health services: Llais had engaged with people in a variety of ways working with and through the Community Mental Health Team Duty Desk (CMHT) in Blaenau Gwent and the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board Mental Health and Learning Disabilities (MHLDD) Q-innovation Hive.

Neath Port Talbot and Swansea – Children and young people: Llais engaged with more than 800 people and identified a number of key issues. Also, engagement had taken place with Directors of Social Services and Directors of Education to make representations in response to the matters raised with Llais.

Cwm Taf Morgannwg – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS): Llais worked with the Behaviour Support Hub from December 2024 – January 2025 and received valuable feedback from 492 people. A follow up ‘public forum’ event had been scheduled for June 2025 to hear more from parents.

Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan – Mental Health: A Mental health forum was to be held on what made a good mental health service and a mental health survey was open until the end of May 2025.

- 3.5 The Chief Executive advised the Board that the Welsh Government had recently launched a 10 year Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-2035, with an accompanying delivery plan for the first 3 years 2025 to 2028. Llais would be monitoring progress in the delivery of the plan through our on-going engagement activities.

Valuing people’s stories: examples of how an individual’s experience can help change for the better – Mental Health

- 4.0 The Strategic Director of Organisational Strategy and Engagement continued the presentation with stories outlining how an individual’s experience can help change mental health services for the better.
- 4.1 A short video was shared of a parent regarding her son’s bipolar disorder. It highlighted a catalogue of failures in the communication to manage her son’s condition with mental health services in her area. It explained that her son was sadly sectioned due to the lack of management and communication from the relevant departments. The video highlighted that, too often, people have to reach a crisis situation before anything is done to help. The parent approached Llais feeling hugely let down and frustrated.

Llais listened to the experiences of the parent and her son and assisted in communications with the mental health services

department. A positive response has since been received, including an apology. The parent thanked Llais for its support as without the organisation and its complaints advocacy support it was considered nothing could have been achieved.

- 4.2 The second video shared was that of a Llais Neath Port Talbot and Swansea's event, which focused on British Sign Language (BSL) to support children and young people with lived experiences of mental health. It highlighted a story of a young lady who shared her experiences of being in the foster care system and the writing of a poem about her experiences. The young lady reported feeling happier now than before, and felt like her voice was being heard.
- 4.3 The Chair expressed his sincere gratitude to all staff involved.

Health and social care services in West Wales

- 5.0 The Regional Director for West Wales provided a presentation on health and social care services in West Wales. Key features of the presentation confirmed the population of West Wales as 389,000, which was predicted to be 425,000 by 2033.
- 5.1 Recurring concerns about health services in West Wales featured heavily in the feedback to Llais, in particular dentistry and access to GPs. The issues raised were due to the lack of appointments and waiting times. It was also confirmed pharmacies were increasingly struggling to get supplies, reducing hours or closing down. In rural areas this caused significant issues for people needing prescribed medication.
- 5.2 Other feedback varied, including about mental health support. The feedback received confirmed that schools were being more helpful supporting children with mental health concerns, and it was important that general practitioners were equipped to support these issues. Once appointments were arranged, the care provided was highly valued, however, the long waits it was confirmed that mental health services were not sufficient in the region.
- 5.3 Recurring themes highlighted a lack of access to GP appointments across the healthcare system. It was confirmed that there were a number of barriers preventing access to appointments, long waits on the telephone and difficulties making digital appointments due to

some not having facilities to book online. It was also reported on the limitations of travel to appointments, in some cases this was due to the locations of appointments provided and the lack of public transport, as a result people were sometimes feeling isolated from communities.

- 5.4 It was confirmed that Llais, West Wales had 3 complaints advocates with 110 current live cases. There was currently a waiting list with 30 awaiting allocation. 600 cases were reported during the year, of which over half of the cases were taken forward as formal concerns.
- 5.4 The Chair expressed his gratitude to all involved in the work of Llais across West Wales, especially in relation to the work being done on access to GP services, which was a key area of concern for the people of Wales and an important element of national and regional programmes of work.
- 5.5 A non-executive member of the Board highlighted the current position with concerns being expressed in the communities of West Wales and beyond regarding proposals to change services provided by Hywel Dda Health Board, particularly stroke services units, especially at Bronglais Hospital, Aberystwyth.
- 5.6 It was also confirmed that a member of the public had submitted a question to the Board on this matter. It was agreed that the Regional Director of West Wales would contact the member of the public about the question and the involvement Llais has in the current proposals made by Hywel Dda University Health Board to change 9 services as part of its Clinical Services Plan.

Action: A-25-05-01 - Response to be provided regarding question to the Board from a member of the public on the future of stroke services at Bronglais Hospital by the Regional Director of West Wales. **Action:**
Donna Coleman

Report from the Chair

- 6.0 The Chair provided a verbal report to the Board on his engagements and activities since the last meeting. As part of this report, the Chair confirmed that the recruitment for the new non-executive member of the board was underway. Interviews would be conducted over the next 3 weeks.

Report from the Chief Executive

- 7.0 The Board received an update on matters across Llais.
- 7.1 Llais had formed a valuable partnership with Tenovus Cancer Care to enhance support for individuals affected by cancer. Recognising Llais's growing need for a specialist advocate for cancer-related complaints, Tenovus had approached Llais to help address this need. The new dedicated advocate would take up the role on 2 June 2025.
- 7.2 Llais recently sponsored and attended the 2025 Annual Social Care Accolades Awards which was held 1 May 2025. The awards recognised, celebrated and shared good practice in social care, childcare, play and early years in Wales. The awards highlighted and honoured the contributions of individuals, teams and organisations across the social care sector.
- 7.3 The Chief Executive confirmed her attendance at the launch of the Care Inspectorate Wales' National Advisory Board strategic plan for the next 5 years.
- 7.4 Llais recently participated in the bi-annual healthcare summit in Wales. The Healthcare summit meetings took place to enable discussion between audit, inspection, regulation and improvement bodies working in Wales to enable closer working relationships and intelligence sharing between participating organisations.
- 7.5 The summit discussions focused on each individual health board and NHS Trust in Wales as well as providing an opportunity to reflect on these discussions to identify all Wales themes that need action nationally.
- 7.6 Llais had continued to develop the relationship and partnership with the Older People's Commissioner for Wales. Llais had attended meetings and information sharing sessions to further promote mutual understanding and support.
- 7.7 As a part of Llais's ongoing commitment to the partnership the Executive Team of Llais and the Older People's Commissioner's

Office would be meeting in September for a joint executive session to explore further opportunities for joint working.

- 7.8 Llais had recently published a report setting out what we heard about having a baby in the Swansea Bay University Health Board area. More than 500 people who had used maternity and neonatal services contributed to our engagement activity.
- 7.9 The information gathered through surveys, interviews and focus groups highlighted a broad range of experiences, some of which were deeply concerning. While some families described compassionate and professional care, many others told Llais they felt unheard, unsupported or unsafe at different stages of their journey, especially during labour, after birth or when trying to raise concerns.
- 7.10 The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care had confirmed that there would be an assessment of all maternity services in Wales, starting in July 2025, looking at how services were performing against national guidelines. NHS Performance and Improvement would also in future be publishing regular progress updates on the implementation of the Maternity and Neonatal Safety Support Programme, with the first update will be published in July 2025.

Performance against our Annual Plan – Quarter 4 (2024/25) and performance reporting for 2025/26

- 8.0 The Strategic Director of Organisational Strategy and Engagement provided an update on the performance against our annual plan for quarter 4.
- 8.1 It was reported that Llais had engaged with over 43,000 people during 2024/25, which was 16,500 more than last year. Llais had taken part in 915 engagement activities (324 more than last year) with 190 of those being engagements at health and social care premises (117 more than last year).
- 8.2 The Strategic Director of Organisational Strategy and Engagement was pleased to confirm several encouraging developments across the final quarter of 2024-2025. Llais had continued to shape the work and reinforce the value of a people-centred approach to health

and social care. Professionalism and compassion remained strong themes in feedback particularly in relation to cancer services and palliative care. Good care was described as staff going above and beyond despite pressures on services.

- 8.3 Recurring themes highlighted were the lack of access to GP services and in some cases reports of being removed from GP lists without notice. Mental Health Services had shown delays in ADHD diagnosis, inconsistencies in referral processes and gaps in medication reviews which are concerns of continuity of care.
- 8.4 Further highlighted themes were ongoing inconsistencies in cancer care pathways. There were currently issues in scheduling treatment and concerns about lack of support for families during their treatment. It was noted that there were also continued issues with clarity of pathways between local health boards and Trusts.
- 8.5 Local forums and Llais local events saw an increase in participation and were particularly beneficial in helping to gather views from people and carers. People felt valued by being kept informed following participating, with some regions piloting new follow-up processes to “close the loop” and show how feedback had made a difference. This approach helped build trust and encouraged further involvement.
- 8.6 Between January and March 2025 there were over 180 representations made to health and social care services through Llais’s complaint’s advocacy and engagement activities. These representations reflected real-time concerns raised by the people and communities, particularly around access, quality, and continuity of care.

Action: A-25-05-02 - The theme of representations to be included in a future scheduled development session. **Action: Richard Bevan and Ben Eaton**

Operations update presentation

- 9.0 The Operations Director provided a presentation on insights from across Wales. It highlighted an overview on emergency departments, mental health services and issues with GP access.

- 9.1 There were a number of issues identified for the Welsh Ambulance Service Trust regarding lost hours and ambulance delays, where communities were experiencing long delays waiting for ambulances. It was reported that in some cases, families were resorting to transporting loved ones to the hospital.
- 9.2 In Gwent there were reported issues with obtaining dental appointments and treatment although this was a common theme across Wales. There were currently delays in secondary care services and long waits for biopsies and domiciliary care resources were not always available.
- 9.3 It was confirmed that the new radiotherapy unit at Nevill Hall Hospital was due to open during the summer. The unit would be staffed by a team of Velindre cancer service experts and would operate as an extension of the Velindre Cancer Centre in Cardiff, increasing Velindre cancer service's capacity to deliver radiotherapy and help to see more patients each week
- 9.4 It was confirmed that social care services remained a challenge across Wales due to the lack of social workers and Llais had made a number of representations to local authorities in the last period.
- 9.5 However, overall it was reported that there was high praise for staff in social care staff despite pressures on services.

Action: A-25-05-03 - Concerns regarding the number of social workers available across local authorities in Wales. Discussions to take place with Social Care Wales. **Action: Alyson Thomas/Angela Mutlow**

Finance update, including: Outturn financial report as at 31 March 2025 and Budget 2025/26 – First monthly report (April 2025)

- 10.0 The Strategic Director of Operations and Corporate Services confirmed the Plan for 2024/25 set out the financial resources required to deliver Llais's Annual Plan, with the objective of ensuring that expenditure did not exceed the income received from the Welsh Government. The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee last reviewed and scrutinised the 2024/25 finance report on 5 March 2025.

- 10.2 The draft of the 2024/25 Annual Report and Accounts would be presented to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee on 4 June 2025 for initial review and consideration. The external audit was scheduled to start on the 14 July 2025 and the final version of the Annual Report and Accounts would be presented to the Board on 22 October 2025 for formal approval.
- 10.3 The recent Voluntary Early Release Scheme exercise had resulted in a £277,000 forecast underspend on staffing costs compared to the Board-approved budget. This amount had been released to the contingency budgets, with £16,000 already allocated to operational plan delivery. The Executive Team was currently reviewing the remaining contingency funds to ensure these were used to support a targeted and effective programme of work in 2025/26.
- 10.4 Any proposals for new permanent posts or longer-term contractual commitments would be offset by recurrent savings, to avoid the risk of over-committing resources beyond the available budget. A medium-term financial plan covering 2026/27 and 2027/28 would be developed, incorporating current-year cost projections. The Board would be engaged to agree the planning assumptions underpinning this work.

Workforce update, including dashboard

- 11.1 In March 2025 the Board agreed to adopt and open the Voluntary Early Release Scheme for a limited period. The Scheme was open from 3 March 2025 to 31 March 2025.

The Board received an output report on 22 March 2025 via email, where the Board was asked to approve 12 business cases for the Voluntary Early Release Scheme. Approval was received by email from the Board on 22 and 23 March 2025. 10 people left the organisation at the end of March 2025.

- 11.3 It was reported that the approved business cases included temporary cover requirements to allow departments and regions to continue to operate with minimal disruption to services while the new roles were designed, developed and recruited to. The People Team have been proactively working with Regional Directors and

Operations managers to understand the immediate needs of the services and sourcing temporary workers to assist us in this period before we have the new roles fully established.

11.4 The Board noted and ratified the outputs and outcomes of the recent Voluntary Early Release Scheme exercise.

11.5 **Sickness Report:** The period between January to March 2025 (Quarter 4) saw a significant increase in the overall sickness absence percentage from 3.84% in Quarter 3 to an average of 8.62% in Quarter 4 against an organisation expectation of 3.30%. During Quarter 4, 14 employees were identified as on long term absence.

11.6 8 of these started their sickness absence in the calendar year 2024. 4 employees were absent due to work related stress (29% of stress related illness) and 10 employees due to bereavement and other personal related stress (71% of stress related illness). Llais continued to be committed to ensure there was a focus on staff wellbeing, following the staff wellbeing survey last year.

11.7 Managers had been asked to identify any additional training needs and submit requests to the People Team. To date a number of opportunities had been delivered during the quarter including all staff sessions and bespoke development sessions.

Decision: D-25-05-01 - Ratified by the Board in relation to the Voluntary Early Release Scheme outputs and outcomes.

Neath, Port Talbot and Swansea region office accommodation

12.0 The Strategic Director of Operations and Corporate Services proposed the move from the office space at Cimla Hospital, Neath Port Talbot to Baglan Bay Innovation Centre (BBIC), owned by Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council due to the expiry of the current office lease. The Health Board had requested that Llais vacate the premises by 30 June 2025. Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council had proposed flexible lease terms for Llais.

- 12.1 The Board was asked to ratify the move to Baglan Bay Innovation Centre, subject to positive outcomes on the integrated impact assessment, positive staff engagement, trade union engagement and provisional agreement of the heads of terms. The move aligned with Llais' operational needs and financial considerations, ensuring continued service delivery within the region.

Decision: D-25-05-02 – Ratified by the Board - Neath Port Talbot and Swansea office move from Cimla to Baglan Bay Innovation Centre.

Corporate risk report

- 13.0 The Interim Board Secretary introduced the new corporate risk report and confirmed that changes had continued to be implemented and discussed over recent months. It was confirmed that the Board approved a new Risk Management Strategy at the Board meeting at the end of March 2025.
- 13.1 Work had continued over recent weeks on the required development activities, especially regarding assessment of key risks, sources of assurance, timelines/deadlines for actions, expected outcomes and the finalisation of a corporate risk dashboard, which was being built alongside the developing OKR system, which was computer software through which Llais tracks the achievement of its goals and priorities.
- 13.3 The Chair and members of Board welcomed the new format for the risk report and stated that it was much clearer and easier to engage with in narrative form. The Board thanked the Interim Board Secretary for the work undertaken in representing risks in a different way to support the scrutiny and assurance work of the Board.

Minutes of the last meeting: Wednesday 23 April 2025

- 14.0 The Board approved minutes from the 23 April 2025 meeting. The minutes were confirmed as an accurate record.

Action log and discuss any matters arising from the minutes

- 15.0 The Interim Board Secretary provided an update on the action log, this was discussed and approved by the Board. The Board agreed to move completed actions to the completed actions section.

Assurance Reports from Board Committees

- 16.0 The Chair of the Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee provided an overview of the Audit, Risk and Assurance meeting held on 5 March 2025 via an assurance report. Key matters highlighted included the receipt of the Local Counter Fraud Annual Report, a continued focus on risk management and that additional assurance sessions would be arranged on key risk areas in the future.
- 16.1 The timeline for the production and finalisation of the Annual Report and Accounts for 2024/2025 was also discussed. The committee had also undertaken an effectiveness review and a development plan would be produced to guide further development of the work of the committee.
- 16.2 The Chair of the Workforce, Remuneration and Terms of Service committee confirmed that a meeting of the committee had been held on the 16 May and was pleased to confirm that Rajan Madhok had been appointed as the Vice Chair of the committee. The committee had received a presentation on workforce trends and metrics, an update on the voluntary early release scheme and the committee recommended Board ratification.
- 16.3 Sickness absence was also discussed and the committee sought assurance on how the organisation would support staff on long term sickness and their subsequent return to work. Discussions were also held on learning and development and the finalisation of a forward work programme.

Use of the common seal – report for ratification

- 17.1 The Board ratified the use of the organisation's common seal on one document, which was sealed on 28 March 2025 in relation to an agreement of a lease with The Welsh Ministers for premises on the 4th floor, Crown Buildings, Cathays Park, Cardiff.

Decision: D-25-05-03 – use of the common seal ratified by the Board.

Any other business

- 18.1 It was reported that a Llais events calendar had been produced and published on the Llais web pages. A link had been sent to Board members, but it was agreed that this would be re-issued for information.

Action: A-25-05-04 - Llais Events link to be circulated to Board members. **Action: Ben Eaton**

Forward look and Board work plan

- 19.0 It was confirmed by the Interim Board Secretary that work was underway to develop a work programme and forward plan for the Board to cover the financial year 2025/26. Areas of work would align with the Llais Annual plan and agreed areas of business and assurance/compliance as outlined in the Board Assurance Framework.

- 19.1 It was reported that there would be a range of development, awareness and learning activities (including e-learning), which will be covered in the work programme and forward plan.

Action: A-25-05-05 – The Interim Board Secretary to submit the new work programme to the Board meeting in July 2025 for approval.

Date of the next meeting

- 20.1 The next meeting of the Board would be held on Wednesday 30 July 2025 at 9:30am, in Wrexham.

The meeting concluded with the Chair thanking all involved in preparing the papers, presentations and contributing to the Board meeting.

The meeting closed 15:00