

People at the heart of health and social care

Our Chair's perspective: Professor Medwin Hughes on a people-centred vision for health and social care in Wales



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Introduction

**Professor
Medwin Hughes
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Chair of Llais



Health and social care in Wales touches everyone's life at some point.

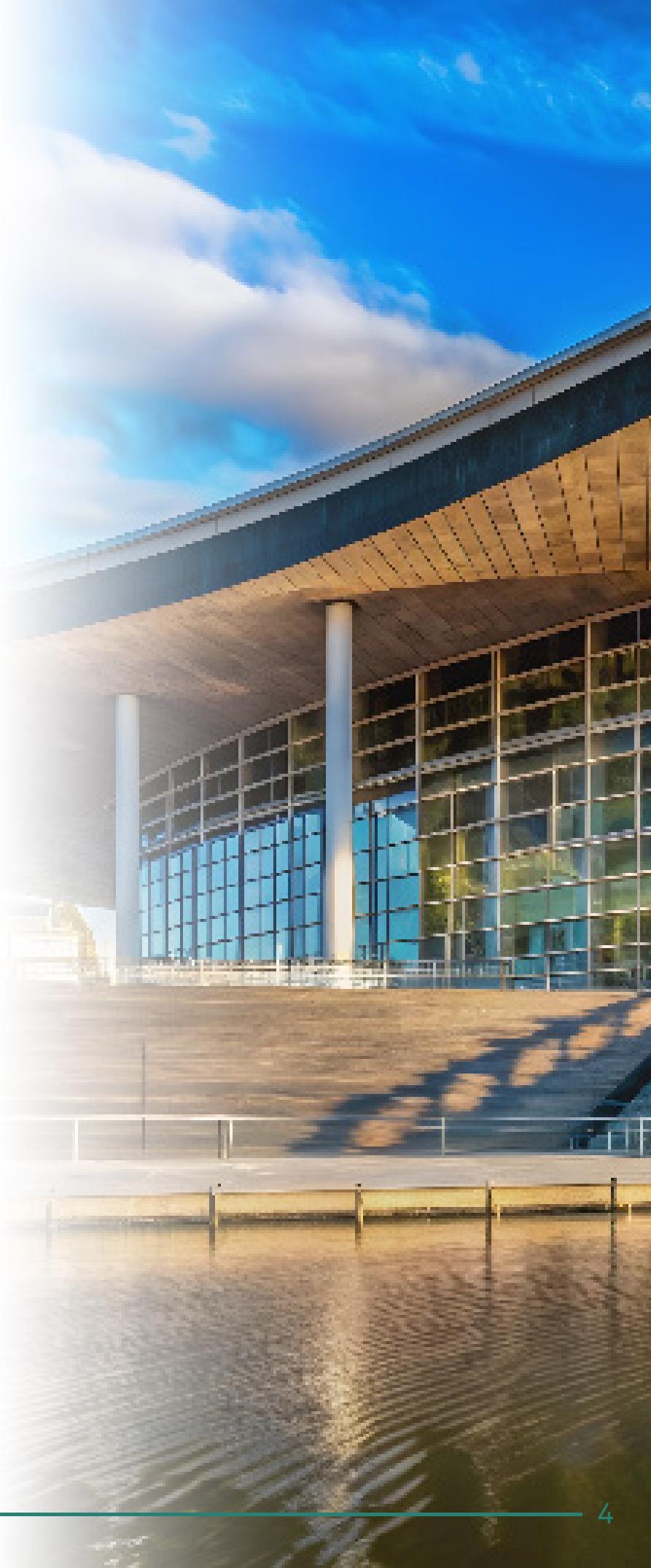
Yet for too long, many people have faced services that feel hard to access, disconnected, or inconsistent. Staff and organisations work under enormous pressure, and people often feel they have little influence over how services are delivered. Llais was established to change that. Its mission is simple but vital: to ensure that the experiences of people who use health and social care services are listened to, understood, and used to guide real improvements. Llais has gathered insight, published principles, and influenced policy in ways that put people at the centre of system reform.

Our published reports *The People's Priorities* and *The Health and Social Care We Want* sets out the current state of health and social care in Wales from the perspective of public experience and examines how change can be guided by people's priorities, and highlights what comes next as the country moves toward a new Senedd and the next stage of reform.

A narrative of change

The story of health and social care in Wales is complex. People often encounter fragmented services, face long waits, and struggle to navigate a system that feels inconsistent from one place to another. Llais' role is to ensure that these experiences are heard and reflected in decisions, creating a narrative of change grounded in what people actually experience rather than what organisations assume.

The publication of *The People's Priorities* and the *People's Principles* is a milestone. These eight principles are based on the experiences of citizens across Wales and highlight what matters most: care should be accessible, respectful, communicated clearly, joined-up, timely, considerate of the whole person, fair, and supportive of independence. What makes these principles so powerful is that they are consistent across communities, showing that the public shares common expectations of care.





This narrative of change is deliberate and constructive. Llais does not focus on criticism or blame. Instead, it presents experiences as evidence that can guide practical improvements. By balancing the needs of citizens with an understanding of staff pressures, Llais ensures that insights are credible, realistic, and actionable.

Llais operates nationally, collecting experiences from across Wales to identify trends that might not be visible locally. By creating a clear picture of the system from the public perspective, it highlights where services succeed and where reform is needed. This narrative is the foundation for reform, setting the direction for changes that genuinely improve people's experience of health and social care.

As Wales moves toward a new Senedd, this narrative will be crucial. It provides continuity, a shared reference point, and a people-focused framework to guide the next phase of reforms. By starting with lived experience, Llais ensures that change is grounded in reality, relevant, and meaningful.

Empowerment and impact

Empowerment is at the heart of Llais' work. The people of Wales feel empowered when their experiences influence decisions and lead to visible change. The People's Principles are central to this process. They do not present individual complaints or demands; they provide a shared, evidence-based framework that guides decision-making and sets clear expectations for services.

Independence is a critical element. Llais operates independently from government and health and social care organisations, allowing people to share their experiences honestly. Policymakers and service leaders can trust that insights are accurate and representative, while citizens can have confidence that their voices are respected.

The impact of this approach is clear. Since publishing *The People's Priorities*, terms like access, dignity, communication, and joined-up care are seen as key for future health and social care plans and have become central in public and policy debates. Llais helps convert citizen voice into actionable insight, giving decision-makers practical guidance on reform. In the same way inclusion is a practical part of empowerment.



Llais focuses on people whose voices are often overlooked such as those facing digital exclusion, language barriers, disabilities, or social disadvantage. By ensuring broad participation, empowerment becomes genuine and equitable, not limited to those already confident in navigating the system.

Mutual understanding is also essential. People recognise the pressures staff and organisations face, and Llais facilitates honest dialogue that balances expectation with realism. Empowerment is therefore a shared responsibility: people and communities influence change while understanding system constraints. The impact of this work is long-term and cultural. Public experience begins to shape policy, service delivery, and organisational thinking. Trust grows when people see their contributions reflected in priorities and decisions, creating a positive cycle that strengthens both engagement and system responsiveness.



Listening well

Listening well is more than hearing words—it is understanding, analysing, and acting on public experiences. Llais prioritises accessibility, offering multiple ways to engage: online, in person, by phone, and through local partners. No voice is left unheard, and every story contributes to a broader understanding of the system.

Depth of listening matters. Llais does not simply collect stories; it identifies patterns and shared experiences that can guide national policy. Individual experiences are transformed into structured insight that decision-makers can use to inform strategy, allocate resources, and improve services. Integrity is critical. The people of Wales must trust that their experiences are reported accurately, and policymakers must be able to rely on these insights without concern about exaggeration or bias. Llais provides this credibility, acting as a trusted intermediary between the public and the system.



Listening well also requires responsiveness. Llais demonstrates to participants how their feedback informs priorities, principles, and decisions. People see that engagement has consequences, reinforcing trust and encouraging continued participation.

Proactive listening is equally important. Llais identifies emerging challenges before they become crises, allowing services to act early and prevent problems rather than react to them. This anticipatory approach makes the system safer and more responsive.

Finally, listening well influences culture. By modelling careful, inclusive, and empathetic engagement, Llais encourages organisations to treat public input as a central, continuous part of decision-making, rather than a one-off consultation exercise.



Delivering change

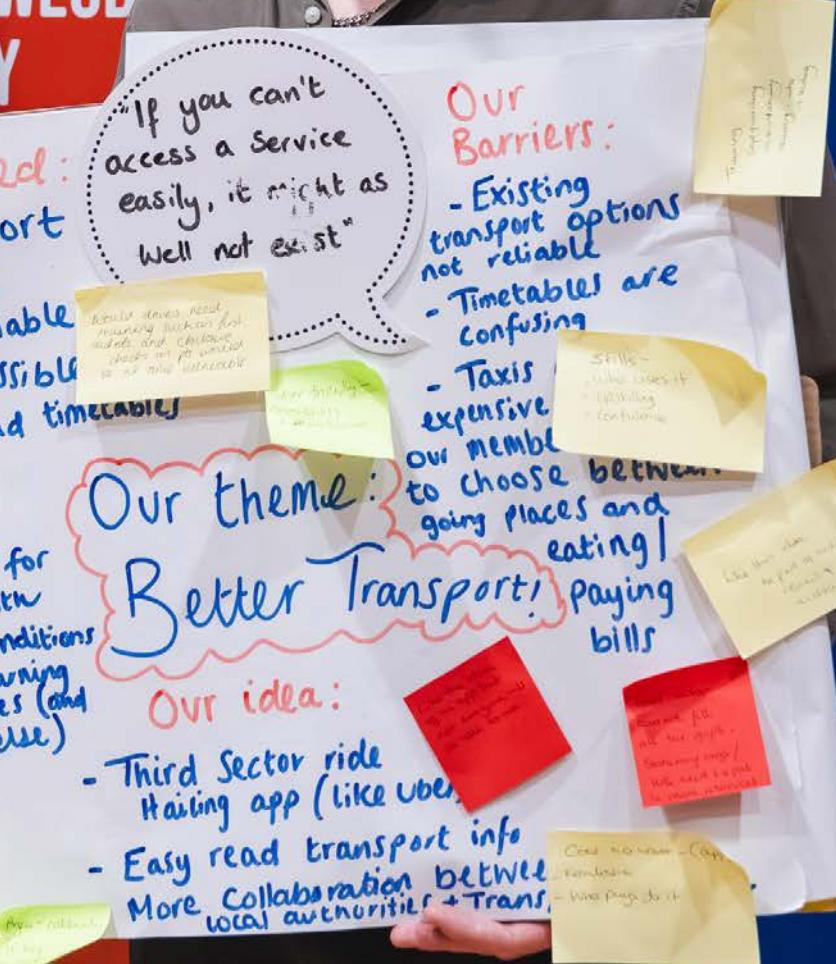
Delivering change is the ultimate goal of Llais. Insight and principles are only meaningful if they lead to tangible improvements in services. The People's Principles provide a framework for consistent expectations: care must be accessible, respectful, joined-up, timely, and empowering.

Llais acts as a bridge between people, communities and the system. By aggregating local experiences into national insight, it helps health bodies and social care providers understand where improvements are needed and how best to achieve them. This influence is subtle but powerful: it guides reform without replacing the roles of policymakers or service leaders.

Accountability is central. Llais ensures public experiences are visible and influence decisions, embedding their voices into planning and evaluation. Change is also cultural: improvements require organisations to think holistically, collaborate effectively, and adopt a people-centred mindset across the workforce. Sustainable change builds over time. Every insight collected strengthens the evidence base, supports shared expectations, and ensures that reforms remain connected to the needs of people and communities. Delivering change also requires that people see the impact, reinforcing trust and demonstrating that engagement leads to practical outcomes. Through this approach, Llais turns listening into action, ensuring that public voice drives reform and shapes a system that is fair, responsive, and connected.



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What the people of Wales expect next

Building a consistent and integrated system

The people of Wales have made their expectations clear: they want a system that works, treats them with respect, and improves their daily experiences. People now expect action – visible, practical, and consistent across the country.

First, people want access that works for everyone, without barriers caused by geography, language, digital ability, or personal circumstances. Waiting should not mean being forgotten, and support must be flexible to meet individual needs. Health and social care bodies must ensure equitable access, so care and support needs are met consistently regardless of location. People also expect care that treats them with dignity and respect. Staff must be supported and empowered to provide compassionate, consistent care across all organisations. Health boards and local authority leaders must ensure that staff training, culture, and leadership enable dignity to be embedded in every interaction.





Clear and honest communication is a priority. People expect to be informed in plain language about their care, including delays or changes. Currently, communication varies across bodies, and Llais' work highlights the need for consistency to build trust and confidence.

People want joined-up care. Separate NHS bodies and local authorities must collaborate so services are seamless. People should not have to repeat their story or coordinate care themselves. Integration across health and social care is critical for continuity, safety, and efficiency. Timely care and support while waiting are essential. People want reassurance and guidance during delays, and consistent practices across bodies are necessary to prevent gaps or inequity.

The public also expects care that recognises the whole person, considering physical, mental, and social needs. Achieving this requires collaboration across bodies and services, ensuring a holistic, coordinated approach to care. Fairness and inclusion are non-negotiable. People expect services to remove barriers related to language, culture, disability, and digital access, with consistent standards across Wales. The NHS and local authorities must work together to develop and adopt consistent approaches to equity, share best practice, and implement inclusive policies.

Finally, people expect care that promotes independence, supporting choice, dignity, and community connection, while providing meaningful support for unpaid carers. Bodies must coordinate to ensure this support is consistent and sustainable.

The implications for NHS bodies and local authorities across Wales are clear: people's priorities demand greater consistency, shared standards, and closer collaboration. Bodies will need to think and act as a connected system, aligning strategies and working together to ensure care is equitable and integrated. Integration is operational, cultural, and strategic, requiring shared workforce alignment and coordinated planning.

In short, the people of Wales are asking for transformative change. They want a system that is accessible, respectful, joined-up, fair, and empowering, delivered consistently across health and social care. Llais will continue to ensure that public insight drives reform, supporting a Wales-wide health and social care system that genuinely serves the people.



Moving forward with confidence

Wales is at a turning point. The voices of the people, captured through Llais' work and expressed in the People's Principles and Priorities, provide a clear guide for reform. Thousands of Welsh voices have told us what matters most: care that is accessible, respectful, joined-up, timely, fair, and empowering. Now, the challenge, and the opportunity, is to turn these priorities into action across every part of the health and social care system.

Change on this scale can feel daunting, but it is achievable. The principles outlined by individual voices in Wales give us clarity and focus. They provide shared standards that organisations, staff, and leaders can align with, ensuring that improvement is not random or piecemeal, but coordinated and consistent. By keeping the public at the centre, we reduce uncertainty, strengthen trust, and make reforms more likely to succeed.

Health and social care bodies already have remarkable expertise and dedication. What Llais' work highlights is that this expertise must be combined with lived experience.



By integrating the reality of people's daily encounters with services into planning, design, and delivery, Wales can create a system that is both technically excellent and genuinely responsive to the people it serves. This approach builds confidence in the system, not just for people, but for those working within it.

Confidence also comes from clarity. The People's Principles act as a roadmap for change. They show what good care looks like in practice and provide benchmarks against which progress can be measured. Leaders can plan with certainty, knowing that each decision should be tested against these principles: Does it improve access? Does it treat people with dignity? Does it bring services together? Does it promote independence and fairness?

Equally, confidence comes from collaboration. No single organisation, board, or authority can deliver these changes alone. Wales' separate NHS bodies local authorities need to build even greater alliances and work in partnership, sharing learning, aligning standards, and creating a system that is integrated by design. The Government of Wales has a key role to play in facilitating such system change, Llais' role is to ensure that people's voices remain central in these conversations, guiding collaboration and keeping the focus on what matters most to people.

Finally, confidence comes from a commitment to action. Listening, principles, and insight are only meaningful if they lead to results. The people of Wales have offered their vision for health and social care across the country, and their priorities provide a clear roadmap for reform. Wales has the tools, the leadership, and the public mandate to transform its health and social care system. By acting decisively, building on shared standards, and embedding public voice at every level, Wales can create a system that is fairer, more connected, and genuinely people-centred. Llais will continue to ensure that these voices guide change, supporting services to move forward with certainty and purpose, creating a health and social care system that is responsive, equitable, and built for the people it serves.



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This will not lead to a delay in responding to your correspondence.

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