

Response by the Welsh Government to the Report of the Health and Social Care Committee Inquiry into the Availability of Bariatric Services – 09 July 2014

The Welsh Government welcomes the Report of the Health and Social Care Committee's inquiry into the availability of bariatric services in Wales. The Welsh Government is grateful to the Committee for its thorough and comprehensive consideration of this subject.

Six of the eight recommendations made by the Committee would require, either directly or potentially, additional funding to support their implementation.

Given the pressures on Welsh Government and NHS Wales funding, it is important to be clear that any such expenditure would have to be cost-neutral, in the round. The Committee Report points to some examples of where this could be achieved, but others would be required.

The Welsh Government's acceptance of the Report's recommendations cannot therefore be predicated on prioritising additional investment for this area of NHS Wales activity over other clinical areas, beyond the extra resources already committed to increased numbers of level four surgical interventions over the next four years.

The Welsh Government's responses to each of the report's recommendations are as follows:

Recommendation 1

We recommend that the Welsh Government work with Local Health Boards (LHBs) to provide a clear outline of the actions that will be taken to implement the All-Wales Obesity Pathway fully, and provide details of the associated timescales. These actions and timescales should be informed in part by the plans being produced by all LHBs in Wales and the service specification for Level 3 services being developed by Public Health Wales.

Response: Accept

This year we have changed the assessment process and undertaken a more formal assessment of the Pathway. In January 2014, Officials wrote to the seven LHBs requesting evidence against the minimum service requirements for each level of the Pathway.

This evidence has been analysed using a red/amber/green rating and this rating has been shared with LHBs.

LHBs have now responded and we will publish the results shortly.

Officials will undertake further work with Public Health Wales to update the Pathway

Standards, once their Level 3 Service Specification has been developed.

Financial Implications:

There may be costs for some LHBs in further developing services to meet fully the requirements of the All-Wales Obesity Pathway. LHBs will be expected to meet these costs from within their existing budgets.

Recommendation 2

We recommend that the Welsh Government provide assurances that it will require forthcoming Local Health Board plans and the all-Wales Level 3 service specification to include measures to address the lack of multi-disciplinary service provision in Wales within the next 12 months.

Response: Accept

Public Health Wales, working with key dietetic stakeholders on behalf of Welsh Government, have developed a draft National Obesity Level 3 Service Specification and Clinical Access Policy for adults. These documents have been developed in collaboration and based on consensus, and will be published by the end of July 2014.

Welsh Government officials will undertake further work with LHBs, supported by Public Health Wales, to update the Pathway Standards once the Level 3 Service Specification has been developed.

Financial Implications:

There may be costs for some LHBs in further developing services to fully meet the requirements of the All-Wales Obesity Pathway. LHBs will be expected to meet these costs from within their existing budgets

Recommendation 3

We recommend that the Welsh Government develop and publish a monitoring and evaluation framework for bariatric services in Wales, which also indicates lines of accountability, to measure the consistency and effectiveness of the referral pathway for overweight and obese patients to move up and down the relevant tiers of support.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government, through Public Health Wales and WHSSC will develop a monitoring and evaluation framework for bariatric services in Wales, for introduction before the end of this Assembly term.

Financial Implications:

The cost of delivering a framework will be accommodated within existing Welsh Government/WHSSC/Public Health Wales resources.

Recommendation 4

We recommend that the Welsh Government work with the Wales deanery and relevant Royal Colleges to consider training for health professionals, across all disciplines, on obesity, its causes, its treatment and the relevant treatment pathway, and its consequences. Training should include motivational interviewing and behaviour-change management. Consideration should also be given to what more can be done to embed the 'make every contact count' methodology.

Response: Accept

The Wales Deanery have advised Welsh Government that the Royal Colleges are already considering how this training can be incorporated into the revision of the curricula, and Welsh Government will work with the Deanery and others to progress this matter. Any changes in the curriculum will require approval by the GMC.

Financial Implications:

The financial implications of any changes will need to be considered as this work progresses.

Recommendation 5

We recommend that the Welsh Government undertake a comprehensive costs-benefits analysis of bariatric surgery procedures, including consideration of societal cost-benefits, to identify the extent to which they provide value for money. The opportunity provided by invest-to-save bids should also be explored, as suggested by the Minister.

Response: Accept in Principle

The Welsh Government's Knowledge and Analytical Services will conduct a review of the existing evidence base regarding the costs and benefits of bariatric procedures. If the evidence gathered through that exercise is not deemed to be sufficient, the Welsh Government will explore the possibility of commissioning an academic institution in Wales to undertake a cost/benefit analysis of bariatric surgery, building on and reviewing existing research and evidence.

The Welsh Government will also explore the possibilities for supporting such a project, if required, through Invest to Save funding with LHBs.

Financial Implications:

The potential costs of undertaking an independent and comprehensive cost/benefit analysis will be explored by the Welsh Government if it is deemed necessary

following the internal review of existing evidence. If necessary, and if funding can be identified from within existing Welsh Government budgets (without diverting monies from frontline services), we will aim to have this work completed before the end of this Assembly term.

Recommendation 6

We recommend that the Welsh Government work with the Welsh Health Specialised Services Committee to consider including a requirement within the eligibility criteria for bariatric surgery – akin to NICE criteria – that a patient commits to long-term follow-up (via the GP or multi-disciplinary team) following surgery. This requirement will need to be accompanied by the necessary expansion of follow-up services across Wales.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government has discussed this matter with WHSSC who have confirmed that they have no issues in principle with adding this requirement to their access criteria when these are next reviewed.

As the Committee have noted, in order for this recommendation to be met, non-surgical weight management services must first be provided more widely in Wales. Given this, if the aftercare requirement is added to the access criteria, it may not be possible for patients who have received bariatric surgery to engage with a local multi-disciplinary team until such time as services are provided in their LHB area.

Financial Implications:

Whilst revising the eligibility criteria will itself be cost neutral, there will be costs for LHBs in ensuring that post-operative follow-up services are available in all areas. LHBs will be expected to meet these costs from within their existing budgets.

Recommendation 7

We recommend that the Welsh Government develop guidance on the processes that should be followed to support a patient deemed ineligible for bariatric surgery. This guidance should pay specific attention to what information is provided to ineligible individuals on the options that remain available.

Response: Accept

Public Health Wales will incorporate this guidance within the service specification for Level 3 Services which they are currently developing on behalf of Welsh Government.

Financial Implications:

Whilst producing the guidance will be cost-neutral, there will be costs for LHBs in ensuring that non-surgical weight management services are available for patients deemed ineligible for bariatric surgery. LHBs will be expected to meet these costs from within their existing budgets.

Recommendation 8

We recommend that the Welsh Government review periodically the need for a local bariatric surgery service in North Wales

Response: Accept

The Committee report recognises that WHSSC has a plan in place to increase the number of bariatric procedures provided to patients from north Wales over the next five years, and that until the numbers of procedures reaches a 'critical mass' of at least 120 per year, a north Wales based service would be unsustainable.

Under the recently agreed WHSSC policy, this number of procedures will not be delivered annually until at least 2017/18.

It should also be noted that the provision of bariatric surgery would itself be only one component of the wider multidisciplinary service that would be required to support individuals before and after surgery, as is provided by WIMOS in Swansea. The costs of providing this wider service would need to be factored into any consideration as to whether a north Wales service was more economically advantageous than existing arrangements.

The Welsh Government will keep this matter under regular review as part of its routine engagement with WHSSC, and ensure that WHSSC gives continued consideration to the establishment of a north Wales centre as the numbers of procedures increases annually to the level required to sustain a north Wales service.

Financial Implications:

There may be additional costs to the relevant LHBs in establishing a north Wales bariatric centre and delivering procedures in north Wales, rather than in Salford (see above). Although these costs would be offset to some extent from not having to pay for procedures currently undertaken by Salford Royal NHS Trust, it is anticipated at this time that any additional costs of providing the service within north Wales will need to be met by LHBs from within existing budgets.