# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **The Health and Social Care (Quality and Engagement) (Wales) Act 2020 – Update on implementation**  |
| **DATE**  | **24 March 2021** |
| **BY** | **Vaughan Gething MS, Minister for Health and Social Services** |

The Health and Social Care (Quality and Engagement) (Wales) Bill was passed by the Senedd just over one year ago.

My hope, when the Act received Royal Assent in June 2020, was that it could be implemented within two years. However, this last year has been an incredibly difficult time for us all; potentially no more so than for those who plan, deliver and rely on our health and social care services. What we have experienced has been truly unparalleled and at times, may have felt all-consuming.

Today, looking forward, I wish to share this Government’s aspirations to implement the Act in full by April 2023. We recognise the immediate years ahead will present further challenges and we may be subject to some ongoing constraints but we remain committed to doing all we can to engage and involve stakeholders in making these important changes.

There is one element of the Act, I hope, will come to fruition this calendar year: the making of Regulations to enable the appointment of statutory Vice Chairs of NHS Trusts – improving their governance and decision-making processes, bringing them in to line with Local Health Boards.

Beyond this, our aim will be to commence the re-focussed duty of quality on NHS bodies (Local Health Boards, NHS Trusts and Special Health Authorities) at the same time as the new duty of candour – which will also apply to primary care providers – from April 2023. This will enable a more transitional and joined-up approach to their introduction. It will afford greater scope to co-ordinate stakeholder involvement in the co-production of statutory guidance and preparation of Regulations, as well as the design and delivery of training for NHS staff. Importantly, it will allow additional time for NHS bodies (and primary care, in respect of candour) to streamline plans and implement changes to their existing policies and procedures, to ensure compliance with the duties from that date.

I can also confirm our intentions to review the Health and Care Standards, alongside development of statutory guidance on the duty of quality; to make adjustments to existing Putting Things Right (NHS complaints) Regulations and guidance, to align these with and support the new duty of candour; and to place a similar duty of candour on independent healthcare providers, using existing powers under the Care Standards Act 2000 – something welcomed by the sector – bringing them in to line with NHS bodies and providers of regulated social care.

With regards to establishment of the Citizen Voice Body for Health and Social Care, foremost, I acknowledge that it has been over five years since we first discussed the creation of such a body. I recognise this has, at times, been unsettling for the staff and members of Community Health Councils (CHCs) but want to give assurance of this Government’s intention that the new Body should be established and operational by April 2023, with CHC staff and volunteer members engaged in and fully supported to manage the transition.

Since the Health and Social Care (Quality and Engagement) (Wales) Bill was passed we have seen the publication of The Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review, chaired by Baroness Julia Cumberlege. In response to the recommendation within that report for the establishment of a Patient Safety Commissioner, I have asked my officials to use some of this additional time to explore the role the Citizen Voice Body, with its consent, could play in meeting this recommendation.

This Government sees the establishment of the Citizen Voice Body as a cornerstone of our work to implement A Healthier Wales: our long-term plan for health and social care; promoting closer integration of health and social care services; and investing in services that promote continuous engagement with the public in these matters.

This critically important work is being taken forward by the Minister for Mental Health, Wellbeing and Welsh Language, jointly with the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services. They recently met with representatives of the Board of CHCs to hear about the activities of Community Health Councils and to understand how CHC staff and volunteer members have adapted to provide vital support for patients by working effectively with health boards throughout the pandemic. The CHC Board members also expressed their enthusiasm to share the CHCs’ collective experience and knowledge in shaping and making a success of this new, independent Body that will be a key enabler for engagement with people, in a multitude of ways, in all parts of Wales.

The Citizen Voice Body will be at the heart of conversation with the Welsh public, working together with NHS bodies and local authorities, and alongside other public, independent and volunteer organisations to strengthen the voice of citizens. It will be essential for all partners to establish close working relationships and I anticipate the new Body will prove an excellent source of advice when it comes to determining what matters to people in relation to health and social care.

I want to emphasise this Government’s commitment to engaging with stakeholders and citizens to inform and guide our work in implementing the Act. Together we can create the culture and understanding needed, all round, to meet the duties of quality and candour and to ensure the Citizen Voice Body becomes embedded within the health and social care landscape, working well with its partners, representing the views of the public.

Collectively, the measures within the Act will help us to work beyond the difficulties of this last year and move further towards the integration and sustainability aspirations set out in A Healthier Wales; driving improvements in health and social care, and crucially, leading to better outcomes that matter most to the people of Wales.