

# Petition P-04-564 Restoration of Inpatient Beds, Minor Injuries Cover and X-Ray Unit to the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital:

## Summary of consideration by the Petitions Committee

January 2018

### Background

1. The petition was submitted by Geraint Vaughan Jones on behalf of the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital Defence Committee, having gathered 2,754 signatures. It was first considered by the Petitions Committee on 17 June 2014.

#### Petition text:

Until the Health Minister has had time to consider Prof Marcus Longley's recommendations on rural healthcare in Wales - a study that was commissioned by the Minister himself in January of this year - we, the undersigned, call on the National Assembly of Wales to urge the Welsh Labour Government to delay decision on Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board's Business Case aimed at downgrading our Memorial Hospital to a mere 'Memorial Centre'.

2. The petition was submitted in response to the closure of Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital, and specifically the loss of inpatient beds, X-Ray facilities and a Minor Injuries Unit (MIU).

3. These changes were initially proposed as part of Betsi Cadwaladr University



Health Board's (BCUHB) wider consultation on service configuration in 2012, Health Care in North Wales is Changing. They were agreed by BCUHB's Board on 18 January 2013 as part of moves to establish 10 hospital hubs across North Wales. These would "provide seven day a week minor injuries services with standardised opening times and an x-ray service available every working day".

4. The Health Board stated that the changes were "designed to improve the quality of care and to ensure that services continue to be safe and sustainable in the long term" and "to provide the services that patients use most regularly as close to their homes as possible, so we don't admit people to hospital when we could provide more appropriate care locally".<sup>1</sup>

5. Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital was not selected to be one of the hubs. The closest is located at Ysbyty Alltwen in Tremadog approximately 13.5 miles by road from Blaenau Ffestiniog.

6. A health centre was proposed to replace the Hospital following a redevelopment of the premises. However, inpatient care, X-ray facilities and Minor Injuries services ceased to be provided in Blaenau Ffestiniog from early 2013.

### Inpatient beds

Twelve inpatient beds were provided at the Memorial Hospital prior to its closure. At that time, the Health Board added six additional beds at Ysbyty Alltwen and implemented a policy of 'Enhanced Care at Home' in an effort to reduce the need for patients to be cared for in hospitals. This involved additional resources being provided for nursing, social services and the third sector.

Three further beds were commissioned by the Health Board in Bryn Blodau Residential Home in Blaenau Ffestiniog for step up/down care. However, because this is a residential facility it does not provide nursing care.

### X-ray and Minor Injuries services

Four X-ray sessions had been held at the Memorial Hospital each week. The Health Board stated that the numbers of patients attending were generally half of the recommended level for a service of this type and the Minor Injuries Unit had also generally only seen two to three patients per day. On this basis, their position was that services had become unsustainable due to insufficient demand.

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<sup>1</sup> Betsi Cadwaldr University Health Board, News article '[Health care in North Wales is Changing](#)', 18 January 2013

Both services are now provided from Ysbyty Alltwen.

## The petitioners' concerns

7. The removal of services from Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital led to the petitioners holding serious concerns over the sufficiency of health care provision in the area.

### The closure of Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital

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8. At the initial stages of the Committee's consideration of the petition, the petitioners argued that the Welsh Government should not approve BCUHB's business case for replacing Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital with a health centre until the findings of the Mid Wales Healthcare Study<sup>2</sup> had been considered. Because the services previously provided at the Hospital had already been withdrawn, this relied on a hope that those services would ultimately be reinstated following the review.

9. The Welsh Government responded to this point in November 2014, when the then Minister for Health and Social Services, Mark Drakeford AM, told the Committee that it was not within the remit of the Study to make decisions about the future, because these are statutory responsibilities of health boards. The Minister stated his expectation that BCUHB should respond to the findings, which had been published in October 2014, through their future service planning arrangements.<sup>3</sup>

10. The final report of the Mid Wales Healthcare Study referred to the "considerable controversy" which had surrounded the changes to Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital, whilst stating:

"It is beyond the terms of reference of this study to explore and comment on the specific needs of these two localities [Blaenau Ffestiniog and Cardigan]."<sup>4</sup>

11. The report acknowledged that:

"there is little doubt that many people living in these areas remain unconvinced that their Health Board has an acceptable plan for the future,

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<sup>2</sup> <http://wihsc.southwales.ac.uk/midwaleshealthstudy/>

<sup>3</sup> Correspondence - **Minister for Health and Social Services to the Chair**, 12 November 2014 (PDF 2 MB)

<sup>4</sup> Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care - University of South Wales, **Mid Wales Healthcare Study – Report for Welsh Government**, September 2014 (p.108)

and are very concerned that the loss of their hospital will also mean a diminution in services.”<sup>5</sup>

**12.** However, it made no specific recommendations relating to the area. The business case for the new health centre on the Hospital site was ultimately approved by the Welsh Government in late 2015.

**13.** Since this time the concerns raised by the petitioners have primarily involved the impact of the closure of the Hospital on local people and upon the wider provision of other health services in the area, particularly primary care.

### **Provision of health and care services in Blaenau Ffestiniog**

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**14.** The petitioners have stated their concerns over the provision of health care in Ffestiniog and surrounding areas on a number of occasions and have described them as “dire”. Concerns raised have included GP services, local provision of step-down care for people discharged from hospital and minor injuries services.

**15.** The Health Board’s original rationale for the closure of services at Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital, particularly inpatient beds, relied upon the development of improved support for people in their own homes. In September 2014, BCUHB informed the Committee that the Enhanced Care at Home service would deliver more care in people’s own homes and avoid the need for admission to hospital.<sup>6</sup> This was an objective of Health Care in North Wales is Changing and consistent with wider Welsh Government policy.

**16.** However, the Committee received evidence from the petitioners and others which indicated that this objective had been difficult to realise in practice because of challenges providing primary care services following the resignation of several local GPs and delays in recruiting replacements. The Community Health Council informed the Committee in April 2017 that:

“...Enhanced Care at Home has not delivered the promised replacement for the community hospital beds and the continuing issues with recruitment are making it extremely difficult to replace GP Principals who left the local practice following the closure of the hospital.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care – University of South Wales, **Mid Wales Healthcare Study – Report for Welsh Government**, September 2014 (p.108)

<sup>6</sup> Correspondence – **Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board to the Chair**, 14 September 2014 (PDF 128 KB)

<sup>7</sup> Correspondence – **Community Health Council to the Committee**, 18 April 2017 (PDF 287 KB)

17. Ultimately, these difficulties resulted in BCUHB taking over direct management of the GP practice in Blaenau Ffestiniog. The Health Board has disputed suggestions that there was a direct link between the closure of the Memorial Hospital and the challenges experienced with local GP services, however these issues undoubtedly exacerbated local concerns over the sufficiency of health services in the community.

18. The Community Health Council also told the Committee that:

“...there is a consistent concern from the CHC that BCUHB has failed to deliver the changes promised in the consultation “Healthcare in North Wales is Changing” in 2012.”

19. In particular:

“...step up and step down care is not provided in the community as was promised in 2012. Instead, local people travel large distances to access such care.”<sup>8</sup>

20. The CHC cited dementia and end of life care as examples of services where this is the case.

21. Having learnt that Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) had recently written to BCUHB in response to concerns raised by the petitioners, the Committee wrote to HIW to seek their conclusions on health care in the Ffestiniog area. HIW’s response in January 2017 stated that, though patient experience of GPs was sometimes affected by staff shortages and the use of locum GPs, feedback is generally good and they were:

“...broadly assured that the health board has taken and is continuing to take appropriate steps in ensuring that the services it provides in the Ffestiniog area are adequate.”

22. Nevertheless, HIW noted that:

“...significant challenges remain for the health board in gaining the confidence of both the local and wider North Wales population.”<sup>9</sup>

23. Around the same time the Health Board informed the Committee that it had recently provided further investment to improve community engagement and local promotion of services, especially in relation to those to be provided in the new Health

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<sup>8</sup> Correspondence – **Community Health Council to the Committee**, 18 April 2017 (PDF 287 KB)

<sup>9</sup> Correspondence – **Healthcare Inspectorate Wales to the Chair**, 13 January 2017 (PDF 102 KB)

Centre. BCUHB also expressed their intention to carry out a programme of engagement across North Wales to inform service improvement and a longer-term “Clinical Services strategy”.<sup>10</sup>

### **The new Primary Care Resource Centre**

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**24.** At the time of the closure of Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital the Health Board agreed to develop primary care resource centres in three locations in North Wales, including in Blaenau Ffestiniog.<sup>11</sup>

**25.** In December 2015, following the production of a Business Case by BCUHB, the Minister for Health and Social Services informed the Committee that the new Blaenau Ffestiniog Primary Care Resource Centre would receive capital funding of £3.94m from the Welsh Government. The services to be delivered at the Centre were detailed by BCUHB in correspondence to the Committee in January 2017.<sup>12</sup>

**26.** However, the petitioners have previously described the planned provision of services as “basic” with the lack of inclusion of a number of services previously delivered in the Memorial Hospital, including inpatient beds, X-Ray and minor injuries services, remaining a fundamental barrier.

**27.** The Centre, Canolfan Goffa Ffestiniog, was officially opened by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Services on 30 November 2017.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Welsh Government’s response to the petition**

**28.** During the Committee’s consideration of the petition, correspondence has been received from the former Minister for Health and Social Services, Mark Drakeford AM, and his successor as Cabinet Secretary for Health, Well-being and Sport, Vaughan Gething AM. Throughout this time, the Welsh Government has maintained the position that, as service changes were agreed locally between BCUHB and the North Wales Community Health Council following a formal engagement and consultation process, the Welsh Government would not intervene.

**29.** In July 2014, the Minister for Health and Social Services told the Committee that BCUHB’s proposals had not been referred to him and that:

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<sup>10</sup> Correspondence – **Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board to the Chair**, 6 January 2017 (PDF 3 MB)

<sup>11</sup> Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, News article ‘**Health care in North Wales is Changing**’, 18 January 2013

<sup>12</sup> Correspondence – **Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board to the Chair – Appendix 2**, 6 January 2017 (PDF 342KB)

<sup>13</sup> Welsh Government, News release, ‘**Health Secretary opens new £4 million health and social care centre in Blaenau Ffestiniog**’, 30 November 2017

“[I] am clear that I will not reopen any matters which have been agreed locally.”<sup>14</sup>

**30.** In subsequent correspondence the Minister wrote that, although the Welsh Government was not involved in the decision to close the hospital, he considered that the business case for a primary care resource centre in Blaenau Ffestiniog to replace it should be seen as a priority. As previously noted, capital funding from the Welsh Government was subsequently agreed in December 2015.

**31.** In June 2015, the Welsh Government announced that BCUHB was to be placed into ‘special measures’ following “serious and outstanding concerns about the leadership, governance and progress in the Health Board over some time”.<sup>15</sup> The Minister appointed his own representative to oversee operations at the Health Board and developed an improvement framework for the Health Board. At the time of writing this process remains ongoing.

**32.** In light of the decision to place BCUHB in special measures the petitioners argued that:

“It is right and proper that the Minister should arrange for decisions taken by such a recognised defective healthcare organisation to be reviewed before they deliver irreparable patient harm.”<sup>16</sup>

**33.** However, the Minister told the Committee in December 2015 that:

“the decision to place the health board in special measures has no bearing on previous decisions relating to services in the Blaenau Ffestiniog area.”<sup>17</sup>

**34.** Following the May 2016 elections to the National Assembly for Wales, the re-constituted Petitions Committee wrote to the newly appointed Cabinet Secretary for Health, Well-being and Sport, Vaughan Gething AM to seek an update. The Cabinet Secretary responded in August 2016 to state that:

“The position remains the same as outlined by the previous Minister for Health and Social Services...and there is nothing further I can add to the response.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Correspondence - **Minister for Health and Social Services to the Chair**, 27 July 2014 (PDF 1 MB)

<sup>15</sup> Welsh Government, Press Release **Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board placed in special measures**, 8 June 2015

<sup>16</sup> Correspondence - **Petitioner to Committee**, 14 October 2015 (PDF 35KB)

<sup>17</sup> Correspondence - **Minister for Health and Social Services to the Chair**, 16 December 2015 (PDF 169 KB)

**35.** The petitioner also shared a response to correspondence he had received from the First Minister, Carwyn Jones AM, in November 2016. This further reiterated the Welsh Government's position that:

“we do not intend to reopen this issue. It remains as issue for Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and any outstanding concerns [the petitioners] have must be resolved locally.”<sup>19</sup>

## Recent developments

**36.** During the latter stages of the Committee's consideration of the petition a separate scrutiny process by the Care Scrutiny Committee of Gwynedd Council into health provision for residents of Blaenau Ffestiniog and surrounding areas has commenced. An Extraordinary Meeting of that Committee was held on 4 September 2017 with evidence taken from BCUHB and the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital Defence Committee. Following this, the Care Scrutiny Committee agreed six recommendations for BCUHB and Gwynedd Council. These include:

- A request for a report immediately on the health provision in the Blaenau Ffestiniog area by an independent agency.
- For Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board to regularly monitor information and data in relation to the effectiveness of current health services in the Blaenau Ffestiniog area and the well-being of its residents, and to commit to adapting or changing provision if there is evidence to justify it.
- That the Health Board give detailed consideration to engagement and consultation shortcomings in the past in order to improve future arrangements.
- For the Cabinet Members for the Environment and Care to commission an assessment of the convenience and accessibility of health services via public and community transport within the Ysbyty Alltwen catchment area.
- That Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and Gwynedd Council work jointly and take appropriate practical steps to recruit care and health staff in

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<sup>18</sup> Correspondence - [Cabinet Secretary for Health, Well-being & Sport to the Chair](#), 26 August 2016 (PDF 91 KB)

<sup>19</sup> Correspondence - [First Minister to the Petitioner](#), 9 November 2016 (PDF 141 KB)



order that there are full teams in place to maintain services in the Blaenau Ffestiniog area and across the County.<sup>20</sup>

**37.** The Committee understands that responses have been sought from BCUHB and the relevant Gwynedd Council Cabinet Members, and that the Care Scrutiny Committee intends to further consider responses in early 2018.

## CONCLUSIONS

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**Conclusion 1.** It is clear from our consideration of this petition that further efforts to build bridges between sections of the local community and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board are required. The opening of Canolfan Goffa Ffestiniog could help to provide an impetus for this. However, we recognise that this Centre has not addressed the underlying motivation behind the petition, namely the provision of inpatient beds, minor injuries cover and X-Ray facilities in Blaenau Ffestiniog. Nevertheless, it is our hope that the new Centre can assist in the development of improved relationships and satisfaction with the level of health care provided within the community.

**Conclusion 2.** We consider that the local scrutiny process now ongoing through Gwynedd Council's Care Scrutiny Committee represents the most appropriate route for the issues covered by the petition to be discussed and addressed. We endorse the recommendations reached by that Committee and urge all involved to give them careful consideration. In particular we agree that the concerns of the local community may be best addressed by the recommendation for an independent report to be commissioned into health provision in the Blaenau Ffestiniog area.

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<sup>20</sup> Care Scrutiny Committee, Gwynedd County Council, [Minutes of meeting held on 21 September 2017](#).