

Health & Social Services Committee HSS-15-01(p.2)

Date: 7 November 2001
Venue: Committee Room 3, National Assembly for Wales
Title: Structural Change in the NHS in Wales

Introduction

1. The consultation document Structural Change in the NHS in Wales was published in July and the three month consultative period came to an end on 19th October 2001. 345 responses were received from a wide range of organisations, individuals and representative bodies.
2. The proposals contained in the consultative document were the result of the work of the Structures Task and Finish which was set up as part of the process for the implementation of Improving Health in Wales – A Plan for the NHS and its Partners. Its membership included representatives from the National Assembly, the NHS, Local Government and the Voluntary Sector (see [Attachment](#)).
3. During the consultation exercise I visited the five Health Authorities to discuss the proposals with their staff. Open Sessions have also taken place in North, West and South Wales to discuss the background and detail of the structural changes. There has been a wide range of meetings, events and workshops across Wales over the last few months giving people the opportunity of discussing the proposals and understanding the background behind the structures.
4. The purpose of this paper is to report on the consultation process and its emerging themes.

Background

5. Structural changes are based on the principles discussed in the Plan to introduce arrangements shaped by three key characteristics that will :
 - be simpler for patients to understand;
 - be accountable for the actions it takes and the services it delivers;
 - have a stronger democratic voice on the way it is governed.
6. The proposals were predicated by the abolition of Health Authorities and the intention to base the new structures on new roles and accountabilities at a local and national level.
7. At the local level Local Health Groups were to be developed and would take on new responsibilities for assessing health needs, commissioning and delivering health services for their local population. At the national level the National Assembly for Wales was to be strengthened to provide a new sense of

leadership, direction and oversight, holding LHGs and NHS Trusts to account for the quality and range of health services they deliver. These new arrangements were to be underpinned by new strategic partnerships between LHBs and Local Authorities to facilitate joint planning and collaborative working, and stronger engagement in this with NHS Trusts, the Voluntary Sector and Community Health Councils.

8. The proposals in the consultation document included :

- the establishment of 22 LHBs as statutory bodies, details of their role and accountabilities and a discussion on Board membership;
- the setting up of three Consortia in which LHBs could share support services and collectively commission secondary care services;
- the strengthening of the National Assembly's NHS Directorate including the introduction of 3 Health Economy Teams and 6 Functional Teams;
- the setting up of pathfinder projects to test out the implications, benefits and risks of transferring the responsibility of community health services from NHS Trusts to LHBs.

Emerging Themes from Consultation

9. The consultation document stimulated a wide ranging and detailed debate on the options available for creating a new structure. The principles behind the proposals have received strong support as has the strengthening of the local and national levels with the setting up of Local Health Boards and the reorganisation of the NHS Directorate. There is also clear support for the development of the public health function across the NHS and with its partners. Closer and stronger partnerships with local government, the voluntary sector and other partners are also seen as crucially important for the future.

10. However, concerns have been expressed about the complexity of the proposals particularly in relation to the concept of Consortia and the commissioning of secondary care services. This is seen as clouding accountabilities and creating an additional level of bureaucracy. Some have also seen the opportunity for the creation of health service organisations which incorporate NHS Trusts and LHBs in the first instance as a long term goal.

11. There is a recognition of the importance of primary care as a foundation of our vision for the future and, on this basis. A number of responses here advocated the strengthening of primary care leadership in the NHSD. Similar observations have also been advanced by groups and individuals with particular interests in the fields of child protection and mental health.

The Way Forward

12. The range and depth of the issues raised through the consultation underlines the importance of very careful reconsideration of the original proposals and, where necessary, a modification of structures to reflect the advice I have been given. Reviewing all the comments received is a very substantial exercise

and I need to thoroughly analyse the issues before finally coming to my conclusion on the way forward.

13. I will be in a position to announce my conclusion on the future structure at the meeting of the Committee on Wednesday 7th November 2001 followed by a plenary debate the following week.

Jane Hutt

Minister for Health & Social Services