

**Minutes**

**Date:** Friday 8 December 2000

**Time:** 10.00am to 1.00pm

**Venue:** 'Y Ganolfan' , Porthmadog

**Attendance**

*Members*

Ann Jones, Chair	Vale of Clwyd
Tom Middlehurst	Alyn and Deeside
Alun Pugh	Clwyd West
Peter Rogers	North Wales
Janet Ryder	North Wales
Karen Sinclair	Clwyd South
Dafydd Wigley	Caernarfon
Ieuan Wyn Jones	Ynys Môn
Rhodri Morgan, First Minister	Cardiff West
<i>North Wales Health Authority</i>	
Ms Enid Rowlands	Chair
Mrs Pauline Wood	Deputy Chair
David Hands	Chief Executive
Dr Peter Higson	Director of Development & Performance Management
Mr Geoff Lang	Director of Finance
Dr Sandra Payne	Director of Health Policy and Public Health
Mr Arfon Thomas	Director of Primary Care Development
<i>Secretariat</i>	
Adrian Crompton	Committee Clerk
Howell Rees	Deputy Committee Clerk

**Item 1: Introduction and apologies**

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked 'Y Ganolfan' for their hospitality. She

also welcomed Rhodri Morgan to the meeting in his role as minister with responsibility for the co-ordination of government policy in North Wales. Apologies had been received from Dafydd Elis Thomas, Alison Halford, Gareth Jones, Christine Humphreys and John Marek.

## **Item 2: Report back from previous meeting - NWR 07-00(p1)**

2.1 The Chair said that at its meeting on 27 October the Committee agreed that letters should be sent to:

- the Chair of the Local Government and Housing Committee drawing attention to the list of funding initiatives linked to crime reduction;
- the Minister for Finance and Communities setting out the main points of the discussion on Communities First; and,
- the First Minister on electrifying the North Wales mainline.

2.2 Replies had been received to these letters. The Chair invited comments and questions and the following were raised:

- the Committee noted that the Local Government and Housing Committee was to consider crime reduction at its meeting the following week;
- with reference to the electrification of the North Wales mainline it was important to note diesel was a non-renewable energy source whereas electricity could be provided from renewable sources. The First Minister told the Committee that options for upgrading the line were being considered on value for money grounds. He added that the European Commission preferred Objective 1 funding to be used for job creation rather than infrastructure projects;
- it was suggested that the Chair should write to Virgin Trains registering the Committee's dissatisfaction with the withdrawal of the Intercity service from North Wales to London. The withdrawal of the service had a detrimental effect on travelers from North Wales and the Irish Republic, on industry and the public service. If it persisted for any length of time, it would have an effect on tourism. The letter should ask for clarification of reasons the service was withdrawn and for assurances about the full re-establishment of the service as quickly as possible. The Committee agreed with this proposal;
- members of the Committee were invited to support the statement of opinion on withdrawal of direct rail services from North Wales to London.

### *Action point*

2.3 The Chair to write to Virgin Trains as proposed. (A copy of the letter that issued is at annex 1)

## **Item 3: Health Improvement – NWR 07-00(p2)**

3.1 The Chair welcomed Enid Rowlands and her team to the meeting. David Hands made a short presentation which set out the main issues facing the Authority. Click [here](#) to view the presentation.

3.2 The Chair invited comments and questions from the Committee. The following points were raised.

3.3 The Health Authority had indicated it was concerned that it might lose out under the current review of resource allocation. What might the effect be and was the First Minister able to provide an assurance that North Wales would not lose out as a result of any changes?

- David Hands said that under current arrangements the five health authorities in Wales received an allocation for its population weighted by age and relative deprivation. It was possible that the revised formula might take more account of deprivation. The Authority accepted the importance of social deprivation but was concerned that it could lose out if the revised formula emphasised urban deprivation factors. North Wales had a higher than average population of older people and the Authority faced higher costs in delivering services in a large rural area. It needed to invest in its service just to keep up with increasing demand due to an ageing population, improving technology and rising expectations;
- Geoff Lang said that the terms of reference for the review included consideration of the extra cost of delivering rural services but the weighting given to this factor was not yet known. Although the effect of the review was not yet known but work in 1997 had suggested North Wales would have lost around £13 million had the formula then used in England been applied;
- the First Minister said that reallocating resources to deprived communities would result in transfers within health authorities as well as between them.

3.4 How would mental health services develop over the next three years? There were currently problems with the time being taken to provide psychological reports:

- Peter Higson said that the Authority had a 20% vacancy rate for specialist posts at present. The Authority was continuing to increase investment for Child and Adult Mental Health Services, particularly to improve community support, but the longer term solution was to increase the number of people being trained.

3.5 How did the Health Authority see the balance between ensuring access to services for local people while centralising some services in the main hospitals? Did the Authority have agreements in place with health authorities and trusts in England who provided services for North Wales patients?

- David Hands said that the "Access and Excellence" report dealt with this issue. He argued that specialisation was not the same as centralisation and that a balance needed to be struck. Highly technical services, such as heart and neuro surgery, were only viable when based in centres with large surrounding populations but there was still scope for regional centres such as the cancer unit in Glan Clwyd. On the other hand some specialties, such as diabetes, were increasingly being delivered in the community. The Authority had service level agreements in place with English authorities and trusts.

3.6 The point was again made that too many services were being centralised rather than being provided in the community. Had the Authority studied the network of services to ensure that, where possible, treatments were delivered locally? The Authority was also asked to confirm that the provision of community hospitals would allow many services to be brought closer to communities;

- David Hands said it was not correct that services were being centralised. The Authority's policy was of appropriate provision to make the best use of the skills and resources available. NHS Direct, a 24 hour helpline, was now available in North Wales for people to consult. North Wales had a higher than average ratio of general practitioners and the average list size was 1,500 although the population was sparse in some areas. Community hospitals took different forms in different areas but needed a population base of 40,000 to 50,000 to be viable. North Wales was well served with three district general hospitals as well as one in Chester that served many people from the area. Some specialist services were also provided in North Wales.

3.7 The decision to retain community health councils in Wales was welcomed. It was suggested that more people with experience of social services and residential care should be appointed to CHCs and fewer local authority members:

- Pauline Wood said that now seemed a good opportunity to review community health councils' structure and make up.

3.8 Urban communities also wanted services provided locally and the Authority's development of community hospitals was welcomed. It was also important to maintain cross border services in North East Wales. The Authority had decided to close Dobshell, Meadowlea and Trefelin Hospitals but the large community around Buckley needed improved facilities:

- Peter Higson said that a review of community services in Buckley would be complete in 12 months.

3.9 Smoking was one of the main killers in Wales and the UK. What were the figures for smoking related deaths in North Wales and were smoke free zones a good thing?

- Sandra Payne said that smoking was the main public health issue facing the NHS. She welcomed the ban on tobacco advertising and felt more could be done by the NHS to support individuals in stopping smoking.

3.10 The Chair then invited comments and questions from the public. The following points were raised.

3.11 Dr Gill Wade, Celtic Connections said that it was often difficult to obtain basic health service information that should be in the public domain. For example, information on prescribed drugs was not publicly available in Wales but could be easily accessed through the internet in England. Consequently, it was more difficult for potential financial savings to be identified in Wales. It was also difficult to

obtain other basic information such as copies of health circulars;

- the First Minister said he had not heard of this problem before and would ensure that officials remedied it. Freedom of information was one of the Assembly's flagship policies and he was concerned about the points raised in the question;
- David Hands said that out of a budget of £600 million, the Authority spent £90 million on General Practice drugs. It was therefore essential that the drugs budget was used effectively. He was aware of some recent data processing difficulties experienced by Health Solutions Wales, the all Wales body that monitored data on prescribed drugs and also pointed out that it would be difficult to provide public access to a live database; David St George, Celtic Connections replied that it was not only difficult to obtain recent information but also historical data that should be a matter of public record.

3.12 Dr Carl Clowes said that services should be provided in the community. Too many patients were being treated at Ysbyty Gwynedd when they could be treated in more appropriate facilities. Managed Clinical Networks (MCNs) had an important role to play in North Wales:

- Sandra Payne said that MCNs were the cornerstone of the Authority's plans for ensuring high standards of care. She agreed that there was scope for developing community hospitals but there was a need to improve communication between specialists in different institutions if MCNs were to function. Manpower problems in some areas meant it was necessary to make the best use of resources and MCN could help;
- Enid Rowlands said that a lack of skills affected other areas than health services and was an issue she wanted to address in a holistic way when she took up her appointment as chair of the National Council for Education and Training in Wales.

3.13 Jeff Evans, Holyhead Town Council agreed that services were increasingly being provided at the main hospitals. Holyhead Hospital did not treat children and provided little more than respite care and a minor injuries service. For anything else people had to travel to Bangor which was expensive. He urged the Authority to upgrade local services rather than centralise them on main hospitals:

- Sandra Payne said it was necessary to strike a balance between the quality of services and where they were provided. There were, for example, sound clinical and safety reasons for not treating children in minor casualty units.

3.14 Councillor Trevor Howorth, Flintshire County Council expressed support for improved services in the community. He asked for clarification of the role of community health councils, local health groups and local health alliances:

- Enid Rowlands said community health councils did an important job providing the patients' voice. The Authority worked closely with them and she was pleased they were being retained in Wales;

- David Hands said that local health groups were sub-committee's of the health authority whose job was assess local needs and ensure that local services were responsive to these. Local health alliances were local authority led bodies seeking to ensure that all local services – housing, education, environmental quality etc – contributed to improving public health. Community health councils provided a voice for the concerns of health service users.

3.15 Ian Scott, Dwyfor Intensive Intervention Unit and North Wales branch of Unison asked if the cleaning, catering and other support staff in the proposed new community hospital in Porthmadog would be employed by the public sector or provided as part of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) project. He also referred to £7 million ring fenced funding that had been provided in England for specialist nurse training and asked if the Assembly proposed to provide funding on a similar basis to tackle skill shortages in Wales:

- Peter Higson said the Authority had consulted on its strategy for providing community hospitals. The strategy sought to develop better core local services to support the district general hospitals and allow devolution of services to local units. The North West Wales Trust was responsible for the Porthmadog Community Hospital and was taking advice from the Treasury on PFI projects. The scheme was expected to be advertised in the European Journal early next year and it would not be possible to say how support staff would be employed until the tenders were considered;
- on training David Hands said that the Authority would not welcome central ring fencing of funding because it would reduce the flexibility of the Authority to respond to local needs.

3.16 Elfed Roberts, Penrhyndeudraeth Community Health Council said that the site selected for the Porthmadog Hospital was subject to flooding and this would add significantly to the costs:

- Peter Higson said that the project team were satisfied that the site was safe and although there were extra costs for drainage works they were not excessive.

3.17 Dorothy Morris, Royal College of Nursing asked how the Authority would cope with winter pressures:

- over the last few years a North Wales Task Team had been brought together involving the Health Authority, NHS Trusts, local authorities and the private sector. This arrangement was working well and helped to stop unnecessary admissions and allow early release from hospital.

3.18 Barry Latham, Chief Executive, North Wales Residential and Nursing Homes Association confirmed that the North Wales Health Authority and private sector worked well together on emergency pressures and he felt the independent sector made an important contribution. He welcomed the strategic planning framework being developed by the Authority but said that local authorities were placing fewer people in nursing homes and beds were being de-registered. This made it more difficult to meet the increased demand created by emergency pressures:

- Peter Higson agreed that the de-registration of beds in residential nursing homes was a concern. A planning forum had been set up to consider the role of the private sector and its relationship with the public sector.

3.19 Councillor David Barratt, Flintshire County Council and a member of Clwyd Community Health Council expressed concern about ‘healthcare by postcode’. As an example, he said that hearing aids supplied in Wrexham were better than those provided in Deeside:

- Sandra Payne said the Authority was working to prevent postcode prescribing. The NHS could make a range of equipment available and differences in provision between areas needed to be investigated.

3.20 Ann Shield, SCOVO asked how much of the £3 million available for the resettlement programme for people with learning disabilities would be spent on resettling residents of Bryn y Neuadd Hospital.

- Peter Higson said that the £3 million would be spent next year on resettling patients from Hensol Hospital. The following year £12 million would be available for the resettlement programme and it should be possible to complete the resettlement of Bryn y Neuadd residents. A meeting with Assembly officials was to be held in the New Year;
- Peter Higson said plans were being developed with local authorities. He agreed that it was a pity that the original resettlement plans had been suspended.

3.21 Dr Michael Toman, Headmaster of Ysgol Plas Bron Dyffryn thanked the Assembly for the £2 million recently provided to upgrade the school. He said that autistic children benefited from investment at an early age and asked for better long term planning to fund services for them. He also called for a strategy on low incidence disabilities and learning difficulties:

- Peter Higson said that £450,000 had been spent on improving access to mental health services for children and adolescents in North Wales and agreed a longer term strategy was required. He offered to speak to Dr Toman after the meeting.

3.22 Rhiannon Efans of Bethesda Community Council was concerned about standards of care in hospitals. She felt that the standard of basic services were higher in smaller, community facilities than in large, general hospitals.

3.23 The Chair thanked the Health Authority team for the presentation and answering questions.

#### **Item 4: First Minister**

4.1 The Chair welcomed the First Minister to the meeting. The First Minister said that the discussion on health improvement and the involvement of the public demonstrated the value of the regional committees. The Chair then invited questions.

4.2 Roger Williams Ellis said he ran a forestry business on 200 hectares employing 16 men. He outlined the importance of forestry, the current difficulties faced by the industry and the difference between public support available to agriculture and forestry. the First Minister said he was not an expert on forestry but understood much of the present difficulty was due to low priced imports especially from the Baltic countries. He favoured the balanced focus on both hard and softwood proposed by the Forestry Commission's woodland strategy and argued that initiatives such as Coed Cymru, to add value to our timber resource, represented the way forward.

4.3 Huw Lewis, Welsh Language Society thanked the First Minister for agreeing to meet the Society next month. He asked why the First Minister had not supported the Welsh Language Act in 1993 but had now changed his mind?

- the First Minister explained that the Welsh Language Act introduced by the Conservative Government did not apply to the private sector. He had been concerned that public sector organisations that were being privatised would not be covered and that the Act's provisions would then apply to an ever shrinking public sector. Since then the Welsh Language Board had worked closely with the private sector on voluntary schemes with much success.

4.4 Eleri Carrog felt that there should be a Welsh tick box on the 2001 census form. There was all party concern about the issue in the Assembly but action was needed and she asked the First Minister to be firm in arguing for a Welsh tick box:

- the First Minister agreed that there should be a Welsh tick box but it was now a matter of what it was practical to achieve. Assembly Members and Members of Parliament had not foreseen the problem until the protests had started in August at the National Eisteddfod. The printing of the forms had started in late July and it was now very difficult to make changes but he was exploring practical possibilities with the new head of the Government Statistical Service.

4.5 Neil Crumpton, Friends of the Earth Wales raised the fact that Conwy County Borough Council had decided to sell off playing fields at the John Bright School in Llandudno for a retail development by Wal Mart.:

- the First Minister said he was unable to comment on the specific case which should be taken up with the council.

4.6 Jeff Evans, Holyhead Town Council referred to reports in the press that 5,000 people were dying each year in the UK as a result of MRSA (methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus). He asked what was being done to tackle MRSA and make better use of the money:

- the First Minister said many people carried the MRSA infection on their skin but it became a problem only when it gained access to the body, for example through a cut and especially deep



inside the body after surgery. He agreed, therefore, that infection control in hospital especially in surgery wards was of the utmost importance.

4.7 Elen Helen ap Owen, a pupil at Ysgol Eifionydd, Porthmadog asked if the Assembly had enough powers to look after Wales' interests:

- the First Minister said that the Queen's speech included one specific Welsh Bill which would extend the powers of the independent children's commissioner for Wales. There were four other Bills which would include specific Welsh provisions on issues such as health and housing. The First Minister said he would like to see a Welsh slot in the Queen's speech every year.

4.8 Councillor Trevor Howorth, Flintshire County Council was concerned that the use of unemployment statistics in the calculation of revenue support grant disadvantaged areas such as Flintshire where employment was relatively high but wages poor.

- the First Minister said that by many measures the economy of North East Wales was healthy. It lacked some of the most highly paid professional jobs but had a good supply of craft level skilled jobs. Generally, the Revenue Support Grant settlement from the comprehensive spending review was very good for Welsh local government although reworking the distribution formula would inevitably result in winners and losers. If Flintshire did not do as well as some areas, it would still receive extra resources in the settlement, as would all local authorities in Wales.

4.9 Dr Carl Clowes said that difficulties in obtaining detailed health data and the lack of a Welsh tick box on census forms pointed to the need for Wales to have its own registrar general like Scotland and Northern Ireland;

- the First Minister said that the census was not devolved to Wales but he felt that Welsh statistics were generally better and more accessible than in England. He confirmed he would follow up the point made earlier on health data regarding generic prescribing with the two individual complainants.

4.10 Gwyneth Roberts, Citizens Advice Bureaux North Wales made a plea for better funding for the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and asked why it was the responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry:

- the First Minister confirmed the understanding this matter had not been devolved to the Assembly and was for the Department of Trade and Industry.

4.11 Elfed Roberts, Cylch yr Iaith expressed concern about the increasing English content on S4C and Radio Cymru. He asked the First Minister to impress upon both broadcasters the need to follow strict guidelines on providing Welsh services:

- the First Minister said that broadcasting was not a devolved matter although the Assembly obviously had an interest especially in respect of the Welsh language. There was a balance to be struck between purity of the language and popularising what was broadcast.

4.12 Janet Williams, a foster carer said that she had visited the Assembly in Cardiff the day before with a group of children to raise the profile of fostering in Gwynedd. She said that due to a lack of funding a support officer in Bangor was being lost and in future no support would be available in the Welsh language. There were also problems in recruiting foster carers in Gwynedd:

- the First Minister said that fostering had an important role to play as, generally, children were better off in a foster home than an institution. He invited Janet Williams to write to him about the loss of the support officer so that he could follow it up.

4.13 Eryl Jones Williams of Dolgellau Town Council said the ambulance service provided an important service in North Wales. Could an assurance be given that there would be no cuts to its funding?

- the First Minister said he was unable to give an assurance that funding would never be cut but he said he was not aware of any plans that would have that effect;
- Enid Rowlands added that the Ambulance Services had received a share of the extra resources for health this year. However 90% of its work was non-urgent and it was important to make the best use of highly qualified staff and expensive equipment.

4.14 Jamie Dawes, a pupil at Ysgol Eifionydd asked if there should be one British football team:

- the First Minister said he was totally against the idea which was contrary to 130 years of footballing history.

4.15 Richard Singer, Ynys Môn Citizen's Advice Bureau asked if the Assembly had plans to tackle discrimination in industrial tribunals:

- the First Minister said that this was not a devolved matter and was for the Department of Employment.

4.16 Fiona Jones, a mature student, asked what the Assembly's policy was on student finance:

- the First Minister said the Assembly did not have the powers to abolish student fees as the Scottish Parliament had done. It could however help in overcoming student hardship in other ways. He said that the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, Jane Davidson, had begun a review on improving access to further and higher education that would report in the Spring.

4.17 Councillor David Barratt, Flintshire County Council asked about funding for schools. He felt that

extra money promised had not been received:

- the first Minister explained that extra funding for schools was being channelled through local authorities in Wales who could take strategic view of need.

4.18 Gareth Williams, Chair of Porthmadog Town Council asked if anything could be done about the decision by taken by John Prescott to approve the Ffestiniog Railway Company's planning application to extend the railway across the road in Porthmadog:

- the First Minister said that the decision had been taken and nothing could be done now to change it. He hoped that the railway would prove to be an advantage to the tourist industry in the area.

### **Item 5: Minutes of the 27 October meeting**

5.1 The Committee adopted the minutes of the meeting of 27 October.

5.2 The Chair said that it was proposed that the next meeting would be held in Flintshire to consider services provided for young people in North Wales . Given the subject the meeting would be held in a school or college. This was agreed. Members were asked to contact the committee clerk if they had suggestions for future business by the committee.

5.3 The Chair closed the meeting thanking Porthmadog Town Council for their hospitality.

**Secretariat**

**December 2000**

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Annex 1



Chris Green Esq  
Chief Executive  
Virgin Trains  
Euston Station  
West Wing Offices  
LONDON NW1 2HS

Pwyllgor Rhanbarth y Gogledd  
North Wales Regional Committee

Bae Caerdydd / Cardiff Bay  
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19 December 2000

## **VIRGIN TRAINS: HOLYHEAD TO LONDON SERVICE**

I write on behalf of the National Assembly's North Wales Regional Committee regarding the service between Holyhead and London. The Committee is made up of all Assembly Members in North Wales.

The Committee wishes to express its total dissatisfaction with the withdrawal of the service from North Wales to London. Whilst recognising that the service has now been partially reinstated, its withdrawal had a detrimental effect not only on travellers from North Wales but also those from the Irish Republic, and so undermined the ferry service between Dublin and Holyhead and the port of Holyhead itself. In the longer term, the failure to provide a reliable through service between North Wales and London would also have an effect on industry, public services and tourism in North Wales.

The Committee would like to know the precise reasons why the service was withdrawn, while other services, although affected by the present difficulties, continued. The Committee also wishes to see the service between Holyhead and London fully reinstated as a matter of urgency and asks for an assurance that this will be done as quickly as possible.

I should be grateful for a reply before the Committee's next meeting on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2001.

Yours sincerely

**Ann Jones**  
Chair, North Wales Regional Committee