



Mark Isherwood MS
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7 August 2023

Dear Mark,

At the Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister on 7 July you raised a number of matters, which I said I would write with further information.

Community pharmacy network and the electronic prescription service

In Wales and England, the number and location of NHS pharmacies is controlled through a system of market entry based on the pharmaceutical needs of the local communities. In 2004, following recommendations made by the then Office for Fair Trading (OFT), a series of exemptions to the market entry requirements were introduced in England, these included an exemption which allowed wholly mail order or internet pharmacies – so called Distance Selling Pharmacies (DSPs) – to provide NHS services without having to demonstrate it was necessary to meet the pharmaceutical needs of the communities in which they were located. It was and remains a condition of the exemption that such pharmacies are closed to the public and operate exclusively at a distance from patients.

In Wales, the Welsh Government rejected the OFT's recommendations because of the very real concerns expressed by pharmacy contractors and Community Pharmacy Wales (CPW) about the impact of DSPs would have on the viability of the community pharmacy network, which at the time relied almost exclusively on dispensing prescriptions as its main source of income.

While we recognise the benefits offered by DSPs in terms of home delivery of prescribed medicines, there is nothing in the Welsh system, which precludes a pharmacy from offering mail order or internet pharmacy services. However, in Wales, pharmacies must do so while also being open to the public and serving the pharmaceutical needs of the communities in which they are located. Requiring the continued presence of accessible pharmacies in our high streets rather than in closed warehouses on industrial parks is critical to local economies and to the health and wellbeing of communities across Wales.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The introduction of the electronic prescription service in Wales will mean people can nominate any pharmacy in Wales or England to dispense their prescription. This may result in a change in the way in which some people's prescriptions are dispensed – some people may choose to have their prescriptions dispensed by pharmacies in England and some people in England may choose to have their prescriptions dispensed at pharmacies in Wales.

The evidence shows that after 20 years, DSPs dispense only a small percentage of prescriptions in England and we are unaware of any evidence demonstrating a negative impact on more traditional pharmacies. Furthermore, we are investing a record level of funding in the community pharmacy sector, which is guaranteed even if the number of prescriptions dispensed by pharmacies in Wales should decrease. Our reforms to NHS contractual arrangements mean pharmacies now receive significant income for providing an increasing range of additional clinical services. These services, including Wales' national pharmacist independent prescribing service, ensure we realise the benefits of pharmacists training and expertise, take pressure off GPs and other NHS services, and improve access to high-quality care for people across Wales.

2 Sisters

You asked about the future of the site and if the Welsh Government had been engaging with Ambition North Wales.

The site remains on the market with an asking price of £2,250,000 for three plots. We are aware of private sector interest in the three plots but are unable to reveal further details as there are commercial sensitivities, which need to be respected.

The North Wales Growth Deal is owned and delivered by Ambition North Wales which is made up of the six North Wales local authorities and academic partners. They will consider and decide on individual projects.

Wrexham Vision Impairment Group and Wrexham Gateway

I have shared the comments you made about the importance of including the lived experience of people with visual impairments during the planning and design phases of projects with the Wrexham Gateway project board and the Welsh Government's Equality and Human Rights Division.

Thank you for raising these matters with me at the Committee and for the opportunity to pursue them further. I hope the information set out above will be useful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Drakeford". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

MARK DRAKEFORD

cc David Rees MS - Chair of the Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister
David.Rees@senedd.wales