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**Llywodraeth Cymru**  
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Russell George MS  
Chair  
Health and Social Care Committee  
Senedd

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18 June 2024

Dear Russell

Thank you for your letter 22 May seeking an update about how the Welsh Government is working with health boards to improve patient communication and develop local services to offer support to people while they wait, as highlighted in the committee's report *Waiting well? The impact of the waiting times backlog on people in Wales*.

In our national planned care recovery plan: [Our programme for transforming and modernising planned care and reducing waiting lists in Wales](#), which was published in 2022, we made a clear commitment to improving communication and supporting people while waiting.

In August 2023, we launched our national [3Ps Policy: Promote, prevent and prepare for planned care](#), which demonstrates how we have translated the commitment into a dedicated policy and delivery plan. This is a commitment to change the way everyone is supported on referral to treatment pathways in Wales.

I enclose a supporting evidence report demonstrating how my officials have been working with health boards to deliver the policy and how it reflects the recommendations the committee raised in its report.

Yours sincerely,

**Eluned Morgan AS/MS**  
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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.

## Evidence Paper - June 2024.

### Waiting well? The impact of the waiting times backlog on people in Wales

#### Introduction

1. The Welsh Government welcomes the opportunity to provide an update about the progress made in developing a model to provide better information and support to those waiting for secondary care. *(This report covers recommendations 1,2,3,9,11,12,16,17 and 20).*
2. Even though, consistent progress is being made to reduce waiting times, more needs to be done to ensure people receive timely care and treatment.
3. To aid recovery, the NHS needs to transform the way it delivers planned care to ensure sustainable services in the future. The Welsh Government has commissioned the Strategic Programme for Planned Care (in the NHS Executive) to support health boards to deliver the transformation and modernisation agenda.
4. Delays in care can significantly impact on the health and wellbeing of the population. The Welsh Government is working with health boards and the third sector to deliver phase one of the [3Ps Policy: Promote, prevent and prepare for planned care](#) (published in August 2023). This will ensure those waiting for treatment in Wales are better informed about and supported to maximise their health and well-being outcomes.

#### Background

5. Since March 2020, the number waiting for planned care services has increased markedly. In March 2020, a total of 474,120 were on an open RTT pathway in Wales and 29,221 had been waiting over 36 weeks. By March 2022 this had increased to 725,897 and 258,432 respectively. In March 2024, a total of 768,899 were waiting on an open RTT pathway with 251,287 waiting over 36 weeks. More needs to be done to increase the pace of recovery.
6. The Welsh Government has set out clear expectations to health boards regarding the productivity and efficiency improvements required. A new Planned Care Policy Framework and Plan are being developed to support health boards to recover and transform. The Welsh Government has commissioned the Strategic Programme for Planned Care in the NHS Executive to support health boards to implement these changes and to ensure sustainable services for the future.
7. As services implement plans to reduce waiting times, the Welsh Government is supporting health boards to implement new approaches to move from passive waiting to opportunities to pro-actively prepare for treatment, actively supporting people while they wait.

**Enabling health boards to deliver phase one of the 3Ps Policy: the Waiting Well Single Point of Contact (SPOC) Service and better communication about waiting times.**

8. As transformation and modernisation of services continue, progress is being made to better inform and support people waiting for planned care. A clear commitment was made in [Our programme for transforming and modernising planned care in Wales and reducing the waiting lists \(gov.wales\)](#) that more effective communication and support would be offered.
9. To support improved communication, national data on waiting times by speciality at each health board is now available on the national 111 platform [NHS 111 Wales - Planned Care](#). This provides average waiting times and an estimated longest wait based on people waiting on the last 10% of a pathway. While this cannot tell individuals their own personal waiting time, it does provide more timely information about waits and the variances across speciality and health boards. The website also has links to sign post individuals to important digital information on how they can be supported to stay well while they wait. [NHS 111 Wales - Waiting Well](#). The site also has links for carers [NHS 111 Wales - Carers](#).
10. The Welsh Government has co-produced the [3Ps Policy: Promote, prevent and prepare for planned care](#) with health and social services leads, NHS, third sector and patient representative groups. The policy was announced in August 2023.
11. A phased approach to implementing the 3Ps Policy is being taken:
  - Phase one – All health boards to implement a single point of contact to support people waiting for planned care. This is based on the lessons learned from Hywel Dda University Health Board's waiting list support service, which was initially piloted during the pandemic. This service is now fully embedded as a business-as-usual model.
  - Phase two – Extend the offer to earlier in the pathway, on referral.
12. Since publication, the Welsh Government has worked with the NHS to deliver the waiting well single point of contact at each health board. The aim is to provide high-quality, person-centred information, advice and support to promote healthy lifestyles, prevent worsening health and deconditioning and to actively prepare people for treatment and recovery.
13. £6.65m has been allocated from the planned care transformation fund between 2023-24 to 2025-26 to enable health boards to implement the single point of contact service and maximise once-for-Wales development opportunities.

## **Hywel Dda University Health Board Waiting List Support Service**

14. The Hywel Dda pilot initially provided information and support to all those waiting for orthopaedic treatment. The service has been expanded to include people waiting in all specialities and at all stages.
15. Evaluation of the service shows that since the service was implemented:
  - Primary care has reported fewer people returning for appointments relating to their secondary care pathway wait.
  - Average length of stay has reduced by two days.
  - People reported improved lifestyle choices, including engagement with smoking cessation and weight loss programmes.
  - Satisfaction with the service is positive and complaints relating to waiting times have fallen by 25%.
  - The number of last-minute postponement of procedures because someone is not fit for treatment has reduced by 33%.
16. The service demonstrates how high-quality tailored support can improve health and well-being outcomes, reduce clinical risk, reduce postponed procedures by a third, reduce length of stay and improve patient experience.
17. All health boards will have a waiting well single point of contact service by summer 2024 based on the learning from Hywel Dda UHB. People will be able to access person-centred information, advice and practical support to empower them to better self-manage their condition and actively prepare for treatment and recovery.
18. Working with health boards, the third sector and patient groups, resources have been coproduced to promote equity of access including:
  - A Waiting Well Patient Charter which sets out the standards people can expect in accessing the waiting well offer.
  - A national induction and training programme to support single point of contact service staff to deliver safe, quality, person-centred care.
  - Clinically-approved standardised operating procedures to facilitate safe practice and timely escalation.
  - The combined waiting well patient-reported outcome and experience measure (PROM and PREM) – a standardised holistic assessment which will be integrated into the patient treatment pathway to support individualised care and identify deteriorating health and facilitate timely reprioritisation.
  - National and local resources (digital and non-digital) to promote communication, engagement, and public awareness of the importance of waiting well and where to seek support.
19. Once-for-Wales approaches will be maximised to capitalise on economy of scale opportunities and reduce health inequalities.

## **Delivering person-centred care and support**

20. Effective preparation for treatment from the start of the pathway is an important part of prudent delivery of high-quality person-centred and outcome-focused care.
21. The waiting well PROM/PREM measures will facilitate an individualised support plan to empower people to better self-manage their condition and prepare for treatment to maximise their health outcomes.
22. People will be supported to complete a waiting well combined PROM and PREM to identify their individual needs and level of risk associated with their condition. This will be integrated into the treatment pathway and repeated, as a minimum every six months to ensure the support offered remains in line with current level of need and to provide timely identification of deterioration of symptoms to enable services to manage those risks, including reprioritisation.
23. The waiting well PROM/PREM will be integrated into the patient treatment pathway and supported by a data standard to ensure consistent implementation, recording, and reporting across all health boards.
24. Integration with the new national PROMs platform is in progress to enable communication and information sharing across teams and provide seamless care for patients whilst reducing the need for completing multiple PROMs.
25. Information and support will be made available to families and carers in line with patient confidentiality and consent policies and processes.
26. All waiting well single point of contact service staff will have access to bespoke directories of services relating to relevant local and national information, advice and support to help people to wait well and what actions to take to prepare for treatment. Support will be tailored in accordance with the assessed level of need and individual preference and will include:
  - Early screening pre-optimisation and pre-habilitation support for people assessed with higher risks and more complex needs which can be delivered on hospital sites and in community venues. For example, Cardiff and Vale UHB pre-habilitation and rehabilitation programmes delivered in community leisure centres.
  - Virtual programmes which can be accessed from home. For example, Hywel Dda's virtual orthopaedic pre-habilitation programme.
  - Signposting to national resources and community and third sector support.

## **Promoting awareness and effective communication with those waiting for care**

27. Promoting awareness and communication is being supported by a communication and engagement strategy, toolkit and national campaign to raise awareness of the importance of waiting well and where to seek information on waiting times and support to prepare for treatment.
28. Different formats and bilingual resources are being co-produced with health boards and partners to ensure accessibility to information and support based on

individual language needs, sensory needs and preferences.

29. All resources are being developed by a national group to maximise shared learning opportunities and reduce duplication across the health boards.
30. Resources being developed will explain the importance and benefits of Waiting Well and how to access the local support and include:
  - Waiting Well video - [Bing Videos](#)
  - Waiting Well PROM/PREM video to promote understanding of the importance of completing the assessment and where to seek support if help is required with completion.
  - Waiting Well landing pages in all health boards in line with the national 3Ps Waiting Well Landing Pages Minimum Specification.
  - Hospital letters which include the single point of contact details, link and/or QR code to enable access to support.
  - Bilingual leaflets and posters.
31. Hywel Dda UHB is also piloting alternative approaches, including local newspaper adverts, local radio adverts and adverts/posters displayed on bus stops, especially in the more deprived/harder to reach areas.
32. Videos will be posted on Welsh Government and NHS social media platforms as well as displayed in hospital and primary/community care waiting rooms.
33. Work continues with Welsh Government and health board communication leads to develop consistent national and local messaging and information and explore alternative ways of engaging with all demographics in Wales.

### **Evaluating the impact of the 3Ps Policy**

34. Work is being progressed with Digital Health and Care Wales standards colleagues to develop a data standard to record and report on single point of contact activity and outcomes consistently across Wales. This will be supported by system changes.
35. This standard will enable Welsh Government to monitor progress in delivering the 3Ps Policy, to benchmark activity and outcomes and identify areas of good practice.
36. It is expected that data will be provided by all health boards from September 2024 to facilitate ongoing progress monitoring and an initial evaluation of the impact of phase one of the policy in early 2025/26.
37. A data standard is also being developed for the Waiting Well PROM which is being piloted in Hywel Dda. This standard and supporting system changes will enable data to evaluate the impact of the information and support provided and patients' satisfaction with the service.
38. To evaluate the delivery of targeted support and signposting to people living in more deprived areas to reduce the health inequalities gap, the Waiting Well PROM will include demographic data including postcode, gender, age and ethnicity.

39. Dashboards will be developed in line with identified key performance indicators for both SPOC activity and outcomes and the Waiting Well Combined PROM/PREM.