



Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru Older People's Commissioner for Wales

Vaughan Gething AM
Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Services
Welsh Government
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Rydym yn croesawu
galwadau yn Gymraeg

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Dear Cabinet Secretary,

Winter Delivery Plans 2018-19

I am writing following your statement in Plenary on 13 November, in which you provided an update for Members on the work being undertaken to ensure that health and care services are better placed to cope with the pressures they are likely to face during the winter months.

I welcome the fact that the Welsh Government recognises there were significant issues and challenges last year, as set out in the evaluation report – Winter 2017-18: An Evaluation of the Resilience of Health and Care Services – that was published in October, and that you have scrutinised the winter preparedness plans produced by Health Boards.

However, further clarity on a number of points would be useful so I can better understand the work that is being undertaken across Wales to improve the experiences of older people should they need to access health and/or social services during the winter months.

It would also be useful if you could share with me information about how the Winter plans were scrutinised, including the criteria against which their content was assessed.

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.

One of the issues you highlighted in your statement was increased admissions to hospital of older people with complex conditions, something that is also referred to in the evaluation report. Please could you let me know whether any specific action is being taken to prevent these admissions, outside of ongoing work linked to the broader prevention agenda?

Similarly, in your statement you made reference to the Choose Well campaign, which aims to reduce the number of patients visiting A&E when a more suitable alternative service is available. Given that, according to the evaluation report, older people account for 'a disproportionate amount of emergency attendances and admissions', I would be interested to know whether Choose Well campaign messages were targeted specifically at older people and, if so, the ways in which these messages were disseminated.

Your statement also highlighted hospital capacity, something that is closely linked to delayed transfers of care, which can have a significant impact upon older people's health and well-being. Whilst the funding to increase capacity is of course welcome, the evaluation report highlights that interventions to support the domiciliary care market are 'not having the early impact they anticipated' and that, in terms of health, the 'greatest obstacle to a sustained improvement in the level of delayed transfers of care is the shortage of nursing care capacity'. Please could you let me know what specific action has been taken to ensure appropriate levels of domiciliary care staff and nursing care provision to prevent unnecessary delayed transfers of care this year?

Related to this, the evaluation report also states that an improvement that could be achieved for future winters would be an integrated pathway for older people. Please could you let me know what progress has been made in taking this forward, and when the pathway will be finalised and rolled out throughout Wales?

Looking to the longer-term, I would be grateful if you could advise me whether your scrutiny of winter plans is something that will be undertaken annually or was undertaken as a 'one-off' in response to the significant issues last year. Undertaking this kind of scrutiny annually would demonstrate a commitment to ensuring that effective winter planning is undertaken across health and social care services and would

enable issues to be proactively identified and addressed before health and social care services reach a potential crisis point.

Finally, I would also be grateful if you could let me know whether the Welsh Government will be taking any additional action in response to the figures published last week that showed Excess Winter Mortality increased by 84% during 2017-18, with the number of deaths amongst older people increasing significantly.

In terms of the work I am planning on this, I have written to health boards, requesting copies of their winter plans and asking that they share any examples of good practice that could be adopted elsewhere. Upon receipt of this information, I intend to publish a short paper during spring 2019 that reflects on winter preparedness on an all Wales basis from the perspective of older people which I hope health boards and partners will use to shape and develop their plans for 2019-20.

As I am sure you will agree, ensuring that older people can access the health and social care services they may need during the winter months is essential and delivering the right action to prevent the issues seen last winter is a crucial part of this. I therefore look forward to receiving a response from you soon to clarify the queries I have raised above and look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that improvements are delivered on behalf of older people throughout Wales.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Heléna Herklots". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Heléna Herklots CBE
Older People's Commissioner for Wales