

P-06-1350 Re-open Dyfi Ward at Tywyn Hospital now, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 05.12.23

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Comments from the Tywyn Hospital Action Group – December 2023

Thank you for sending the letter from the Interim Chief Executive of Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board to us to respond to. Thank you also for delaying the discussion of our petition until the public meeting had been held.

Over 120 people attended the public meeting held in Tywyn on 21st November, also attended by four senior members of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, and two representatives from 'Llais'. Local speakers conveyed heartfelt, personal experiences to the audience. These included moving accounts about the support and care received by relatives as inpatients when the ward was open, we also heard reports about current problems facing patients and their health services in this area. BCNUHB were asked questions and provided with concerns of the issues relating to the closure of the ward. Reference was made to the pioneering work of the late Morgan Vaughan, a renowned councillor from Tywyn, who fought tirelessly for millions to be raised and spent on the hospital to be refurbished and extended, which was opened in 2016. A first-hand account of care in the local community also described what life is like for the most vulnerable and least visible, many of whom would not have been able to attend the meeting. These truthful and hard-hitting reports struck a chord with everyone in the audience. Attached is a compilation of supporting letters and emails the group has received, in support of the campaign, as well as the statements from those that spoke at the meeting.

Disappointingly, at the meeting, BCNUHB staff were unable to follow up on many of the matters that they had stated and discussed at the council meeting they attended in Tywyn in May, which was also joined by many locals. The board reiterated that they wish to work together with the local community on staff recruitment; but had not followed up on many of the initiatives that they had promised in May. The board have said and continue to say that a barrier to recruitment is the availability of suitable accommodation in Tywyn; and yet the community have provided the health board with up-to-date lists of good quality alternative and affordable accommodation, generously offered by locals, and questions were asked at the meeting why these had not been shared with prospective staff. The board had said in May that arranging an attractive package for staff to come to Tywyn was a priority, and although this was reiterated by the board once more at the public meeting, this has not been actioned. Staffing and recruitment have been a challenge, but at the same time, when nurses were appointed from overseas, in August, they were placed in Dolgellau not Tywyn. Training, retaining and promoting staff currently working at the hospital was discussed at the meeting in May, but initiatives have not been carried out. Retention of staff is an issue, when we know that locally based staff have chosen to go to work for other health boards. Once the ward was closed, it was always going to destabilise the situation for Tywyn hospital, not only because the health board is now trying to recruit to a hospital ward that it closed, but that the health board itself is in special measures. No dates for the planned reopening of the ward were provided at the public meeting. After the meeting, many individuals shared and expressed their upset and disappointment that we are no further on with the opening of the ward since it was closed 8 months ago.

Ms Shillibeer's letter to the petitions committee reiterates many of the points covered previously in the group's reply to the petitions committee from September, which still stand. In addition, freedom of information documents show that the board had been planning the closure of the ward since February and had been looking at the reasons why one or other of Dolgellau or Tywyn would have to be closed. These documents also show that only 15 beds at both hospitals were ever considered, despite BCUHB consistently maintaining that Dolgellau have more beds and was a key issue cited in keeping Dolgellau open over Tywyn. Other factors we see that the board looked at were availability of doctors, the distance to and from where staff would have to travel, which of the board's own main hospitals would be affected (Ysbyty Gwynedd Bangor and Wrexham Maelor), the political impact, and the fact that patients being returned to Tywyn come from Bronglais, Abersytwyth, which is in a different health board. No real analysis or references to matters on the effects impacting actual patients were considered. On 28/04/23 BCUHB notes show that 'End of life and hospice care to be considered as an option for beds at Tywyn Hospital' – this reinforces what many locals have said about BCUHB having an alternative plan for our hospital.

Disappointingly, the health board declined to answer questions from the Tywyn Hospital Action Group at their board meeting on 30/11/23, stating that the policy for asking questions is being changed, despite BCUHB's website still saying that the public can ask questions, in writing submitted beforehand. Asking questions of the board, at their full board meetings, has enabled the group to maintain momentum with the campaign and ensures that questions and replies are recorded formally and are available for all to access in the public domain at any time. However, the reply received from the Chair of the health board, the day before the meeting was held, stated:

'We announced previously that we were reviewing the Questions item on the Board agenda and would be replacing it with something that would be more meaningful. I'm hoping this will involve capturing evidence from patient experience – from various sources, including the public – which will then be arranged in themes and evidence presented in a way that will identify issues and outline improvement. I'm hoping that Llais can be involved in this work, and all will be in the public domain. All this is very much work in progress and we hope to include this new approach in our next Board meeting, January 2024. Therefore the series of questions you presented will not be on our agenda for tomorrow's Board Meeting

We understand that you may wish to raise issues, and I repeat my previous statements that you can of course contact us at anytime to request information. We also attended the public meeting in Tywyn recently where there was opportunity to ask questions. I would suggest that an opportunity to discuss any issues directly might be more fruitful and informative. Please let mw know if you wish to consider this'

Announcements of not being able to submit questions had not been received, neither does it say this on the board's own website page relating to questions from the public, see the screenshot attached. The group asked questions in this instance specifically in pursuit of facts and evidence relating to the campaign to reopen the ward, and these questions evolved following the public meeting, because matters were not answered by the health board at the public meeting. The reply also states that questions can be asked at any time, but our questions have not been answered.

These are the questions that were submitted on 24/11/23 to the health board for their meeting of 30/11/23, which remain unanswered:

- Following up from the answer provided at the last meeting, in reference to the appointment of overseas nurses to Dolgellau, and not to Tywyn, why weren't more nurses employed there and then to fulfil all the vacant roles at both Tywyn and Dolgellau? Also how many nurses from overseas have been appointed to Betsi Cadwaladr health board's facilities in total in 2023, and when, and where were those nurses deployed?
We note that at the meeting of Tywyn Town Council in May, attended by BCUHB, the concept of building a community of overseas nurses in Tywyn, offered by BCUHB as a means to alleviate staffing issues at Tywyn hospital was enthusiastically received by locals. If the two overseas nurses were offered the choice to come to Tywyn or Dolgellau, as stated, then were those nurses invited to Tywyn to meet locals and look at the facilities, which BCUHB staff said would happen at the meeting in May?
- Lack of accommodation continues to be used by BCUHB as a barrier to recruitment. However, up to date lists of suitable, affordable and available accommodation have been shared with BCUHB. Why is the health board still saying that accommodation is a problem? At the meeting in May, BCUHB staff also stated that the health board would consider renting properties on behalf of employees, as we know other health boards do. Why is the health board now saying that is not an option?
- Please can you confirm up to date lists of dates of adverts for posts from the last closing date listed in the answer at the last board meeting, which was: 'July 23 - closing date of 16/08/23 - no suitable candidates'. You mention flyers, posters and banners being distributed locally, please can you tell us where these are located. In your reply you also state that leaflets were distributed at the Race the Train event in Tywyn which was held on 18/08/23, when it appears that there were no live adverts. The health board say that they wish to work with the local population on recruitment, and up to date adverts and any other initiatives which were suggested at the meeting in May, need to be shared and implemented. When and how will this happen?
- What training is in place for current staff at bands 2 and 3 to fulfil the roles of higher bands? BCUHB stated in May that they were working on this. In addition, what is the board doing to ensure that the staff they already have are retained at Tywyn? Nurses and doctors, who are still living locally, have gone to work for other health boards.
- Please provide the answer to the question posed at the last meeting, referring to the chart showing the differences in health services in Dolgellau and Tywyn in 2017 to 2023, based on data from Cyngor Gwynedd Scrutiny Committee and Community Healthcare Services from BCUHB, and asking for dates for their reinstatement. You said you would respond in full.
- The group have been asked often about the employment of permanent Doctors at Tywyn Health Centre. This was also a subject asked about at the meeting in May. Please can you confirm the current up to date position regarding Doctors at Tywyn Health Centre? In addition, what plans do you have for Doctors covering the inpatient ward?

BCUHB need to be accountable for the decisions they make on providing healthcare in the Tywyn area. We trust that the petitions committee appreciates the legitimacy of our campaign and uses its influence to ensure that our health services are reinstated to a high standard. We have a right to an efficient and effective health service, which puts patients first.

Yours sincerely
Jane Barraclough
Tywyn Hospital Action Group