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Mr Mike Hedges AM  
Chair of the Petitions Committee

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**Dyddiad / Date:** 6<sup>th</sup> January 2017

Dear Mr Hedges,

**RE: Petition p-04-564: Restoration of Inpatient Beds, Minor Injuries Cover and X-ray Unit to the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital**

Further to your recent letter dated 21<sup>st</sup> December 2016 requesting an update on the latest situation in Blaenau, I have set out below an update for the Committee on the provision of healthcare services in Blaenau Ffestiniog.

In addition, a number of appendices are also enclosed which are:

**Appendix 1** – A review of community health services delivered in Blaenau Ffestiniog in the context of overall service delivery in the locality undertaken by the Locality Lead GP for Meirionnydd.

**Appendix 2** – A table detailing the current service provision in Blaenau by service and also identifying which services will be increased and which are new services to be delivered in the new Centre (Canolfan Goffa Ffestiniog) when it opens in Summer 2017.

**Appendix 3** – Update on improvement plan following HIW inspection of the practice.

a. In-patient Services

In line with national and organisational strategic direction, the Health Board's aim continues to be to care for more people at home or closer to home, avoiding the need for admission to hospital wherever possible.

The decision to close the 12 inpatient beds in Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital and replace with an integrated health and social care centre was taken in January 2013, following a lengthy (18 months) and detailed wide consultation process called '*Health Care in North Wales is Changing*' overseen by the Consultation Institute and approved by the Minister for Health. This process followed the earlier decision taken by the former North West Wales Trust as a result of the Chris Jones' Report. There was absolute support during the consultation for the following three key principles:



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- **Targeted prevention** – taking action to promote good health and prevent illness
- **Enhanced care at home** – providing more care in their own homes for people who might otherwise need to go into hospital
- **Moving care from acute hospitals to the community** – moving services into local areas to bring better results for patients

To ensure the sustainability and consistency of services. *'Health Care in North Wales is Changing'* proposed a greater focus for some community services on a range of ten community hospital hubs across North Wales. Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital (FMH) was not recommended as one of the ten hospital hubs, with Ysbyty Alltwn in Porthmadog being proposed as the local community hospital hub for the North Meirionnydd area.

As envisaged within the Rural Health Plan, the Health Board has sought to provide more holistic approaches to care provision rather than perpetuating a historical model of care. This includes providing more care at home, improved hours of community nursing, greater skill mix in community services, improved integration with social care and a wider range of specialist services delivered locally. The new Centre being constructed in Blaenau Ffestiniog will incorporate all of these principles.

When the decision to close the 12 inpatients beds in FMH was made, it was agreed that six additional beds should be subsequently opened in Ysbyty Alltwn and that Enhanced Care would be rolled out across the locality to care for higher acuity medical patients at home wherever possible. Meirionnydd locality began rolling out enhanced care in September 2013 with additional resources provided in nursing, social services, third sector and admin support. All 6 GP Practices in Meirionnydd are signed up to supporting Enhanced Care and refer patients to the service. The service is valued by patients, carers and GPs (from feedback from CHC questionnaires). Patients appreciate the opportunity to be cared for in their own homes rather than being admitted to hospital. In addition, overnight community nursing has recently been rolled out across Meirionnydd and a full 24/7 community nursing service will follow when recruitment is completed in the next few weeks.

By improving care services (enhanced care and overnight community nursing), providing 6 beds in Alltwn and 3 beds in Bryn Blodau Residential Home in Llan Ffestiniog (for respite, step up/down and enablement), a full range of care options are available for patients who would otherwise have been admitted to hospital. From the 1<sup>st</sup> April this year to date 32 people have received a total of 511 nights care in the three short term care beds in Bryn Blodau.

It is of note that over the last few years, the North Meirionnydd Community Nursing Team has been caring for more and more palliative care patients in their chosen / home environment. Previously these enhanced care and palliative care patients would have been admitted to hospital. Currently there are on average 11 to 12 patients at any one



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time receiving end of life care from the Blaenau Community Nursing Team which is the highest number of all the areas across Meirionnydd.

#### b. X-ray / Diagnostics

4 x-ray sessions used to be provided in Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital per week. The numbers seen were generally half the recommended level for a session and this was unsustainable for the Radiology Service in terms of maintaining staff competences and the efficient use of resources and equipment. Bala Health Centre also lost their X-ray sessions a number of years ago for the same reasons. This was accepted by the Bala GPs as being unsustainable.

An x-ray service is now available 5 days per week in Ysbyty Alltwn. We consider the distance needed to travel for an x-ray is reasonable for Meirionnydd (see appendix 1). It should be noted that the community heart scanning and heart failure service for Gwynedd was first piloted in Meirionnydd and it will be delivered in the new centre in Blaenau.

With regard to minor injuries, a minor injury service is provided by the practice in Blaenau during surgery hours, in line with that provided by GP practices under an enhanced services specification.

Ysbyty Alltwn (12.6 miles away, 21 minutes) has a Minor Injuries Unit (MIU) open from 8.00am until 8.00pm seven days per week (soon to be extended to midnight once staff are recruited). The decision as to whether any particular injury can be managed in the MIU is, however, a clinical decision to be made by the clinician seeing the patient. Hand injuries can often involve hidden damage to tendons or nerves. Increasingly facial injuries are dealt with by specialist maxillofacial teams and it is reasonable for a minor injury clinician to refer on to a DGH if they think that is the right option for a patient. The high speed injuries generated by the mountain bike centre in Blaenau are unlikely to be amenable to treatment in a MIU. Indeed the frequency of an air ambulance response would support this.

When the MIU in Ffestiniog Hospital was operating in the hospital unit, an average of 2 to 3 patients were seen per day and most of those were dressings or venesection for outpatients.

#### c. Quality of Primary Care

Since taking over the management of the GP practice, we have enhanced the range of services provided by recruiting an Advanced Nurse Practitioner to support the GPs on a full time basis, as well as 3 sessions of Advanced Practice Physiotherapy and 4 sessions of Advanced Practice Pharmacist. There is evidence that antibiotic prescribing is reducing and referrals to hospital physiotherapy services reduced through having this local primary care provision. The Quality Outcomes Framework (QOF) achievement was 83% in 2015-16 compared to 64% in the previous year.





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We regularly have three GPs working in the practice daily, and while at present we only have one salaried GP, working for three days, we do have 5 regular locums who work in the practice, who know the patients and provide continuity of care. The practice is currently able to offer a significant number of same day appointments for patients requiring them as well as home visits for patients who clinically require them. We have recently advertised for additional salaried GPs and have offered a post to one of the current locums and we are re-advertising further vacancies in the practice.

The Meirionnydd Cluster Lead has reviewed the annual rate of GP appointments in Blaenau Ffestiniog and has identified that this is currently 2.91 which compares favourably with a similar sized rural practice in the County having a rate of 2.7. If the appointments booked with advanced nurse, physiotherapist or pharmacy practitioners are included, then the rate increase to 3.63 appointments per patient per year. In addition he has confirmed that home visiting rates are similar.

Blaenau Ffestiniog is the only GP practice in Gwynedd where point of care haematology and biochemistry is available and has been for several years. This is an example of technology being rolled out and Blaenau being in the vanguard. The clinical staff in the practice have access to step up and down beds in Bryn Blodau Residential Home, commissioned specifically to support the local population, supported by the community nursing teams.

Due to the extended absence of the practice manager, interim management support has been put into the practice with support from the Primary Care Support Unit and an experienced practice manager from an independent practice in the area as well as targeted support from the Primary Care Development Nurse and Primary Care Development Manager on specific projects and initiatives.

Regular staff meetings take place to discuss a range of issues and Protected Education Time sessions are also held regularly and involve both clinical and non-clinical staff.

Reception staff keep a log of concerns and compliments raised with them and these are discussed at staff meetings. The practice has instigated a suggestion box and plans are in place to undertake a patient access survey in January with the CHC. The Area Engagement Officer will progress the establishment of a Practice Participation Group over the coming months, to provide on-going feedback about current and future services in the area.

An update against the improvement plan published following the HIW inspection of the practice is attached as appendix 3.

#### d. Engagement

The recently appointed West Area Engagement Officer supports the Area Team to co-ordinate the current and future engagement activities in Blaenau Ffestiniog in which she will build and sustain relationships with stakeholders and community groups which will



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include bi-monthly engagement events in Blaenau Ffestiniog to keep all members of the community updated on the new build.

In conjunction with the Health Board's Communications Team, a regular newsletter is now being produced for the wider Blaenau community, with the second edition planned for December 2016. The aim is to keep residents informed of developments, including the new and enhanced services that will be available in the new Health Centre. In addition, a new local Patient Participation Group (PPG) is being planned, initially in Blaenau Ffestiniog that will provide valuable input on specific services to influence local service delivery and future service development. The aim is to focus on a particular service or client group at each meeting. It is proposed that the first priority for this Group will be Older People.

A public engagement event was held in Blaenau at the end of September 2016 providing an opportunity for the local community to see the latest plans for the new centre and discuss the future range of services to be provided. Feedback from the event has resulted in discussions to include a new twice monthly audiology clinic and in some minor design changes to the primary care accommodation. Two further engagement events in November and December 2016 were held in the Blaenau GP Surgery to encourage members of the community to be part of the new PPG. The Surgery events were successful in generating names for the PPG and in giving feedback with regard to the vision for Older People's Services and Outpatient Services as well as giving out information packs on voluntary sector services and organisations. Much praise was given by members of the public on the services offered at the surgery and swift access to appointments and health services.

The date of the Surgery engagement event arranged for November fell on National Carers Rights Day at which the Engagement Officer was also able to highlight the information and support available for unpaid carers in the area.

In addition to the above events, the Engagement Officer is planning to engage with the community in an informal setting by working with the local 'Eurospar' in Blaenau Ffestiniog to set up an information and engagement stand in the retail shop to engage with local residents (between January – March 2017). In the New Year she will also be meeting with the local Secondary School Headmaster and the local childcare provider "(Caban Bach)" to improve engagement with parents and young people in the area too.

The Area Team has been meeting regularly with Gwynedd Council and Blaenau Town Council representatives to update them with regard to the construction progress and planned service provision in the new Centre. They are fully supportive of the plans for Blaenau. There is also ongoing engagement with the third sector through Mantell Gwynedd, who are represented on the Blaenau Project's Service Transition Group and with Age Cymru who are currently running a Living Well Centre in Blaenau.

Finally, the Health Board is currently developing a longer term overarching Clinical Services strategy setting out its strategic vision and how it will provide healthcare for the



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medium to longer term. As part of this strategy we will be developing a programme of engagement across North Wales. This will ensure we continue to learn from feedback and patients' experiences and will inform service improvements for people across the age range.

e. Ensuring adequate level of local service provision

Since the closure of Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital, all services delivered from the site were transferred to the nearby Health Centre in Blaenau and there has been no halt in any service provision. There is an extensive range of services being currently delivered in Blaenau which can be seen in Appendix 2 (see services marked in blue and pink). This also sets out those new services which are planned to be delivered from the new Centre in the future.

Separately, the Meirionnydd Locality Lead has undertaken a review of community health services delivered in Blaenau Ffestiniog in the context of overall service delivery in the locality (Appendix 1). This shows that overall community health service delivery in Blaenau Ffestiniog favours comparably with other small populations in Meirionnydd.

I think it's important to note that we have been responding to specific and general concerns from the Defence Committee relating to health care provision in the Blaenau Ffestiniog area for a number of years.

I trust that this response and the enclosed appendices (detailed at the beginning) provide a helpful update on the situation in Blaenau in terms of giving a comprehensive understanding of how the Health Board has addressed the concerns regarding health care provision raised by the Defence Committee.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gary Doherty'.

**Gary Doherty**  
**Chief Executive**