



Bay Watch

Issue 127 - 11th July 2011

Bay Watch is a weekly political briefing for Welsh NHS Confederation members that is focused on health issues and policies being discussed and debated in the National Assembly for Wales.

If you have any queries about this publication, please contact sian.pugh@welshconfed.org

This Week at the Assembly

Tuesday

Petitions Committee

The committee will consider a petition opposing the closure of Blaina and District Hospital.

Plenary

Questions to the First Minister

The First Minister will be asked to comment on improving public health.

Domestic abuse debate

Assembly Members will debate the progress made in the first year against the priorities of the Right to be Safe Strategy.

First Minister statement

The First Minister will make a statement on the government's legislative programme for 2011 – 2016.

Wednesday

Health and Social Care Committee

The committee will hear from the Minister for Health and Social Services, Lesley Griffiths and the Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services, Gwenda Thomas. Also present will be the Director General

of Health and Social Services, David Sissling and the Director of Social Services Wales, Rob Pickford.

A [briefing paper](#) for the session is available, in which the Minister outlines her priorities for this Assembly term.

For more information on any of this week's business, please see the Assembly Calendar:

<http://senedd.assemblywales.org/mgCalendarWeekView.aspx>

Last Week at the Assembly

Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

Priorities

The Health Minister reiterated many of the Labour manifesto commitments, including improving access to GPs, annual health checks for those aged over 50, improving cancer, cardiac, stroke services and children's health, ambulance response times and reducing unnecessary attendance at emergency departments.

Funding exception committees

An all-Wales policy for individual patient funding requests is being developed.

Management pay

The number of top tier managers was "greatly reduced" following the 2009 reorganisation. The Minister added it

is something she may look at later in the year.

Orthopaedic waiting times

The Minister agreed that physiotherapy plays an important part in reducing the need for orthopaedic surgery.

Health board plans

The Minister said that health boards were required to send detailed plans by the middle of September.

Social services collaboration

The Deputy Minister Gwenda Thomas welcomed the collaboration between Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent social services, adding later that collaboration with health will be the "key to success".

GP surgery hours

The Minister said the "detail is currently being worked out". Ms Griffiths will meet the chair of the BMA Wales GP committee and the Royal College of General Practitioners this week.

Specialist neuromuscular physiotherapy

LHBs in mid and south Wales have agreed to ring-fence and fund one whole-time paediatric specialist neuromuscular physiotherapist. Discussions are ongoing about whether a similar service for adults is needed.

Respite for carers

The Deputy Minister said access to respite care will form an important part of the work on refreshing the carers strategy.

Rural services recruitment

The Minister discussed with the BMA how to attract doctors and medical staff to rural areas. Ms Griffiths reiterated that the rural health plan is "very much alive".

Public awareness of sight tests

The Minister is a "big fan" of public health campaigns and a campaign regarding sight loss is "something that I will consider in due course".

Ophthalmic services in west Wales

The government's optometric adviser has been working with the LHB to bring about a "clear and detailed strategic picture for clinical service delivery for the next five years and beyond".

Mental health

Local health boards have been asked to monitor the use of prescribed drugs for mental health conditions, and will be expected to report progress in reducing inappropriate prescribing.

Read the session in full here:

<http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-chamber-fourth-assembly-rop.htm?act=dis&id=219358&ds=7/2011#q1>

Questions to the First Minister

Waiting times

The First Minister acknowledged that there are "difficulties" in orthopaedic surgery. He said it would take "some time" for the £65 million funding to "filter through".

Preventative health

The First Minister said that the government will look at health "in the round", tackling the causes of bad health, such as poor housing.

Making savings

The First Minister denied the suggestion that there is "a secret closure programme of hospitals".

Accident and emergency waiting times

There will be targets in place in the delivery plan that will be produced "in due course".

Plans for the health service

Responding to criticism that the government has not given enough detail on its plans for the health service, the First Minister said the plans are in the Labour manifesto.

Delivery unit

The First Minister will make a statement giving more information on the set-up of the Delivery Unit before the summer recess next week.

Improving access to GPs

The First Minister said that access was more than just opening hours, and emphasised the importance of ordering prescriptions and booking appointments online. He added that many GPs are "enthusiastic" about looking at their working hours.

Read the session in full here:

<http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-chamber-fourth-assembly-rop.htm?act=dis&id=219203&ds=7/2011#q1>

Withybush debate

Interim leader of the Conservatives and AM for Preseli Pembrokeshire, Paul Davies, led a short debate on Withybush hospital. Mr Davies raised concerns about services “disappearing” from Withybush and argued that services need to be “sustained and not centralised.”

Mr Davies said it was essential that proposals to change the health service are transparent and accountable to the people it served. He called on the Minister to reassure people that Withybush will “continue to be a district general hospital.

Elin Jones (Ceredigion, Plaid Cymru) and Angela Burns (Conservative, Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) also argued the case for services to remain in rural DGHs.

In response, Lesley Griffiths said that Withybush hospital would continue as a “major provider of healthcare” and is “absolutely key” to health services across the three counties.

She said the health board has been working closely with its clinical teams to consider the optimum configuration of services. Ms Griffiths reiterated that the aim is to strengthen home and community care services, engage people in managing their chronic conditions and reduce the dependency on hospital-based care.

She added: “Allowing essential change and improvement will allow it [the health service] to flourish. I believe that the mindset that sees staying put as the right approach is wrong and dangerous.”

Read the debate in full here:

<http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-chamber-fourth-assembly-rop.htm?act=dis&id=219203&ds=7/2011#dad>

Health and Social Care Committee

The committee agreed to consult with external bodies over the summer recess on its ways of working and possible future inquiry topics. The committee also agreed that it would launch an inquiry before the summer recess, and the Research Service would provide a paper for the next meeting, scoping potential inquiries.

Minutes of the meeting are available here:

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=227&MId=407&Ver=4>

Information on the full remit of the committee is available here:

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s1911/HSC4-01-11%20Paper%202%20Annex%20A.pdf>

Committee service

The Assembly Committee Service has published a paper on ways of working for the new committees. The paper contains a number of useful pointers on the way that committees will operate during this Assembly term, including the recommendation that smaller groups, or sub-committees, could be formed to undertake more detailed, specialised inquiries. The paper also places emphasis on the committees’ role in directly engaging the public in their work, and ensuring the views of the people of Wales are represented in scrutiny.

The paper is available here:

<http://senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s1957/CELG4%2001-11%20paper%204%20Committee%20Service%20ways%20of%20working.pdf>