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TENBY TOWN COUNCIL
CYNGOR TREF DINBYCH-Y-PYSGOD

Clerk to the Council/Financial Officer : Clerc i'r Cyngor/Trysorvdy

6th February 2013

Mr William Powell AM
Chair
Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Dear Mr. Powell,

Thank you for your committee's consideration of our recent petition regarding the Hywel Dda Health Board's proposals to close the minor injuries unit at Tenby Cottage Hospital and transfer its services to local GP practices.

Thank you also for giving us the opportunity to outline our views on the consultation process to the committee.

I submitted the petition on behalf of both Tenby Town Council, and the South East Pembrokeshire Health Network, and it is the view of both organisations that the consultation process was flawed in that it was not conducted to garner public opinion but because it had to be undertaken.

From the outset, indeed from the Board's decision to temporarily close the unit last winter, it is felt by over 20,000 people in the south east Pembrokeshire area, that the proposal document was presented as a fait accompli and that the consultation exercise was no more than a sop.

Indeed comments made by Board representatives to a SEPCHN meeting of over 100 people in New Hedges that people concerned about difficulties in travelling to facilities in Withybush should 'save money in a jar to pay for a taxi in an emergency' appears to indicate that the Board were of a mindset to press ahead with closure irrespective of the results of the consultation.

We also feel that the consultation document merely stated that views were sought on 're-provision of minor injuries services ...to be delivered from GP practices' with no substantive detailing as to how this was to be undertaken, making it difficult for the general public to make an informed decision and provide meaningful feedback as to whether the proposal was feasible.

Consultation meetings were held in Narberth for town and community councillors, with a public 'drop in' session from 2 pm to 7.30 pm in Kilgetty. Tenby Town Council asked the Health Board to attend a public meeting in Tenby to allow questions to be put to senior staff from the Health

Board but they declined, feeling that the sessions they had arranged in Narberth and Kilgetty would allow enough opportunity to ask questions and provide comments.

Members feel that this is indicative of the Board's failure to take account of the travel difficulties experienced by people in the area which form part of the basis of public concern. (Statistics show that 40 per cent of people in Tenby do not own, or have access to a vehicle).

The Board did hold a 'drop-in' session in relation to the consultation in Tenby but this was merely to assist members of the public in filling in the consultation response and gave no opportunity for members to speak to staff about the implications of the proposal.

Consultation documents and response forms available locally were also limited, and although the Board did supply more on request, this did not meet demand, which resulted in a great number having to be photocopied.

Again this appears to indicate that the Board was merely paying 'lip service' to the consultation process.

We are also concerned that in their report on the results of the consultation exercise to the Board, the ORS suggested that the opinions expressed in the 'open' consultation were not as representative as those expressed in the 'targeted survey' as responses to the 'open' consultation were greater in those areas more adversely affected by proposals.

It is our view that, if the people of the south east Pembrokeshire area took the time to source the consultation documents, either on line or in hard copy, and to send in their responses, then their views opposing the closure are more indicative of the strength of feeling locally as to the difficulties the people of this part of the county feel they will experience as a consequence of the Board's decision. Is not the purpose of consultation to elicit public opinion?

We are also concerned that it appears that responses from organisations, such as Tenby Town Council (representing an electorate of over 5000 people) and Pembrokeshire County Council (representing an electorate of over 120,000) were given no more weight than that of an individual's response.

It is therefore our contention that the consultation was nothing more than an expensive 'paper exercise' undertaken not to elicit the views of the public but because the Board was obligated to carry it out.

Yours sincerely



Mr. Andrew Davies

FINANCIAL OFFICER/CLERK TO THE COUNCIL