

P-04-564 Restoration of In-patient Beds, Minor Injuries Cover and X-Ray Unit to the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital. Correspondence – Petitioner to the Committee. 13.01.16

We would be obliged if you bring the attachments to the attention of the Petitions Committee.

Many thanks.

Geraint V Jones (Chair of Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital defence Committee)

Dear Members of Petitions Committee,

On 12.12.2015, we copied you with our email to the Minister, in which we yet again raised with him some very serious questions about the way that BCUHB set about discriminating against the people of the Welsh Uplands prior to the rushed closure of our Memorial Hospital in January 2013. I now attach the Minister's blunt response to that correspondence (also attached for your convenience), the brusque tone of which came as no surprise to us, given that he has repeatedly ignored all our arguments, choosing instead to favour the Health Board's endless platitudes.

I fear that Mr Drakeford's arguments are disingenuous. Despite all evidence to the contrary, he still maintains that BCUHB engaged the public in a meaningful consultation process back in September 2012 (well before he was appointed to his ministerial post). In other words, he insists on giving 100% support to decisions taken by a health board that has been publicly disgraced more than once and which he has personally now put into special measures! Not only that, but he also quotes the support of the CHC for such decisions, although he knows full well that the current Gwynedd and Conwy branches of the CHC have expressed grave concerns about what is happening in the Welsh Uplands, as indeed have Prof Marcus Longley, Sarah Rochira (the Commissioner for Older People) and the Welsh Language Commissioner Meri Huws.

The Mid Wales Collaborative, established some months back by the Minister himself to look into Healthcare in rural Wales, are also reviewing the situation and intend holding sessions in Ffestiniog on the 8th of next month. Mr Drakeford, however, has already expressed his intention to sanction the Betsi'r Business Case, even before the Collaborative will have had time to present its report! Such a stance from a government minister defies belief and begs the question: Why is Mr Drakeford being so intransigent and so Ministerially blinkered? And why has he, time and time again, refused to meet with a deputation of the Memorial Hospital Defence Committee down in Cardiff? In his response to your Chairman, he claims to have corresponded with us on a number of occasions, but he has yet to give forthright and truthful answers to any of the questions posed to him (eg. those raised in our 12th December email). In fact, he has chosen to side-step every one of those questions and arguments in favour of his maxim 'I will not re-open matters that have been agreed locally'. We would challenge him not only to explain the extent of that so-called 'local' involvement but also to provide, if he dare, all the evidence of local opposition to BCUHB's plans. Let him also explain why it would 'not be appropriate' for him to meet with the Defence Committee to 'discuss this matter'!

The Minister maintains that his £3.94m investment in a new Primary Care Resource Centre will result in a range of new services for the area. Such a claim has little or no foundation and we have challenged him on it more than once by quoting, amongst other things, the services that were available here in 2012, before the Betsi decided to deprive us of what we then had (see attachment 'Services in 2012'). It is blatantly disingenuous of Mr Drakeford to argue otherwise.

We are very aware that, over the past months, we have burdened the Petitions Committee with endless counter-arguments to Minister Drakeford's and the Betsi hierarchy's claims. In his brief reply to my recent email the Minister says that he has asked Dr Peter Higson, as chair of BCUHB, to contact us to discuss our concerns in full. In fact, such a request, co-signed by the clerks of Ffestiniog Town Council, Dolwyddelan Community Council and secretary of the Memorial Hospital Defence Committee, was sent to the Chair and the Chief Exec of the health board three months ago (and thrice

repeated after that) without reponse. A reply finally came on 13.12.2015 (see attachment 'Dr Higson's response') but despite the promise it contains, the two sets of elected councillors and the Defence Committee are still waiting for such a meeting to materialize.

We again thank you for your continued interest in our Petition.

Yours very sincerely,

Geraint V. Jones (Chair of Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital Defence Committee)

12.12.2015

Annwyl Mr Drakeford,

This to acknowledge receipt of your response to my email of 18th November but I have to point out that you once again make no effort whatsoever to address the issues which were raised but prefer, instead, to re-iteratate, word for word, the claims and the platitudes of a fully discredited health board. Why would you choose to do that, Minister?

You say you are 'assured' on all these issues by BCUHB. In other words, you are prepared to accept their assurances without question whilst at the same time choosing to turn a blind eye to the genuine grievances of a socially deprived area. (See BCUHB's own 'Health Profile for Blaenau Ffestiniog 28th June 2012' if proof were needed:-

- ° MSOA Gwynedd 009: Bowydd & Rhiw, Diffwys & Maenofferen and Teigl all lie in the most deprived 30-50% of LSOAs in Wales (i.e. all the electoral wards in Blaenau and Llan Ffestiniog)
- ° MSOA Gwynedd 009: Hospital admission rate for <75s higher than Gwynedd, North Wales and Wales; as are the emergency and elective hospital admission rates.
- ° 'In general, Blaenau Ffestiniog is a relatively deprived part of Wales with a younger population profile than the Welsh average. Self-reported health and disease experience seems better than Wales, but mortality rates

for circulatory disease and cancer, the two biggest killers in Wales, seem worse.’)

As Minister for Health and Social Welfare are you prepared to totally disregard such concerns and to argue that end-of-life care is well-catered for in the Welsh Uplands?

PREVIOUS CORRESPONDENCE

You say that ‘we have corresponded on this issue on a number of occasions’. How very true! But the correspondence is protracted simply because you, like the health board hierarchy, choose to avoid responding to the specific issues being raised time and time again in all our correspondence. Why is that, if not to avoid matters that are an embarrassment to you as Minister and to health board officials?

For instance, the following issues were raised in my last email:-

(i) The chair and chief exec. of the Betsi have ignored two formal requests from the Ffestiniog Town Council, the Dolwyddelan Community Council and the Defence Committee to meet with them.

Your silence suggests that you condone the health board’s decision to disregard the wishes of democratically elected town and community councillors. But we shouldn’t be surprised, I suppose, given that you yourself, over the past 18 months, have rejected as many as 5 requests for you to receive a deputation from the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital Defence Committee. In other words, we were prepared to make a 7 hour and 300 mile round journey down to Cardiff but you, on the other hand, were unwilling even to open your office door to us! With due respect, Minister, were you to respond in like fashion to your own Cardiff West constituents then you would very soon be out of a job.

(ii) BCUHB’s Chief Executive – a man drawing a salary of c. £250,000 – claims that NHS decisions have nothing to do with democracy.

Your failure to respond to his claim implies that you agree with him, despite promises from you, time and time again, to listen to the voice of the people!

This is another sad reflection on Welsh Labour, the so-called party of the working classes.

(iii) You make much of 'public consultation and engagement process' and that you will 'not be reopening matters which have been agreed locally'. What do you actually know of that process, Minister? Had you taken notice of previous correspondence, you would know that:-

(a) Three sessions of public consultation were held in the Blaenau Ffestiniog Community Centre on 06.09.2012, with a maximum 60 permitted to attend each one. In other words, a total of 180 out of the area's 7,000+ population.

Nevertheless, every single voice from the audience, that day, spoke up against the proposed threat to our memorial hospital and other critical services. Health Board Executive Geoff Lang's response at each of those sessions was a verbal promise that all concerns were being noted and would be considered by the Board, a promise that, in retrospect, can only be regarded as a bare-faced lie, since the BCUHB were soon voting to close our Memorial Hospital without any of those concerns being addressed.

Are we to assume that you condone such underhand methods?

(b) You can also but be aware that public meetings and rallies held in the Ffestiniog area over the years have been supported by the vast majority of the population, as have several petitions, and for you again to claim that 'matters have been agreed locally' proves that you have either been seriously misled in this instance or that you choose to turn a blind eye to what local opinion actually is.

(c) Two referendums held last February by the Ffestiniog Town Council and Dolwyddelan Community Council resulted in a 99.9%+ call for services (i.e. hospital beds, minor injuries cover and X-ray facilities) to be reinstated. And BCUHB Chair's response at the time was to make light of the result by claiming that 'People don't understand what they are voting for.!'!

We ask again, Minister, whether you subscribe to that view as well?

Voices in Tywyn have been listened to, and are still being listened to, as you very well know, so we can but assume that this is a further example of discrimination against the Welsh-speaking Uplands.

There are several other points in my last email that you chose to disregard. For instance, my request for a copy of Simon Dean's letter to me, one that you say you've received but which I certainly haven't!

OUR CLAIM OF DISCRIMINATION

What of our claim of BCUHB's discrimination against the Welsh-speaking Welsh Uplands? Does that not concern you either?

Simon Dean rebutted our claim of discrimination with this statement on 24.09.2015:-

'With regard to the perception of discrimination in comparison to Tywyn (the new development and MIU), it is noted that Tywyn as a community is viewed as being more remote than Blaenau Ffestiniog. In terms of accessibility, the Welsh Index of Deprivation scores Blaenau fairly well as it benefits from a train line, bus routes and good roads. This was an important factor when approving the Tywyn business case and also by the Health Board in its discussions with the CHC culminating in its decision to retain the MIU in Tywyn.'

And our response to him (28.09.2015) was as follows:-

'What you are both saying, therefore, is that neither the Welsh Government nor the BCUHB know that Tywyn also has a train line and station! And that it benefits from a service that provides a direct link between Pwllheli and London Euston!

To be told that we have government ministers and highly paid health board officials who are prepared to take important decisions based on such ignorance is truly astounding!

On the other hand, if the WG and the Betsi did know of the trainline's existence, but chose an untruth to strengthen Tywyn's case for inpatient

beds, MIU etc, then that is certain proof of showing favouritism and discrimination.

Your letter also claims that Tywyn has a less reliable bus service than Ffestiniog and that it has no 'good roads'. This again is highly debatable and strengthens the argument that someone or other, either in the WG or in BCUHB, chose to build a false case against Ffestiniog retaining its Memorial Hospital. If that is so, then there is certainly room for legal challenge and to seriously question the source of the information that was given to the Welsh Index of Deprivation.'

Mr Dean's reply , a week later (05.11.2015), was this brief apology:-

Dear Geraint, apologies if I've not briefed myself fully. I will look at the previous correspondence again and respond further once I've done so.

Best wishes

Simon

Simon Dean

Prif Weithredwr Dros Dro/ Interim Chief Executive

Six weeks have since elapsed and we are still waiting for the promised response! So can I ask you the same question Minister, since it has such serious implications:- Who has been supplying this mis-information in support of the Health Board's agenda?

OTHER POINTS TO BE ANSWERED

And finally, Mr Drakeford, these points:

- Firstly, your latest response makes no mention whatsoever of the well-documented views and concerns of Prof Marcus Longley or those of Sarah Rochira, the Older Person's Commissioner, on the state of healthcare in the Welsh Uplands. As a 77 year old pensioner myself, I feel that that, too, has to be a matter of grave concern in this area.

- Secondly, you will know that a deputation of us attended the Dofor Conference on March 12th this year and listened to your opening statement. That, and the ensuing speeches from experts in rural healthcare, gave us renewed hope and we have since sought to work with the newly-formed Mid Wales Collaborative, fully believing that you would be taking its conclusions seriously. We have met with joint-chairs Jack Evershed and Ruth Hall and also with Dr Sue Fish and have been present in the public gallery at all meetings of the Collaborative. However, the press statement that you released yesterday (albeit worded mainly by the BCUHB) indicates that you intend implementing the BCUHB business case as soon as possible, thus implying that you have no intention of waiting for the Collaborative's findings and final report. If that is not surprising then what is?

Incidentally, there was nothing new in your statement. It was merely a regurgitation of what was drawn up over two years ago by the BCUHB's Integrated Health and Social Care Programme Board.

There are other points in your statement that we could challenge. For instance, you talk of 'Improved GP services with the ability to expand and improve Recruitment.' What on earth does that mean, bearing in mind that we had a very efficient GP practice until 18th January 2013 when the health board intervened and made a complete mess of things. Now the Practice is run by BCUHB Mk3 and depends on a very costly locum input.

You also make this disingenuous claim, Minister:-

'This £3.9m investment shows our commitment to creating community based health facilities closer to patients moving from hospital locations.'

You will have letters on file, Mr Drakeford, where the Health board has tried to relieve bed-blocking at Ysbyty Gwynedd by attempting to move older patients against their will to care homes, simply because they have no family to look after them at home. If that is an example of the commitment behind this £3.9m Investment, then heaven help us!

There are other issues that we could raise but a meaningful response to the above would be very much appreciated.

Yours sincerely, as always,

Geraint V Jones (Chair of Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital Defence Committee)

Mr G Lang

Acting Chief Executive

Executive's Office

Ysbyty Gwynedd

Bangor

LL57 2PW

12 March 2012

Dear Mr Lang

Review of Blaenau Ffestiniog Hospital

We would like to respond as the Medical Practice of Blaenau Ffestiniog to the recent independent review of Blaenau Ffestiniog Hospital by Dr Edward Roberts.

We welcome the review and commend Dr Roberts on his work and the bringing together of some important information regarding the future of the hospital.

We as a Practice feel his work is thorough but there are some important omissions and inaccuracies that need to be highlighted so that the Health Board are able to make an informed decision.

As a Practice we along with the entire Primary Care Team, the Hospital staff and over 5,000 people in this community strongly recommend and support Option 1 but with improvements.

To quote Dr Roberts, "This is a deprived community which requires services added to it and not taken away".

Options 2 and 3 will certainly take away services whereas Option 1 with improvements will add services.

Regarding inaccuracies and omissions

A Section 5: Hospital / Service Profile and Visit Summary

The list of facilities at Blaenau Ffestiniog.

In his review this list is incorrect and incomplete. The facilities presently provided should read:

Option 1 Current Activity 20/2/12

1. 12 inpatient beds (1 chronic illness + 11 beds)
2. Minor Injury Unit: nurse lead 8:00 to 16:00 (medical cover)
3. Nurse lead clinics: dressing/injury follow-up
4. X-ray diagnosis and treatment / pop of fractures
5. Physiotherapy
6. Community District Nursing
7. Occupational therapy
8. Intermediate care services
9. Falls prevention group
10. Phlebotomy
11. Out Patient Clinics:

- Paediatrics
- Rheumatology
- Diabetes
- Ophthalmology
- Substance misuse
- Family Planning
- Chiropody
- Counselling
- Midwife / antenatal

12. Dental Services

13. Medical Practice: single level, purpose built Health Centre with Dental department, Out Patient consulting rooms and x-ray department.

B. Section 5: Blaenau Ffestiniog Health Centre

Dr Robert's impression was that it was an aging building and the accommodation was limited.

This impression is not correct, in reality the Health Centre in Blaenau Ffestiniog is a relatively new building.

It is a purpose-built Health Centre, all on the same level with Dental department, Out Patient consulting rooms and x-ray department. The accommodation is perfectly adequate for the medical practice and we do not need to move from the building.