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Building a healthier future after COVID-19: Summary of the feedback

Hywel Dda University Health Board undertook a six-week engagement exercise ('Building a healthier future after COVID-19') between May and June 2021.

The aim was to learn how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected your health and care, and access to it. We also wanted to understand the implications of these experiences in relation to our long-term health and care strategy, 'A Healthier Mid and West Wales: Our Future Generations Living Well'.

Additionally, we continue to develop plans for a new hospital in the south of the area, within the zone between and including the towns of St Clears (Carmarthenshire) and Narberth (Pembrokeshire). We invited people to nominate possible sites for the proposed hospital. We also asked people to give their top priorities when considering the location of the building.

This summary document outlines the feedback received in the questionnaire. The responses have been split into six themes:

1. The impact of the pandemic on our population
2. The strategy
3. The Social Model of Health and Wellbeing, and the wider determinants of health
4. Hospital site nominations
5. Key priorities for location of new hospital
6. Understanding impacts

A copy can be requested by calling **(INSERT PHONE NUMBER)**. Alternative versions are also available, including audio, easy read, Arabic and Polish.

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1. The impact of the pandemic on our population

People said they had difficulties accessing services, particularly some primary care services. Some people found the new methods of accessing services, such as online or by phone, challenging, while others said it was more convenient.

A significant number of people were concerned about the impact of the pandemic on waiting lists and delays in diagnosing certain conditions due to the inability or reluctance to see a doctor.

The impact of the pandemic on the mental health and wellbeing of staff, patients and the wider public of all ages became a recurrent theme throughout the questionnaire responses. Concerns ranged from the impact of isolation and loneliness exacerbated by lockdown, to the difficulty in accessing mental health services and support.

Many felt the pandemic highlighted the importance of more services being available at a local level, such as in the community.

Community support delivered by the third sector and volunteers was mentioned positively by some people, with the hope that these initiatives could be sustained.

There was praise and acknowledgement of the hard work of staff who are doing their best under difficult circumstances. However, people expressed concerns about staff well-being, and future impact on staff recruitment and retention.

Reference was also made to 'long covid', which describes the effects of COVID-19 that continue for weeks or months beyond the initial illness, and how it impacts individuals, along with the services required to support patients.

2. The strategy

A Healthier Mid and West Wales: Our Future Generations Living Well is our long-term health and care strategy. This section gave people the opportunity to reflect on that strategy.

Feedback revealed many people did not feel the health board had listened to those consulted or had ignored concerns about access to services and the proposed location of the new hospital, or opposition to the new hospital in general.

Some people expressed frustration at the lack of detail in the strategy, particularly regarding what services would be provided at existing hospitals and at the new one. A few people felt they did not have enough detail to give an informed response to the question.

Many people commented favourably on the plan for increased integration of services, and improved partnership working between health, social care and the third sector, particularly the intention to develop integrated care centres or 'hubs'.

There appeared to be general positivity toward more services delivered in the community, nearer to where people live, as well as an appreciation for volunteer-led community support initiatives that have increased during the pandemic.

Prevention and early intervention were identified as a priority for the health board, especially around education, healthy eating and exercise programmes.

Concern about existing and future mental health services and wider support also featured in this section.

3. The Social Model of Health and Well-being and the wider determinants of health

When commenting on how they felt their health and well-being could be supported in their communities, some people focused on education and the need for self-management and self-care of conditions. Many said community activities and support groups were important.

A few people mentioned social prescribing as a way of accessing non-medical support. Access to green spaces for physical exercise and mental health benefits also featured.

Comments were made about the importance of healthy eating and access to good advice about nutrition, as well as affordable fresh food. People said it was important to embed good, healthy habits in children through education to help prevent health problems in later life. Many people noted the impact of poverty on people's ability to maintain a healthy lifestyle and access services. This inequality of access included some health services, such as ear syringing, podiatry, and physiotherapy, which are available privately at a cost. This means people on low incomes are not always able to access the treatment.

There is a recognition of the importance of different organisations across health, social care and third sector, working together for the benefit of people.

4. Hospital site nominations

This section asked for nominations for a site for the new hospital based on the following four criteria:

- Located within the zone between and including St Clears in Carmarthenshire and Narberth in Pembrokeshire.
- A minimum of 35 acres of reasonably developable land.
- Have realistic prospects of obtaining planning permission for a new hospital.
- There should be appropriate transport infrastructure for a major hospital site.

The health board's request for site nominations for the new hospital prompted some detailed responses.

Many people expressed a preference for a hospital in their immediate area, and not in the zone between Narberth and St Clears. Many of the arguments against the proposed location of the new hospital centred around issues including road infrastructure, poor public transport and the distance and travel times for rural populations. Others felt the needs of the more populated areas should be prioritised.

The number of people responding from Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire was evenly split. This was reflected in the comments opposed to the hospital being located either further east or west depending on where the respondent lived. Some Llanelli residents asked why they should consider traveling further west, when Morriston Hospital in Swansea was only a short distance from them. Several Pembrokeshire people felt it was unfair that Carmarthenshire might end up with three hospitals.

Although there were fewer participants from Ceredigion or mid Wales, there was similar strength of feeling from their responses about the distance.

5. Key priorities for location of new hospital

This section focused on people's responses to what is important to them for a hospital site, and what they feel should be considered.

The questionnaire asked people what they felt were the five most important things the health board should consider when determining the best location for the new hospital once a suitable list of site nominations was presented.

People were concerned about the distance to the hospital, how people would get there in a timely way, and said there was a need for improved public transport links and road networks.

People also wanted to see plenty of free parking for both staff, patients and visitors.

The importance of attracting and retaining staff, including affordable housing and transport, was noted.

The cost of building a new hospital was raised. People asked where the funding would come from, what were the financial implications for the health board, and whether it would be more cost effective to invest in existing sites and buildings, instead of building a new hospital.

From an environmental impact perspective, people said the hospital should not be built on greenfield sites or areas at risk of flooding. The hospital should be sustainable for the future, use green technologies and include green spaces for patients and staff.

6. Understanding impacts

The health board asked for information on equalities and socio-economic impact.

There were responses about how people of protected characteristics experienced services, and observations made by people who do not have a protected characteristic, and that they may have witnessed inequality, or believe that there is potential inequality.

There were some recurring themes in their responses around rurality, difficulties accessing transport, poverty, and mental health.

Practical considerations were also raised, such as medical sites that were not wheelchair accessible, or information in inaccessible formats.

The issue of virtual consultations featured strongly here with many older people expressing a preference for face-to-face rather than online or telephone conversations.

Conversely, other respondents expressed a preference for the digital format as it meant not having to travel for appointments.

Meanwhile, suggestions to better support those on low incomes included subsidised or reimbursed travel costs, more community-based services so people did not have to travel so far, and the option of non-emergency patient transport.

There is inequality of access to services for people on low incomes as some health services, such as ear syringing, podiatry, and physiotherapy, are available privately at a cost.

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Hywel Dda University Health Board is committed to continuous engagement. This means we will continue to talk with staff, patients, their families, and the wider public. We will consider your experiences and views, whether they are positive or negative, when planning services.

What we want you to know...

- The health board has not purchased or yet identified a preferred site in the agreed zone for the new hospital.
- A new hospital is essential for urgent and planned care in the south of the Hywel Dda area and will provide trauma care and be the main emergency department for the south of our area.
- The health board has no plans or intention to close either Glangwili or Withybush hospitals. We will engage further on how these hospitals could work alongside the proposed new hospital.
- Bronglais Hospital will build its reputation as an excellent rural provider of acute and planned care, and will continue to provide urgent, emergency and planned care services.
- Prince Philip Hospital will provide a GP-led minor injuries unit as well as acute adult medical care with diagnostic support, including consultant-led overnight inpatient beds for patients.
- The health board is committed to a programme of decarbonisation, therefore, every decision we make, before and during the development of a new hospital, will consider the impact on the environment.
- Transport plans in support of the new hospital will be influenced by key developments in transport strategy locally.

Number crunch

- 2438 – number of visits to the online engagement platform - Have Your Say (Eng) and Dweud Eich Dweud (Welsh)
- 271 – number of people who completed the questionnaire

Thank you

Hywel Dda University Health Board would like to thank all those who supported and responded to the engagement exercise. The feedback has been insightful and informative and will play a major role in helping shape future services. This in turn will allow us to deliver on our long-term commitment for a healthier mid and west Wales. This engagement exercise was part of an ongoing process. Over the coming months and years, we will engage with the public, stakeholders and partners on a wide variety of issues, such as service models. People will have their chance to give their views and opinions.

If you wish to receive updates on developments, please join our involvement and engagement scheme Siarad Iechyd/Talking Health: <https://re-url.uk/WQB6> , or request an application form by writing to “FREEPOST HYWEL DDA HEALTH BOARD”. You will not need a stamp.