

Llais Gorllewin Cymru  
Ystafell 5, Llawr 1  
Tŷ Myrddin  
Heol Yr Hen Orsaf  
Caerfyddin SA31 1LP

Llais West Wales  
Suite 5, Floor 1  
Tŷ Myrddin  
Old Station Road  
Carmarthen SA31 1LP



Eich llais mewn iechyd | Your voice in health  
a gofal cymdeithasol | and social care

By email to: Jill Paterson, Director of Primary Care, Community and Long Term Care.

Dear Jill,

This letter is our formal response following the public engagement exercise that was carried out relating to the future of GP services for St David's Surgery.

As you'll be aware we were informed of the practice's contract resignation in April and have been working with Health Board colleagues around the vacant practice process and public engagement.

Health Board colleagues have shared anonymised public responses with us and we have reciprocated by sharing any responses we have received with them. We also attended the public engagement event on the 14th of June.

In general we have found the engagement process to be appropriate and implemented well. Some people highlighted that the anonymous paper survey that was received via post was not anonymous because a printing error put name and address details on the back of the survey.

We're aware that Dr Riley has highlighted concerns about the survey used and that some of the discussions with Health Board colleagues provided mixed or inaccurate messages.

Whilst we feel it would be helpful for the Health Board to carry out a look-back exercise and evaluate its engagement process, our overall view is that the public

Prif Weithredwr/Chief Executive: **Alyson Thomas**

Cyfarwyddwr Rhanbarthol (Llais Gorllewin Cymru)/ Regional Director (Llais West Wales):

**Donna Coleman**

**E-bost | E-mail: [westwalesenquiries@llaiscymru.org](mailto:westwalesenquiries@llaiscymru.org)**

**Ffôn Tel: 01646 697 610**

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have had an appropriate opportunity to have their say and have questions answered where possible.

In terms of the onward vacant practice process we feel that the Panel and ultimately the Board should bear the following in mind:

## **Public Engagement themes**

We were struck by the strong sense of community during the engagement phase and intense support and attachment to the current GP practice. People we spoke with displayed real warmth and gratitude towards the surgery and its staff, one phrase we heard was "...it works so well". If the practice closes, it is clear that many would feel a real sense of loss and have concerns that their experience as a patient would not be as good. There was genuine worry behind the concern and questions we heard. This (and other reasons that will be raised) accounted for the depth of feeling and passion that the engagement period generated.

Whilst some people said they'd be comfortable with joining a new practice many were very concerned. Amongst those concerns were some consistent themes that we heard during the engagement period;

- concerns about accessing Solva Surgery, (e.g. transport, buses and parking),
- worries about accessing appointments at Fishguard or Haverfordwest practices for those dispersed there, due to local demands,
- worries about the capacity of Solva surgery to handle increased numbers of patients and the facility to be seen on the same day,
- an ageing population in St David's having greater need and vulnerability,
- a growing population in St David's creating more demand for services,
- spikes of transient population due to high levels of tourism,
- losing continuity of care,

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- inconvenience around prescriptions as Solva has no pharmacy.

There were also some individual points raised that showed the impacts that closure and dispersal could bring;

- a key member of the local RNLI crew said that they would need to “book off” the on-call system if they had to travel to Solva surgery and would then be unavailable to respond. This was also the case for a local retained firefighter.
- A person with a chronic condition who contacted us said how they are increasingly struggling with their independence and would find it difficult to catch a bus or afford a taxi.
- Another told us that they need to carry an oxygen bottle around with them and this would be very difficult on public transport.

## **Our view**

As a citizen voice body, Llais will always favour care as close to home as possible. We also acknowledge that the logistical challenges around providing GP services can be very difficult.

Llais cannot become involved in the private commercial complexities surrounding the lease of St David’s surgery premises, however if there is no building that is realistically available, then there is currently no option of a managed practice within the city.

If that is the case and list dispersal takes place, we feel that every effort must be made to ensure this happens as smoothly as possible and the concerns and challenges described by people during the engagement process must be mitigated as far as possible. We would highlight the following:

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- We feel that there is growing fragility and potentially unmet health need within the community. The Health Board needs to consider this as part of its wider strategic approach to providing services to an ageing rural population.
- We were struck by worries about transport costs and we feel that the Health Board must provide clear signposting to benefits support or advice as some may not realise they are entitled to more help.
- Given the concerns we heard, we feel the Health Board should explore whether certain services could be provided in the city if suitable venues could be found, such as blood testing or physio.
- With many people concerned that Solva doesn't have capacity to meet the needs of new patients, we feel the Health Board should communicate how the Solva building and staffing would be configured to cope with extra numbers flowing through it.
- If people have to use public transport to get to Solva, appointments should (where possible) work with local bus timetables so that people don't have to wait for extended periods in poor weather. We feel that the Health Board should also work with local transport providers so that they are aware of this change in need.
- Many people raised concerns around the Solva car park. The Health Board needs to take measures to maximise the availability of parking for patients and manage this facility.
- If patients are dispersed, we expect that each receiving practice should actively provide a warm welcome their new patients and give good quality, clear information about that practice. We understand that the Health Board met with some local people with a learning disability and if dispersal happens, they may be offered an open day event where they can see the surgery and become more familiar with the building and staff in advance.

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- With any service change we would expect the Health Board to actively capture patient experience as any new arrangements become more established.

We'd like to thank the Health Board for involving us in this process. We'd also like to thank the community in St David's for their willingness to share their views and engage in this process.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Dentten', is shown on a light grey, textured background.

Sam Dentten

Deputy Director (Llais West Wales)

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