



HOUSE OF COMMONS

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Steve Moore  
Chief Executive  
Hywel Dda University Health Board  
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Hafan Derwen  
St David's Park  
Carmarthen  
SA31 3BB

16 July 2018

*Dear Steve,*

**Our Big NHS Change – Consultation response**

Please see below my response to the Hywel Dda University Health Board's consultation on the future provision of NHS clinical services in my constituency of Preseli Pembrokeshire and across West Wales.

I have been told repeatedly by the Health Board that financial costs are not the fundamental reason for the proposed changes and that staffing pressures are the main challenge that need to be addressed through the reorganisation of clinical services. One of the principal reasons for these recruitment difficulties of medical staff in Pembrokeshire is the uncertainty and negativity around the future of Withybush Hospital that has been ongoing for more than ten years. Welsh Government's repeated efforts to see rural services downgraded has contributed to a crisis in recruitment that is especially acute in areas like West Wales. This recruitment crisis is also creating serious problems in primary care. The closure of St Clements Surgery in Neyland and the planned closure of Goodwick Surgery are both due to recruitment problems. The Health Board is being asked to fix a huge problem which is fundamentally the responsibility of Welsh Government.

The repeated cycles of consultations, reduction of services at Withybush in the name of 'patient safety', and broken promises by Welsh Government regarding improvements mean that people in Pembrokeshire are very sceptical about the intentions behind this current consultation. The widespread expectation is that the inevitable outcome will be more services moving eastwards and more patients from Pembrokeshire needing to travel longer distances to access clinical services. The future of Accident & Emergency in Pembrokeshire is especially sensitive given the critical importance of journey times.

Member of Parliament for Preseli Pembrokeshire





The fact that the Health Board has said that the final outcome of the consultation could be none of the three options outlined in 'Our Big NHS Change' will just increase the belief among Pembrokeshire people that decisions have already been made or that the consultation is really a window-dressing exercise. The lack of clear commitments from Welsh Government to invest in any of the new facilities outlined in the consultation mean that there is a cloud of uncertainty over any potential 'gains' for Pembrokeshire while there is a strong sense of immediate further cuts to come.

In short, communities in Pembrokeshire are being asked to believe in vague promises of "jam tomorrow" while the experience of the last ten years with Welsh Government demonstrates that it will insist on service cuts regardless of whether any promised improvements have been put in place or not. It undermines confidence in the consultation to promise a new hospital without putting forward any clear plans about how this will be delivered, where it will be, and how it will be funded. Likewise, any suggestions to bring back health services to Pembrokeshire need to be accompanied by clear proposals, rather than empty promises. Pembrokeshire residents have been betrayed before by past guarantees, and this cannot happen again.

For these reasons, I cannot support any of the options in the consultation. Without a much greater level of detail about future capital funding, timescales for service improvements, location of future infrastructure and a serious plan for improving transport connections through West Wales, it is very difficult to comment in any meaningful way on the three options – other than to say that they all carry serious risk for people in Pembrokeshire.

The removal of A&E from Withybush, which is a feature of all three options, is just not acceptable without a clear plan that guarantees that any change will not lead to longer journey times to access emergency care. An increasing number of local people are already required to travel to Carmarthen for hospital visits while, at the same time, journey times on the A40 east of Haverfordwest have become slower with more frequent lane closures and delays. The removal of A&E provision from Haverfordwest, geographically and in terms of population in the heart of the County of Pembrokeshire, will exacerbate risks.

You will be aware of the petition delivered to the Senedd on 4 July signed by 40,000 Pembrokeshire residents. In light of such a level of opposition I believe the wisest course of action would be for the Health Board to drop its current proposals and think again. To proceed further with them would be to make a mockery of the statement that the proposals have been informed by "*public engagement*" and would result in a devastating loss of confidence in the leadership of local health services amongst the community in Pembrokeshire.

At a time when the Westminster Government has promised a very significant further increase in NHS spending, which will see an additional £1.2 billion a year going to Welsh Government, Pembrokeshire residents deserve to see a clear plan that points the way to long-term improvements in clinical services which are readily accessible. The lack of a clear funding commitment from the Welsh Labour Government, or a specific plan for upgrading health services across rural Wales, shows contempt for Pembrokeshire people. Welsh Government's



stewardship of the National Health Service over the last two decades is a story of neglect, broken promises and missed opportunities. This is what has created the current challenges which the Hywel Dda consultation is trying to address. Without a major change of direction from Welsh Government I am afraid the Board's proposals will fail to deliver on the aspirations which underpin it.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my response to the consultation. I would welcome a meeting with you to discuss this further.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mr. Stephen Crabb". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "S".

**Rt Hon Stephen Crabb MP**