



Cynulliad National
Cenedlaethol Assembly for
Cymru Wales

The Petitions Committee

Completion Report

**Report of the Petitions Committee's consideration of
P-03-096 North Wales Neurological Unit**

June 2008

Presented

10 December 2007

Ruled Admissible

10 December 2007

Initial Consideration

21 February 2008

The committee agreed to:

- Invite petitioners to give evidence at the Committee's meeting in Colwyn Bay on 6 March 2008.

(See Annex 1 for the relevant extract from the transcript of the meeting on 21 February)

Further Consideration

06 March 2008

The Committee considered supporting information supplied by the petitioners and agreed to:

- Send copy of petition to Steer review
- Send a copy of the petition to the Welsh Affairs Committee to consider as part of their review into cross border services
- Reissue invite to petitioners to attend a future meeting.

(See Annex 1 for the relevant extract from the transcript of the meeting on 21 February, Annex 2 for a copy of the letter sent to the Steer Review and Annex 2 for a copy of the letter sent to the Welsh Affairs Committee)

22 May 2008

The committee considered a response form Dr Hywel Francis, chair of the Welsh Affairs Select Committee and agreed to:

- Close the Petition as the Committee could progress it no further.

(See Annex 1 for the relevant extract from the transcript of the meeting on 22 May 2008)

Petitions Clerk
June 2008

Annex 1

Extracts from Petitions Committee meeting transcripts

21 February 2008

Val Lloyd: The next petition is P-03-096, the North Wales Neurological Unit. This is the one in which petitioners express their total opposition to the idea of moving all neurological surgery services from north Wales to Swansea and/or Cardiff. They ask for an appropriate centre nearer north and mid Wales, or for them to be allowed to be referred to centres in England, as is the case. Now, a wide review is under way, and the Minister has said that it is, as you know, a grass-roots, total review. It is being conducted by an independent observer. Normally, I would be content to write back to the petitioners explaining that in detail, but as we are in north Wales in a fortnight's time, I wonder whether the petitioners might like to come to expand on their case.

Michael German: That is an excellent idea, Chair. It would perhaps be useful for the clerk to explain to them that the review is going on and for the proceedings of this committee to be transmitted to the reviewer, whoever that is. We may want to inform the reviewer that we are taking this petition and ask whether the reviewer wants to attend the meeting to listen or participate or whatever. That might be possible. I do not know whether he would want to or not; I do not even know who it is.

Val Lloyd: We could offer him or her the opportunity. Are Members content with that? I see that you are.

06 March 2008

Val Lloyd: We will move on to the petition from Merched y Wawr in north Wales about a north Wales neurological unit. We asked the petitioners to come to speak with us today; they were unable to do so or declined to do so, but they have given us a paper at a late stage. We will suspend the meeting briefly, while we re-sort our papers, which we seem to have lost.

Does everyone have their papers now, including me? I see that we do and so we can resume.

This petition is from the Derwen and District Merched y Wawr, and it says:

'We, residents of the above areas, wish to express our total opposition to the idea of moving all Neurological Surgery Services from North Wales to Swansea/Cardiff and we appeal to you to either develop an appropriate centre nearer North and Mid Wales or permit expenditure across the border in England'

Merched y Wawr was not able to be here, but it has provided us with a paper to back up its reasons for the petition. The paper is very direct, and it is something that we would all empathise and agree with. I remind Members that the current Minister for Health and Social Services set up a review of general neurological services, which includes neurosurgery, across Wales in September. In November last year, she updated and expanded its terms of reference in a letter to all of us, with the expert review group, under Mr James Steers, who is an eminent neurologist. In point 3 of the terms of reference, she directed the group to consider the possibility of developing in-patient neurology and neurorehabilitation services in north Wales. Admittedly, we do not know the outcome, which will not be known until the summer,

when the group is due to report. She also directed that there be a recommendation for a high-quality, safe and sustainable neuroscience service for the population of Wales, as close to home as possible. So, that is well covered.

Gareth Jones: It should be in Llandudno, then.

Val Lloyd: We all want it. I would say Swansea, of course, and Andrew might say the Vale of Glamorgan, and so on. I open the topic for discussion.

Michael German: I understand that the petitioners felt that they did not have sufficient notice to be able to come today, but this is an issue that vexes people. They have produced a number of extra questions, which are pertinent to the review and its outcome. I am always careful with regard to terms of reference, namely I check that their wording does not tell you the outcome. This reviews the possibility of neurosurgery being located in north Wales, but that is only a possibility. Many people would also say that people could go to Liverpool for these types of services, which is one of the options available. We do not know what the outcome will be, but this is a vexing matter, and I wonder whether we ought to offer the petitioners an opportunity, given that they said that they were not given sufficient time, to come to another committee meeting, at whatever stage is appropriate, and to have their say then.

Val Lloyd: We did give them three weeks' notice, or was it more? The last meeting was two weeks ago, and there was also half term.

Michael German: I understand that they were told about the meeting only earlier this week.

Mr Sanchez: There was a communication problem. We tried to contact them via e-mail and by telephone well in advance, but we were unable to get hold of them until a few days ago. We made every effort to contact them.

Michael German: I understand that.

Andrew R.T. Davies: In reading the papers, I had assumed that they had withdrawn the petition because of the inquiry that is being undertaken, which may address some of their concerns, and that they were happy for a written paper to be submitted to us. However, the committee desires to facilitate oral evidence, so if the petitioners still wish to come along, I think that we should facilitate that wish. I was of the opinion that, because the inquiry had been formulated, they perhaps felt that their energies would be put into that. However, that does not seem to be the case.

Mr Sanchez: That is not the case; they would still like to come before the committee.

Andrew R.T. Davies: Then I think that we should invite them to come to present the evidence to us.

Gareth Jones: I would go along with that.

Darren Millar: May I come in on that? Obviously, this petition has been presented by members of the Derwen and District Merched y Wawr, which is based in my constituency. However, their concerns echo and represent the views of many more people throughout north Wales, in addition to the 1,000 people—which is a significant number—who have signed the petition that is before the committee. The arguments

have been well rehearsed in the Chamber, so I will not go through them in any great detail. I think that it would be a good idea to invite the petitioners to come to a future meeting—I have no problem with that. However, I would appreciate it if there were some feedback, prior to their attending a meeting, on the whole review process and their views. Now is the time to feed in views while Mr Steers is already on the case with the review that he is conducting.

The Welsh Affairs Select Committee is also looking at cross-border services between England and Wales—health services are being discussed at the moment—and it is crucial that we feed the concerns of the residents of north Wales, including those of the members of the Derwen and District Merched y Wawr, into that process. Although there has been a change of heart, shall we say, since the announcement was made by the Minister for Health and Social Services in July on neurosurgery, I think that the issue causes significant alarm in north Wales. I am sure that Gareth's postbag is as full as mine with correspondence on the issue, and all north Wales Assembly Members have certainly been petitioned on the implications of the announcement, which seemed to suggest at the time that people would be required to travel some significant distance for brain surgery and for the pre-operative and post-operative care that they might need.

There are strong links in this area with some of the tertiary services that are provided by the NHS over the border in north-west England, and that relationship has served the people of north Wales very well for many years. I am not averse to the creation of a centre of excellence, provided that it is that and not a second-rate centre somewhere else in north Wales. I do not think that the members of Merched y Wawr would want the latter either, as they have indicated in their petition. We need to feed this into the review process now, rather than wait for Merched y Wawr to make a presentation to this committee. I would suggest to the committee that it should do that, while also inviting the members of Merched y Wawr to attend a future meeting to make a presentation.

Val Lloyd: I will speak to that as the Member for Swansea East, in which the new neurosciences facility is located. I understand fully the concerns of the people in north Wales, as well as those in my constituency, and to the west of it. I will call on Gareth to speak, and then I will come back in.

Gareth Jones: I do not normally sit on this committee but, out of respect to the petitioners, I would certainly endorse what Andrew said about getting the petitioners to present their views. However, along the lines of Darren's response, as an AM representing Aberconwy, I could say that, as far as I am concerned, this is a non-starter. I made that point back in July, well before any campaigns, because it is certainly not acceptable. I do not want to use this particular forum to make that obvious point. My concern with the petition is that we are perpetuating the myth that this will happen. In other words, that there will be patients visiting the neurological centres down in south Wales. That is not acceptable. It is a perfectly clear message. However, we have to undertake this review. I am quite sure that that review will come to the same conclusion: that this relationship with the Walton Centre in Liverpool has to be maintained. As I have said, this is about petitions; it is not about my own feelings. However, in line with what Darren has said, I have expressed my concerns.

Val Lloyd: I share your views, Gareth. I have heard what has been said and, to an extent, I disagree with it. It would be sufficient to send this petition directly to Mr Steers's committee. It is very clear and lucid. Gareth has already indicated that the Minister has made her views regarding north Wales quite clear. She has not made

her views known on any other area, but she has made her views on north Wales clear, and these have been reflected in the guidance that has been drawn up. The Minister has spoken about it in the Chamber many times, because we raise it continually to get her reassurance. I think that it would be sufficient to send this on to—

Michael German: I agree with that, but I would like us still to offer the petitioners a chance to speak, if they so desire, at another meeting of the committee.

Darren Millar: That would be useful. If you make it clear to the petitioners that you are passing on their views to Mr Steers and also to the Welsh Affairs Committee while it conducts its review of cross-border services, they may say that that is sufficient action as far as they are concerned and may decline the offer. However, it is important that they have the opportunity to speak to the committee if they want to. I would also ask the committee to consider making a representation directly to the Minister regarding the issue of treatment miles; that is, the carbon impact of future decisions regarding the health service.

Michael German: That is not our role.

Val Lloyd: We cannot do that.

Darren Millar: That is fine; thank you.

Val Lloyd: As Members were eager to tell you, our remit is to deal with the petition. We take a very wide view on that, and have pushed the boundaries as far as we can in the interests of petitioners. However, I think that we are agreed that we will re-issue the invitation to the petitioners, we will send the letter to the Welsh Affairs Committee and to Mr Steers, but that is about all that we can do.

Mr Sanchez: We have received another petition this week that is virtually identical to this. So, we could consider the two together.

Andrew R.T Davies: In relation to north Wales?

Mr Sanchez: Yes, in relation to neurosurgery in north Wales.

Darren Millar: Who is the second group of petitioners?

Val Lloyd: It has not come before the secretariat yet. We stick to the process. It comes to the secretariat, and admissibility or otherwise is decided according to a set of regulations so that we ensure that every petition is treated in the same way. It might end up in the same place.

Michael German: We have rules here.

Val Lloyd: Thank you for your attendance, Darren. You are most welcome, and it was a pleasure to see you.

22 May 2008

Val Lloyd: With regard to the petition on neurosurgery in north Wales, we have had a letter. We referred this matter to Dr Hywel Francis MP, as chair of the Welsh Affairs

Committee. We have previously had a reply from the Minister, pointing us towards the ongoing review and the comments being fed into it. I do not think that we can take this any further now. We had a response from Hywel to say that it was circulated to all members of the Welsh Affairs Committee and formally noted and he thanked us again for sharing the information with him and his committee. I do not think that there is anything more that we can do with this petition. So, we will formally close the petition from Merched y Wawr in north Wales.

Annex 2

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau

Petitions Committee

Mr. James Steers
Chair
Neurosurgery Task and Finish Group

Bae Caerdydd / Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd / Cardiff CF99 1NA

Our ref: PET-03-96

20 March 2008

Dear Mr. Steers

Petition regarding a North Wales Neurological Unit

My Committee considered the above petition of over 1000 signatures from the Derwen and District Merched y Wawr on the 6th April. The Committee resolved to bring this to your attention for consideration in your review of general neurological services across Wales.

Please find attached a copy of the petition and supporting statement submitted by petitioners. I shall keep you updated with any relevant developments.

For information, we are also sending the petition to the Welsh Affairs Select Committee who are considering cross-border services between England and Wales.

Yours sincerely,



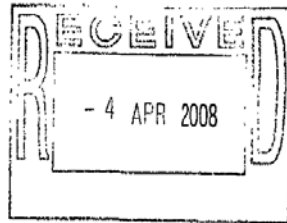
Val Lloyd
Chair, Petitions Committee

Annex 3



Welsh Affairs Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA
Tel 020 7219 6189 Fax 020 7219 0300 Email welshcom@parliament.uk
Website <http://www.parliament.uk/welshcom/>



3 April 2008

Dear Val,

The provision of cross-border public services for Wales (health services)

Thank you for your letter of 20 March drawing to my attention the petition submitted to Minister of Health Edwina Hart AM from Derwen and District Merched Y Wawr regarding a North Wales Neurological Unit. As you know, my Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into the provision of cross-border health services, and I will see that this petition is drawn to the attention of the Committee at the next opportunity.

Wanner Segent

Hywel

Dr Hywel Francis MP
Chairman

Val Lloyd AM
Chair, Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1NA

Annex 4



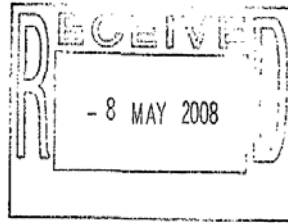
RECEIVED
09 MAY 2008

Welsh Affairs Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA
Tel 020 7219 6189 Fax 020 7219 0300 Email welshcom@parliament.uk
Website <http://www.parliament.uk/welshcom/>



6 May 2008



Dear Val,

Petition from Derwen and District Merched Y Wawr: cross-border health services

Thank you again for copying to me a petition submitted by Derwen and District Marched Y Wawr to Minister Edwina Hart regarding a North Wales Neurological Unit, which was referred to the Petitions Committee for consideration.

This is to let you know that the petition was circulated to all members of the Welsh Affairs Committee and was noted formally at our meeting on 29 April.

Thank you again for sharing this petition with us, and for bearing in mind our continuing inquiry into the provision of cross-border health services in Wales – to which the petition is of course highly relevant.

Wanwyn reports

Dr Hywel Francis MP
Chairman, Welsh Affairs Select Committee

Val Lloyd AM
Chair, Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1NA

