



Our ref: WQ90191

Mabon ap Gwynfor MS
Senedd Constituency Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd

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27 February 2023

Dear Mabon,

Thank you for your recent written question asking me:

“What are the practical differences between an assurance process and an inquiry process, and why was the former deemed sufficient for the review into maternity services at Swansea Bay University Health Board that the Welsh Government agreed to commission in November 2022.”

When issues of significant concern regarding a health board’s performance or patient outcomes are notified to Welsh Government officials, assurance is initially sought to confirm whether there are systemic causes for concern, evidence of ongoing harm or missed opportunities for learning and improvement. This is typically achieved by collating and assessing available evidence, seeking intelligence and insights from relevant stakeholders such as other public bodies and regulators where necessary, to provide an overall picture of the quality and safety of the services being provided.

These are well established national mechanisms for monitoring the quality, safety and effectiveness of services provided by health boards across Wales. Assurance is sought and challenge provided on a regular basis regarding emerging and ongoing operational issues, through mechanisms including the integrated quality, planning and delivery (IQPD) arrangements which are held monthly.

In addition to these regular assurance activities undertaken or coordinated by officials, Welsh Ministers have legal powers to establish a public inquiry or review into matters within their remit. This would typically require significant concerns of an institutional or systemic nature.

In November 2022, during a meeting with one family, concerns were raised and the request for an Independent Review/Inquiry was made. Following the meeting Welsh Government officials initially commenced **an internal assurance review** of available intelligence, including that held by the NHS Delivery Unit, to inform whether further investigation or action - such as an **Independent Review or Public Inquiry** - was required. This **internal assurance review** to assess available evidence was the review which officials agreed to undertake at the meeting in November.

The Welsh Government's clinical professional leads assessed the information provided from the Delivery Unit, together with other available data and intelligence and concluded in early 2023 that the evidence, at that time, did not highlight any immediate concerns warranting specific action, or further assurance outside of existing arrangements. It was agreed that quality and safety at Swansea Bay University Health Board's maternity and neonatal services would continue to be monitored through routine national oversight and assurance mechanisms, which included triangulation with intelligence from other public bodies and regulators.

I am aware an independent review into the health board's maternity and neonatal services is now taking place, and a Chair has been appointed to lead this work. Further announcements are expected in due course regarding appointments to the independent oversight panel and agreement of the review terms of reference.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. E. Morgan'.

Eluned Morgan AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Health and Social Services