

Health Matters Update

15 January 2008

The Minister for Health and Social Services, Edwina Hart

This written statement informs Assembly Members of developments in a number of health-related actions set in motion in the autumn period.

In relation to Agenda for Change, Members will recall that a review of the implementation of Agenda for Change in Wales was commissioned from David Jenkins, previously General Secretary of the Wales Trades' Union Congress, a member of the Employment Appeals Tribunal for fifteen years and currently chair of the Wales Co-operative Centre and of Opportunity Wales. A draft report of Mr Jenkins' findings has been produced and the views of relevant Trades Unions are now being sought. Once that process has been completed it is my intention to respond to the recommendations of the document, and to report further to Members on action taken.

In relation to the Air Ambulance Service Review, I will be asking the chairs of the Welsh Ambulance Trust and the Air Ambulance Service to meet on the basis of the draft Review report which has been drawn up by the Chief Executive Officer of the WAST, Alan Murray, and to produce some detailed recommendations on better joint working in future.

A first, summary Report has now been provided by Professor Mansel Aylwood, in relation to the future of Health Commission Wales. Professor Aylwood is currently the Chair of the Wales Centre for Health and, until April 2005, was Chief Medical Adviser, Medical Director and Chief Scientist to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Chief Medical Adviser and Head of Profession at the Veterans' Agency, Ministry of Defence. The Report identifies a series of issues on which more detailed investigation and advice are required, and which Professor Aylwood will provide as part of the second stage of his inquiries. I intend to be in a position to make a further statement on the outcome of this work by the end of March 2008.

Members will be aware of widely reported concerns about the system for placing Junior Doctors in clinical posts, as part of their on-going education and training. In Wales work on this issue has been led by the Chief Medical Officer. A way forward has been agreed between Welsh Assembly Government and the Wales Deanery in respect of the recruitment to specialty training in Wales for 2008. The CMO wrote, in December, to both junior doctors and consultants in order to provide greater confidence to both trainees and consultants body in the whole process here in Wales.

I want to take the opportunity of this statement to draw together a number of different developments in relation to services in North Wales. On 7th January I met with Mr Michael Williams, acting chair of the Swansea NHS Trust who is concluding his investigation into the conduct of public consultation in North Wales in relation to Designed for North Wales. On 8th January, I met with Dr Chris Jones, Chair of Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Health Board, and a practising GP, who is undertaking a Review of the adequacy of Primary and Community Services in North Wales, in relation to the proposal for changes to Secondary Care. The outcome of these two wider work strands will provide the essential backdrop to consideration of service-specific issues in North Wales. I hope to receive these reports by the end of January.

On Friday of last week I was able to announce membership of the Task Group established to develop the detail of the Assembly Government's Rural Health Plan. I am delighted to inform

Members that Lord Elystan Morgan former MP for Ceredigion, High Court Judge and Member of the House of Lords since 1981 has agreed to chair the Group. His two vice-chairs will be Jane Jeffs, formerly chief executive of Community Health Councils in Wales and a resident of Carmarthenshire, and Professor Marc Clement of University College Swansea, currently Vice-Chancellor of the University of Wales. Mrs Jeffs will take particular responsibility for issues of public engagement, and Professor Clement will take the lead in advising on clinical issues.

Turning to reform of Trusts in Wales, I can confirm that the go-ahead has now been given to creation of a single Trust, combining the current organisations in Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire. On Friday 4th January I met with the chairs of all three existing Trust Boards and have asked them to advise me on some detailed implementation issues, including the future headquarters of the merged Trust and the name by which it is to be known. I have also agreed two other trust mergers to be in place by April 2008: in the South-East - Pontypridd & Rhondda NHS Trust and North Glamorgan NHS Trust, and in South West Wales - Bro Morgannwg NHS Trust and Swansea NHS Trust. In North Wales, North East Wales NHS Trust and Conwy & Denbighshire NHS Trust are consulting with Community Health Councils and staff interests until the end of March, on their proposal to merge later in 2008.

At the end of this set of developments the number of Trusts in Wales will be substantially reduced, as one strand in the One Wales commitment to eliminate the last vestiges of the internal market in the Welsh NHS – a process on which I will report further to Members at regular intervals over the coming months.