

**PETITION 245177 Investigate C&V UHB's refusal to keep north Penarth's surgery, allocating patients to distant GPs.**

We call to account UHB officials and politicians colluding with closure of Albert Rd surgery (north Penarth), allocating patients to Sully and Dinas Powys, and grossly overloading Stanwell surgery (Penarth Healthcare). We believe the local MS Vaughan Gething knew of the plan and he could have highlighted the concerns to the relevant Ministers and commissioners for Older Persons, Children and Future Generations, to uphold the principle of healthcare services close to home. The system has failed us

We respond to the minister, Eluned Morgan's 27<sup>th</sup> July reply to the Petitions Committee chair. She writes that sustainability of GP practices remains a key priority of the Health Board. This recalls the Minister's launch of the *Primary Care Model for Wales* (Cabinet approval, June 2019):

*Stable general practice is at the heart of the Primary Care Model.  
... support from health boards can help vulnerable GP practices*

We suggest Eluned Morgan means "...remains a key priority for" the Health Board. We show that sustaining the GP practice had no priority in Penarth in 2021.

The Board's *Primary Care Team* (PCT) said publicly that closure was a decision by the GP practice, as an independent business. This did not accord with the new *Primary Care Model for Wales*, nor with the e-mail documents we obtained through an FoI request (Annex and attached pdf). Documents from the PCT itself were withheld, despite explicit requests

The Minister writes "*due to buildings being sold*". The real story in the FoI disclosures show the Health Board was paying £31k/year and had said that would end in Dec 2021. The owners wrote 26 August 2021 to say they would have to put it on the market. The Board had told them the project to provide premises for a surgery at the Cogan *Wellbeing Hub* was "in progress";

*you gave us notice that there was no use for the building after 31st of December 2021 and you would not be able to help with the mortgage after this date... putting us in a position where we had to sell despite there being a large penalty to pay (owners to Board on 5th October 2021).*

The 26th August letter put the Health Board on notice to either extend the lease or offer to buy the surgery.

The FoI documents do not show any response from the Board, until the GP contract-holder Dr Leppik received notice-to-quit on 1 or 2nd October. She immediately contacted the Board, writing to the owners on 3rd October saying they were trying to find a solution:

*We are having discussions with the Health Board relating to your notice to quit Albert Road on 1st March 2022. We are in the process of exploring several options with them*

Later that day, Dr Leppik wrote

*I believe that the uLHB have a contractual obligation to continue to make payments on the rent up to and until ... vacates the building*

Alternative premises were suggested; including the Town Council's West House Annex (temporary solution), Avon House (Health Board's leased accommodation, vacated by Mental Health services). But the Board's PCT refused and by 4th Nov. wrote to Albert Rd patients that their surgery would close, while claiming

*Our focus is to ensure services are provided closer to home and together with our stakeholders we will establish a way forward to ensure future provision of GP services to all existing patients.*

It turned out that *closer-to-home* for many patients meant several miles from north Penarth, in Dinas

Powys and Sully. On 19th Nov., the VoG Council showed up saying they and C&V Health Board *have committed to explore options to maintain GP Services for the local community from April 2022... we will keep the local community updated with details of future provision of health care as we work through a sustainable solution.*

The same day, Vaughan Gething as the constituency MS met with the Health Board, but did not report back to constituents seeking a report from his office.

The Minister writes the dispersal into neighbouring practices was *based on available capacity*. It wasn't. The two Penarth Practices both said they'd be overstretched but were given no choice. None of the Practices had closed their books, but that did not mean as the PCT said, that they could take in a thousand or several thousand more patients. Under the *Primary Care Model*, it was for the GP Cluster to lead on the dispersal, but they were just told by the PCT to divide up the numbers. Both Penarth's surgeries report they are under severe stress to cope with the numbers, while social media carry many complaints from fraught transferred patients. The Minister adds

*The primary care team continues to provide support to the practice and work with the practices to monitor the impact of the dispersal on access to services for patients.*

This is strange as the *Primary Care Model* sets the GP Cluster to lead. Cluster meetings have not taken place, repeatedly cancelled by the Health Board. No minutes were disclosed in the FoI as there are none. The Minister should ask the Health Board to provide evidence of the claim *to monitor the impact of the dispersal.*

The Minister mentions that the

*new build integrated health and care centre for the Cogan area (is) under review.*

The PCT had claimed this was their long term plan. They pressed Dr Leppik in 2018 to relocate Albert Rd surgery there, but she declined (Sept. 2018). Yet by Sept. 2019, the Board had won her to agree, for they organised two information sessions at the surgery. Though the patients rejected it (as had wider 'consultations' throughout Penarth) saying Cogan is not close to home for north Penarth and accessibility is very poor (by walking, bus or car), the Health Board persisted. However their business case (OBC) stalled. Nevertheless, the PCT still declared in January that the Cogan option is their long-term plan. The Minister's phrasing "*under review*" shows it was a false premise.

#### Further Information provided with the Petition

C&V UHB rejected buying the Albert Rd premises when warned, years ago, that the GP's lease was due to expire. Their plan to instead provide new premises far away in Cogan was publicly rejected. It failed their principle of health services close to home.

Successive UHB designs for a *Wellbeing Hub* at Cogan ignored the poor accessibility. Their choice of site discriminated against the elderly and mobility-limited persons.

While declining to help Albert Rd surgery to continue, the UHB offered funds to GPs in Sully, Penarth and Dinas Powys to expand to take the 7000 patients. The UHB did not consult on this plan.

The overload at Stanwell (Penarth Health Care) surgery has worsened the standard of care. Expanding their staff took time (now 11GPs for 17 000 patients), but space is lacking and managing patients' needs is problematic. Redlands surgery had similar difficulties, having been told since 2018 to expect transfer to Cogan. The UHB pursuit of (new-build) premises in the wrong place is at fault.

They could still recognise their error and buy the Albert Surgery from the property developer.

## Annex

The FoI disclosures at the following link are incomplete.  
[https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/closure\\_of\\_albert\\_road\\_surgery\\_a](https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/closure_of_albert_road_surgery_a)

They include e-mails exchanged between the GP and the owners but none of the Health Board itself or its Primary Care Team. We'd question whether the Board kept an audit trail, or rather just found diverse documents in a limited search of e-mails. The absence of documents from the Primary Care Team, with their public letters to patients, with no records of discussions with the Vale Council, Vaughan Gething MS and with the GP Cluster suggests deficient record-keeping. Nevertheless, the FoI disclosures are sufficient to give a story quite different from public statements of the PCT. The notice-to-quit the surgery was not unexpected, as they stated, but stemmed from the Health Board setting December 2021 for when they'd end the lease.

### FoI request of 25 July:

Please disclose all information you hold regarding closure of Albert Rd surgery and GP practice from the time your officials were first notified of the prospective move due to sale of the building 3 or 4 years ago. The lead official was Robert Wilkinson, date before Sept.2019.

Please include

- 1) correspondence, e-mails and notes of meetings with the GP practice re. the proposed move to a future Wellbeing Hub proposed in 2019
- 2) consultations for patients conducted at the surgery attended by your officials in 2019
- 3) the engagement of your Primary Care Team from 2021, extending the closure past the end of 2021
- 4) documents of 2021-22 regarding possible alternative arrangements for the surgery to continue
- 5) the PCT's interactions with the Vale of Glamorgan Council in 2021-22 relating to the closure.

Despite the very specific requests, the response on the *whatdotheyknow* site covers only point 1).

The attachment pdf contains the following critical e-mails in the disclosures, as cited in the text

- 26Sept'18 LHB re Albert Rd options;
- 11-12Oct'18 Albert Rd declines to relocate to Penarth Leisure Centre;
- 3-8Oct'21 Response to Notice2Quit

Max Scott-Cook for *Save Albert Surgery campaign* ----- 1<sup>st</sup> November 2022

### Questions for the Minister and Health Board

The FoI disclosures imply that the surgery closure was not an independent decision by Dr. Leppik, rather she was left with no option. The Health Board have failed to disclose their arrangements with her, when in 2019 she agreed to their pressure to move the surgery to Cogan. Did it include their commitment to pay £31k/year rent and under what conditions?

Did the Health Board comply with the *Primary Care Model for Wales* in providing support for the vulnerable Albert Rd practice, then suddenly ending it (on the basis that they'd expected the Cogan Hub to be available by the end of 2021)?

Did the Health Board work collaboratively through the *primary care cluster*, which enters the above story only when the PCT wanted the surgeries to accept the dispersed Albert Rd patients?

*The Primary Care Model for Wales sets out a whole system approach from a health perspective... timely care and support that is delivered collaboratively by all partners through the primary care clusters. (NHS Wales Planning Framework 2019 to 2023)*

The local cluster includes the 4 surgeries (Dinas Powys, Sully, Redlands and Stanwell), the lead being Dr Carl Lloyd of Redlands surgery.

Did the Health Board pay due regard to the Equality Act requirement on equity-of-access, to *ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to deliver equity of access to healthcare services for all individuals* (from the Planning Framework 2019-22 version)?

This both in the PCT ruling out alternatives to closure of the surgery and in the earlier determination to move both Albert Rd and Redlands GP Practices to Cogan, disregarding distances and difficulties of access.

Doesn't the Health Board fail in transparency and openness? The former is impeded by poor record-keeping evidenced by the very limited FoI disclosures; openness refused by the PCT who told the public zoom-session they'd wanted just to inform the public when the alternative arrangements were settled, but were forced to make an earlier statement when the closure leaked out.

It's clear that closing the GP surgery for north Penarth not only created stress for other surgeries in the cluster, but also is a great injustice for people reliant on a local surgery. Would the Minister comment on the failures under Core values of Welsh Governance:

- the constituency MS, Vaughan Gething, failing to report to and speak up for the surgery's patients, including vulnerable sections who particularly need a surgery within walking distance (as is Government policy).
- the Children's Commissioner and Older Person's Commissioner, who would speak for young children or the frail and elderly, but had no inputs.
- the Future Generations Commissioner, who sees the vital importance of local surgeries for sustainable communities, but had no input
- Social Justice, for which a Welsh Government minister is responsible, did not count in the Health Board decision.

### **Conclusion.**

Will the Health Minister recognise that C&V Health Board's PCT strayed beyond their supporting role and disregarded principles, policies and guidance set by the Welsh Government, both in closing the surgery and in deciding our GP services should be at Cogan in the longer term?

Would she therefore require the Health Board to consider what can be done to consult with stakeholders with a view to restoring a surgery in north Penarth?