

Eluned Morgan  
Minister for Health and Social Services  
Welsh Government

17 February 2023

Dear Eluned

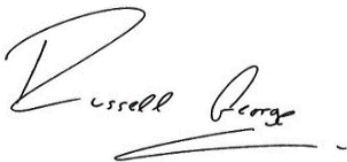
### NHS waiting times

As you will be aware, the Health and Social Care Committee is monitoring progress against the recovery targets set out in the Welsh Government's programme for transforming and modernising planned care and reducing waiting lists in Wales.

At our meeting on 15 February 2023, we considered the November 2022 NHS waiting times data released in January 2023 against the recovery targets set out in the programme. The reduction in the median waiting time from 29.3 weeks in October 2020 to 21.2 weeks in November 2022 shows that progress is being made, although more slowly than envisaged in the programme. In recent months, activity levels have increased, which is welcome, but given the volume of patients still waiting to be seen, capacity needs to increase beyond current levels if the backlog is to be cleared.

We would be grateful for a response on the issues outlined in the annex **by 31 March 2023**.

Yours sincerely



Russell George MS  
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg. We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

## Annex: NHS waiting times: request for information

We would be grateful for a response on the following issues **by 31 March 2023**.

### Recovery targets

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1. Despite the publication of the Welsh Government's planned care recovery plan, waiting times in Wales are still rising in some specialities. Projections based on progress to date suggest that unless activity significantly increases, the Welsh Government's recovery targets are unlikely to be met. What steps are being taken to address this.
2. What impact do you anticipate the 2022-23 winter pressures and recent industrial action taken by NHS Wales staff will have on planned care and the achievement of the recovery targets, in particular the first target (no-one waiting longer than a year for their first outpatient appointment by the end of 2022).
3. Have any revisions been made to the improvement trajectories for each health board to address their delivery and meet the nationally agreed measures to clear the backlog? If so, what changes have been made, and are all health boards on track?
4. You have previously said that "it will take a full Senedd term and a lot of hard work to recover from the impact of the pandemic".<sup>1</sup> Are you still of the view that planned care can return to pre-pandemic waiting time levels by the end of this Senedd?

### Data granularity

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5. Are you willing to share more granular data (or management information recognising the limitations of this data) with the Committee relating to the number of closed pathways by setting out exactly how many of the closed pathways are a result of a patient starting treatment and how many patient pathways have been removed from the list for other reasons (i.e. what the impact of the waiting list validation exercises has been and whether the results are consistent across health boards).

### Recovery of different specialities

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There are several specialities where waiting times are particularly long, such as trauma and orthopaedics, ENT and ophthalmology.

6. Based on current projections, which specialities do you anticipate will achieve each of the recovery targets, and which specialities will not.

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<sup>1</sup> Plenary RoP [para 165], 26 April 2022

7. What does success look like for you in terms of “most specialities” achieving the recovery targets (i.e. 50 per cent, 95 per cent etc).

## Trauma and orthopaedics

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8. For Trauma and orthopaedics, the health boards have developed action plans to implement the GIRFT (Getting it Right First Time) proposals and the national pathways. Have these actions plans been published and if so, can they be shared with the Committee.
9. In December 2022 you wrote to us to say that following the Ministerial orthopaedics summit in August, the Deputy Chief Medical Officer wrote to health boards to “outline the position with regards to long waiting patients and that those waiting over 104 weeks should be placed in the same category as urgent patients when booking appointments”. Could you confirm whether this applies only to trauma and orthopaedic pathways, or to all patient pathways.

## Diagnostics

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10. In December 2022 you told us that a national diagnostics programme board was established in May 2022, and that it was “currently finalising a diagnostics strategy for the long-term sustainability of services”. You also said that the strategy would include measures such as regional diagnostic hubs to increase capacity. Could you provide an update on the work of the programme board, including when the diagnostics strategy will be published and progress in developing regional diagnostic hubs and other measures to increase diagnostic capacity.
11. In November 2021 the Welsh Government announced £51m investment to “help ensure NHS Wales has up-to-date diagnostic facilities using the latest imaging technology. Image quality will be improved, supporting earlier and more accurate diagnosis of many common diseases, including cancer”. Could you provide an update on progress in upgrading diagnostic equipment and imaging technology.

## Cancer

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An area of concern within the data is performance against the cancer target, with only 53.9 per cent of patient pathways achieving the recovery target in November 2022.

12. Please provide an update on action being taken to improve cancer waiting times, specifically for the cancers with the longest waits such as gynaecological, head and neck and urological.

## Ministerial summits

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13. Please provide an update on the outcomes of the Ministerial summits held in late 2022 in respect of ophthalmology, emergency care, and ear, nose and throat.

## Workforce

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14. To what extent are workforce challenges in health and social care affecting progress in achieving the recovery targets? Please outline what the specific workforce challenges are, how they are affecting progress.
15. Are you confident that the [national workforce implementation plan](#) published on 1 February 2023 will adequately address these workforce challenges, and that there are sufficient financial and staff resources in place for the plan's implementation? Please also outline how progress in implementing the plan will be measured and reported to the Senedd.

