



WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

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24 Cathedral Road / Heol y Gadeirlan
Cardiff / Caerdydd
CF11 9LJ
Tel / Ffôn: 029 20 320510
Fax / Ffacs: 029 20 320555
www.wao.gov.uk

Email / Epost: jeremy.colman@wao.gov.uk
PA / CP Fiona Bashford, fiona.bashford@wao.gov.uk

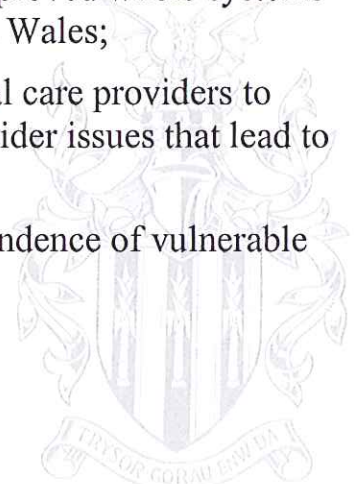
Mr Jonathan Morgan AM
Chair of the Audit Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1NA

Dear Chair

**WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT CORRESPONDENCE ABOUT
THE WALES AUDIT OFFICE REPORT,
'DELAYED TRANSFERS OF CARE FOLLOW-THROUGH'**

I write in response to the Clerk's letter of 10 September requesting advice on the contents of Paul Williams's letter of 4 September setting out the Assembly Government's response to a number of questions raised by the Audit Committee, specifically:

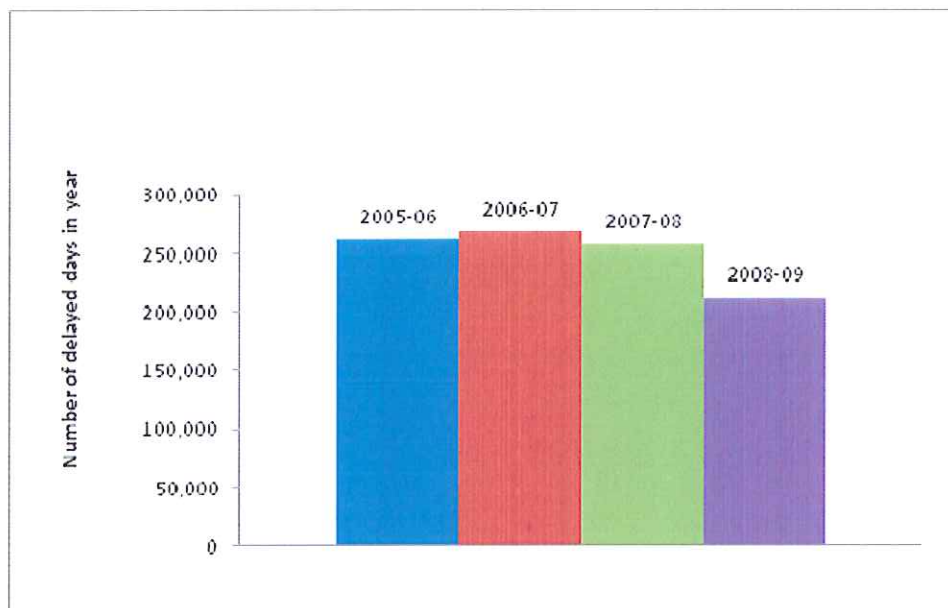
- the plans that are in place to take forward a reorganisation of the census process and when they will be implemented;
- how Local Service Boards will be supported to drive change and whether there are any other mechanisms in place to create the long and medium term plans necessary for sustained improvement;
- what steps the Assembly Government is taking to work in partnership with local health and social care providers to create an improved whole systems approach during and after the reorganisation of NHS Wales;
- what plans are in place to encourage health and social care providers to more effectively share best practice in tackling the wider issues that lead to delayed transfers of care; and
- an update on work being done to promote the independence of vulnerable older people and make better use of resources.



Overall, the response appears comprehensive and robust. It supports the conclusion of my report that the problem of delayed transfers of care has generally been taken seriously. It also recognises the fundamental, whole system issues of which delayed transfers of care are a symptom.

It is also encouraging that the extent of delayed transfers of care continues to fall. We have recently analysed the actual bed days lost during the 2008-09 financial year which confirmed that the overall number of bed days lost fell to 211,849, a reduction of 18 per cent from 2007-08, with consistent reductions across all types of hospital bed. Over the same period, there were reductions in both the Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan and Gwent communities of 14 per cent and 37 per cent respectively. There have also been reductions in the average duration of each delayed transfer. The longer-term trend is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 – bed days lost through delayed transfers of care across Wales, 2005-06 to 2008-09



The Government's response highlights a number of mechanisms being taken forward to support greater integration between health and social care provision. From the citizen's perspective, this is absolutely crucial to ensure that the whole system operates more seamlessly and proactively in promoting independence. The recipient of public services can feel they are fragmented because of boundaries between health and social care organisations, budgets, staff and services. Local Service Boards have generally recognised the need for greater integration of health and social care, and we will monitor closely the impact of the innovations their projects produce. The response is not explicit about how the

Assembly Government will ensure that health and local government bodies have single, shared targets for delayed transfers of care and promoting the independence of vulnerable people. In this context, the pilot projects for the Local Service Boards on health and social care integration will need to set such shared measures to identify the extent to which the system is promoting independence.

Consistent with the theme of greater integration between health and social care, the Government's response emphasises the steps it is taking to improve Continuing Healthcare provision. Managing the assessment of eligibility for and the provision of Continuing Healthcare is an extremely complex and difficult issue for public sector bodies. The Assembly Government is developing a new framework and has provided £100 million in additional resources. I am actively considering undertaking a study of Continuing Healthcare, which may examine how this funding has been used as well as the Government's framework for evaluating its impact.

Both of our projects on delayed transfers of care have highlighted the complexity and challenges involved in the management of Continuing Healthcare. As with the issue of integration between health and social care, it highlights the need for better use of resources across the whole system, and the risks of costs being passed between health and social care organisations. With the current and likely future financial challenges facing public services in Wales, there is a significant risk that pressure on resources may lead to increased disputes between health and social care about responsibility for funding people's needs. For example, any potential tightening of eligibility criteria, for example for social services, could lead to increased delays and less effective prevention activity. Short-term cost savings for one organisation can increase the overall cost to the public service across the whole system. For example if low-level community interventions are not available to promote independence, and a vulnerable older person ends up in a hospital bed, with a cost of over £300 a night, the total cost to the system can increase significantly. Managing the competing pressures between designing a more effective system and the need for short-term cost savings in individual organisations' budgets will be a key consideration during these challenging economic circumstances. A genuine commitment and vision between local partners will be crucial in finding new and innovative ways to promote independence and meet increased demand when there are significant resource constraints.

In terms of future action, I recommend that the Committee notes the Government response and takes no further action. My forthcoming report on unscheduled care will address a number of whole systems issues at the interface between health and social care which the Committee may wish to examine in more detail. I will continue to monitor progress in addressing the whole system causes of delayed transfers of care and will of course inform the Committee of progress.

Yours sincerely

Jo Bashford

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JEREMY COLMAN
AUDITOR GENERAL FOR WALES