

Russell George MS, Chair
Health and Social Care Committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

20 February 2025

Our Ref: 001/RG/UnheardShortInquiry

Your Ref:

Dear Mr George,

I am writing to request that the Health and Social Care Committee consider holding a short inquiry into the implementation of the Committee's *Unheard* report.

The report, published in December 2023, and debated by the Senedd in May 2024, highlighted significant concerns:

- **Women's voices being unheard:** A central, critical theme was that women often felt their concerns were dismissed or downplayed by healthcare professionals. This led to delays in diagnosis and treatment, with women feeling their symptoms were misattributed to psychological or emotional factors rather than thoroughly investigated.
- **Delays in diagnosis:** The report found that many women experienced significant delays in getting a diagnosis of gynaecological cancer. This was attributed to a combination of factors, including a lack of awareness of symptoms among both women and healthcare professionals, as well as inefficiencies in referral and diagnostic processes.
- **Long waiting times:** Once diagnosed, women often faced long waiting times for treatment, with Wales having some of the worst survival rates for ovarian cancer in Europe. The report highlighted that waiting times for gynaecological cancer treatment were particularly long and compliance with the single cancer pathway target was the lowest for all reported cancers.
- **Capacity issues:** The report identified significant capacity issues within the healthcare system, including a lack of resources, facilities, and workforce to adequately support women with gynaecological cancers. This included shortages of radiologists, pathologists, oncologists, and nurses.
- **Need for better symptom awareness:** The report emphasised the need for greater public awareness of the symptoms of gynaecological cancers, as well as better education for healthcare professionals on how to recognise and respond to these symptoms.
- **Data collection and analysis:** The report called for improvements in the collection and analysis of data related to gynaecological cancers, including the need to disaggregate performance data by type of gynaecological cancer to better identify areas for improvement.

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- **Need for strong leadership:** The report stressed the need for strong leadership and support around the work on gynaecological cancers, with clear roles and responsibilities defined for the Welsh Government, and the responsible bodies within the NHS Executive.

The report made a number of recommendations addressing these concerns.

While the Welsh Government responded to the report in the May 2024 Senedd debate, accepting all but three recommendations, implementation has been sporadic.

Also, the then up-and-coming Woman's Health Plan was regarded by the Welsh Government as a significant delivery and accountability opportunity. However, a few short weeks prior to publication we discovered that this would no longer be the case. Members were assured that the Plan would substantially address the concerns of the *Unheard* report – in reality that opportunity was dropped.

That kind of development has only come to light following the determination of Claire O'Shea, and others, to hold the Welsh Government to account for delivering the *Unheard* recommendations.

We would encourage the Committee to scrutinise implementation of the *Unheard* recommendations before the current Senedd term concludes in 2026.

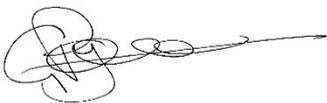
A light-touch, one or two day, inquiry would provide an opportunity to:

- Assess the progress made in implementing the report's recommendations.
- Identify any barriers to implementation.
- Hear from stakeholders, including service users, about their experiences.
- Make further recommendations to the Welsh Government to ensure the report's findings are fully addressed.

We believe that such an inquiry would be invaluable in ensuring that the *Unheard* report translates into meaningful improvements in the lives of women affected by gynaecological cancer.

Thank you for considering this request. We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,



Greg Pycroft

Policy and Public Affairs Manager

cc.

**Claire O'Shea, cancer patient, founder of Claire's campaign
Health and Social Care Committee Members**

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