

TALGARTH TOWN COUNCIL

Mrs Josephine M E Rumsey, Town Clerk

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17th July 2020

Ms Katie Blackburn
Chief Officer
Powys Community Health Council
1st Floor Neuadd Brycheiniog
Cambrian Way
Brecon LD3 7HR

Dear Ms Blackburn

On Monday 13th July, we received by email, a copy of the letter to you dated Thursday 9th July, outlining proposed changes in the opening hours at Haygarth Medical Centre, affecting both its Hay and Talgarth sites. In your statutory role to represent the interests of patients locally, we therefore write to you now, on behalf of Talgarth Town Council, with our formal response and to express our significant concerns about the proposals.

Firstly, we would contest the narrative given for reducing the opening hours at both sites. We understand that the practice received short term “pacesetter funding” from Welsh Government - not Powys Teaching Health Board (PTHB) - intended to help them test new models of primary care. This was in part to help address ongoing GP recruitment challenges and to develop new flexible ways for patients to access their services. That fixed term funding has now ended, albeit PTHB extended it from local funds for a further six months during COVID - 19 and that funding has, as anticipated, come to an end. The Haygarth practice now state that they feel they have no other choice but to reduce the overall opening hours of Hay and Talgarth medical centres to generate cost savings and to enable them to continue to deliver the quality care their patients deserve. How can they, with credibility, claim to be delivering equivalent quality care by *reducing the opening hours at Talgarth by 30% and Hay by 22%*?

In terms of engagement with patients and the community, we acknowledge that GPs have relatively few statutory requirements placed upon them, as long as they are fulfilling the requirements of the contract, which they will seek to argue that they will continue to do, by providing a service as required in statute to: “be available” from 8am to 6.30pm core hours across the two sites. However, this clearly means that patients would be required to travel from Talgarth to Hay and vice versa to a much greater extent, in order to receive medical attention. In this case, what assessment has been undertaken as to how severely this will impact on the elderly and those who rely on public transport? In addition to this, what regard is being paid to the environmental impact of the additional vehicular movements that will be necessitated by the Haygarth proposals?

The general equality duty does certainly apply, including ensuring that an equality impact assessment has been undertaken in developing such a far reaching proposal and in making a decision. Good practice in this area would include engaging with patients to understand the equality implications of different options for responding to the end of fixed term “pacesetter funding” from Welsh Government. Demonstrating good practice in positive community relations would suggest a more proactive approach. Whilst accepting that this is more challenging during the COVID-19 pandemic, we would contend that the Haygarth proposals fall well short of good practice, in terms of the equality duty and patient engagement.

As a Town Council, with our own budgetary responsibilities, we are at a loss to understand how reducing overall opening hours at Hay and Talgarth will generate significant cost savings. Does this involve staff cuts, reduction in staff hours or reduced GP hours? If this is the case, it will clearly have a further adverse impact on quality of care in our community. We are also keen to learn if this proposal also affects the other three practices in South Powys which are part of Red Kite Health Solutions or is it only Haygarth which is seeking to reduce hours? What level of public consultation is required, as the proposal will make a significant change to the delivery of patient care by an organisation funded by the public purse? We are also interested to learn if - and in what way - the pilot has been evaluated to substantiate the claims of success made by Haygarth Doctors? If so, does the report support the claims and is it in the public domain? If an evaluation has not taken place - why not?

Finally, Regulation 20 of the General Medical Services guidelines states: 'A contract must contain a term which requires the contractor in core hours, to provide, essential services and additional services funded under the global sum, at such times, within core hours, as are appropriate to meet the reasonable needs of its patients'. How can it be reasonable to expect elderly and vulnerable people, and others who are socio-economically disadvantaged, to have to travel between Talgarth and Hay to access essential medical services? It is nationally recognised that Powys has an increasingly aged population - and a matter of public record that the unemployment rate in the County has grown by 100% in recent months and in the Hay/Talgarth area by an alarming 363%.

As a Council, we know the CHC's commitment to championing the cause of quality healthcare in our area, and therefore request that you and your colleagues look at these proposals as a matter of priority. We understand that the PTHB's Joint Services Planning Committee meets with the CHC early next week, so we look forward also to the Health Board moving quickly to a critical appraisal and definitive position on the Haygarth proposals.

We would appreciate an acknowledgement of safe receipt of this letter and a substantive response at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely

Josephine Rumsey

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Town Clerk

cc *Andrea Blayney, Deputy Chief Officer, Powys CHC*
 Flora Buckle, Monitoring & Scrutiny Officer, Powys CHC

Carol Shillabeer, Chief Executive, PTHB
 Jamie Marchant, Director of Primary, Community Care & Mental Health, PTHB

Kirsty Williams MS
 Faye Jones MP
 The Rt Hon Jesse Norman MP