

Cyfarwyddwr Cyffredinol Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol/
Prif Weithredwr GIG Cymru
Grŵp Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol

Director General Health and Social Services/
NHS Wales Chief Executive
Health and Social Services Group



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Nick Ramsay AM
Chair
Public Accounts Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

20 February 2019

Dear Mr Ramsay

Informatics Systems in Wales

Thank you for your letter of 23 January. I have received the request to attend the Committee meeting on 1 July 2019, however due to personal leave I am unable to attend on this date as requested. My office is liaising with your clerks to source an alternative date when I can update you on progress.

As the Committee will appreciate from the varied and detailed evidence that was provided during each of the sessions on Informatics in NHS Wales, NWIS and Health Boards are working with a significant number of interdependent systems, some of which are legacy local systems, that operate in a complex operational environment which makes delivering new digital ways of working a challenging proposition.

A Healthier Wales clearly outlines our commitment to investing in new ways of digital working and to dealing with any shortcomings in delivery. To support this, I have commissioned a review of infrastructure and system design that will be informed by best practice approaches to digital healthcare delivery from across the world which is due to report back at the end of this financial year.

A report on the review of informatics governance in NHS Wales has already been received by the Government. It recommends a number of radical actions for consideration over the short and medium term, including:

- Establishing a Chief Digital Officer for Health to strengthen national digital leadership.
- Creating a new standards authority and mandating informatics standards.



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MEWN POBL | IN PEOPLE

Parc Cathays • Cathays Park
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

Ffôn • Tel 0300 0251182
Andrew.Goodall@gov.wales
Gwefan • website: www.wales.gov.uk

- Establishing a new digital development team to support innovation and accelerate the pace of delivery, with priorities set nationally.
- Bringing together the current dispersed regional and national informatics services in a shared-service arrangement for data, infrastructure and delivery.

The Minister for Health and Social Services has said he will update Assembly Members before Easter recess on the response to the governance report specifically but both of the reports will be published and I will ensure the Committee is updated on plans to act on their recommendations. The priority now is supporting professionals and the public and providing a solid platform for successful transformational change. We have made an additional £50m in capital and revenue available for this important area in the coming financial year.

Meanwhile, we should not underestimate the effort it takes NWIS to maintain the existing service even as we step up plans to transform digital services. Much of NWIS's focus has to be on providing day-to-day support and maintaining the complex systems for which it is responsible, such as the Welsh Patient Administration System (WPAS) which manages patient administration in hospitals. It records details of patients' hospital visits, including waiting list management, medical records, inpatient treatment, outpatient appointments and emergency visits. This is alongside NWIS undertaking continued innovation and development of existing systems. As an example, the Welsh Clinical Portal (WCP) provides the ability for health and care professionals to access clinical care documents, including referrals, discharge advice letters, clinic letters, emergency department attendances and GP letters.

The Committee will wish to be aware that the three significant data centre issues last year occurred at a time when necessary changes were being made to the infrastructure. NWIS has now adopted an enhanced change process to address lessons learned in relation to the process of managing changes. Changes are applied to the applications and infrastructure running within the data centres on a daily basis. A total of 7,000 changes were undertaken between September 2017 and October 2018. Of the 21 outages reported to the Committee, two affected multiple systems where the impact would have been widespread. One incident related to the hosted messaging (email) service and the remaining 18 incidents impacted the individual applications relating to WLIMS and CaNISC systems without affecting other services.

NWIS has made a considerable investment in proactive monitoring and in planned upgrade activities. In the past 12 months, NWIS has pro-actively tested the ability to switch all critical services to run in an alternative data centre in the event of a major data centre problem. This forms part of a continual business-as-usual activity.

Investment has been prioritised to refresh hardware and systems that are reaching end of life and Welsh Government has made an additional investment of £1.65 million to strengthen systems against cyber threats.

We are not complacent about the impact of system outages in critical care systems, and the need to improve is clear, however, the Committee will wish to note that there have been no major data centre outages since April 2018. While there have been issues with individual systems, services have typically been restored quickly. As requested, we will provide detail in advance of our next attendance.

While there is still work to be done to fully embrace digital across the service, we are focusing on progress and expectations, as we deliver on the commitments in *A Healthier Wales*. I expect significant improvement during 2019.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Goodall', written in a cursive style.

Dr Andrew Goodall