

Vaughan Gething AC/AM
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Iechyd, Llesiant a Chwaraeon
Cabinet Secretary for Health, Well-being and Sport



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Dear David

Thank you for your letter of 5 October about mental health services in North West Wales.

I am aware there is still a great deal of work to do to deliver the improvements in mental health provision within Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board which we want to see. The Welsh Government will continue to provide the Health Board with the support it needs. The Health Board is working hard to deliver the significant improvements which are required, set out under the special measures process.

There is a new but very skilled and experienced senior team in place who are providing the necessary strong leadership, designed to ensure the necessary programme of change and improvement is planned and delivered as quickly as possible. However, the Welsh Government, Health Inspectorate Wales and the Wales Audit Office, the tripartite group that reviews progress against the special measures improvements plans all recognise the scale of mental health services in North Wales and the significant efforts which will be needed to improve them.

We published the improvement framework for the health board on 29 January. This sets out our expectations for improvement and the milestones for progress over the next two years. Within this period, we expect to see a health board which has strong leadership and robust governance, provides safe high-quality mental health services, offers safe and sustainable out-of-hours primary care services and has a clear plan for the development of primary care and community services in North Wales.

On 24 June I issued a statement on progress on the expectations set out in the framework and noted the early steps taken to improve mental health services, whilst recognising the significant scale of the effort needed.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The Health Board has undertaken a comprehensive recruitment campaign this year to improve medical staffing levels, including the appointment of a new Director of Mental Health, Andy Roach, who reports directly to the chief executive. This role is pivotal in leading on the significant work underway to improve mental health care in North Wales.

Under the special measures we have supported the health board in taking steps to strengthen mental health services in North Wales. These have included:

- improved supervision for nursing staff;
- compassionate dementia care training;
- better reporting of incidents and investigations; and
- monitoring of medicines and shortening of timeframes for responding to complaints.

The Health Board has taken action to begin commissioning a strategic review of mental health services and we will be monitoring progress in this area. The strategy will be developed through extensive engagement with service users and carers, as well as working closely with partner organisations through the North Wales Cross-Sector Regional Leaders Board.

Our new investment in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) aims to reduce waiting times. Services have prioritised access initiatives in the current year in advance of recruiting new staff. We are also working with partners within the Together for Children and Young People programme to ensure only those young people who need specialist CAMHS are referred to these services. Young people themselves say they prefer, if possible, to receive emotional support at times of distress and lower levels of need from other agencies, such as schools and youth services, rather than accessing mental health services.

The Health Board has received its full share of £1.6m out of the total £7.65m of additional annual funding for CAMHS for the whole of Wales, which is being used to support neurodevelopmental services, improve access to Local Primary Mental Health Support Services for children and young people, support early intervention in psychosis and CAMHS specialist services and improve crisis services. While staff are being appointed, we have encouraged health boards to use the funding to improve access times.

With regard to your comments on drug treatments, significant steps have been taken recently to improve access to psychological therapies in Wales. Each health board in Wales now has in place a psychological therapies management committee to oversee the delivery of an appropriate range of services at a local level. This is complemented at a Wales wide level by a national psychological therapies management committee.

Last year, at the request of the Welsh Government the National Psychological Therapies Management Committee, with support from Public Health Wales developed an action plan to help health boards ensure their staff are equipped with the skills to deliver a range of psychological therapies.

To support the delivery of this plan, in 2014/15 the Welsh Government made an additional £650,000 available to provide training to existing staff to deliver psychological therapies. In June 2015, we announced further recurrent funding of £1.9m a year to support psychological therapies provision for adults and £1.1m for children and young people.

Thank you again for writing to me on this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vaughan Gething". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'V' and a long, sweeping tail.

Vaughan Gething AC/AM

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