

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

Chief Executives NHS Wales & Directors of national bodies

Our ref: **I&S**

1 October 2021

Dear Colleagues

Revised Local Options Framework

In December 2020, the previous Minister for Health & Social Services issued a Local Options Framework. In light of increasing operational pressures and rising COVID-19 cases that Framework has been revised and is now being reissued to provide NHS organisations with further flexibility in how they deploy their services and workforce. Application of the Framework should be seen as a last resort, when all other available choices have been fully utilised and exhausted – particularly in relation to ensuring patient flow and hospital discharges.

I expect the coming autumn / winter period to be the most challenging that we will have seen across the health and care system as we balance a Coronavirus context with a system balancing other emergency and routine activities. Health and social care organisations have plans in place and have been taking urgent action to ensure they are ready to respond to the demands of COVID-19, to continue to provide essential services and to prepare for winter pressures.

However, as the rate of COVID-19 transmission continues to rise again across communities in Wales, it can become increasingly difficult to maintain the fragile balance between providing care to those who require hospitalisation because of COVID-19 and the delivery of essential, non-COVID services. Throughout these challenges, the priority remains to minimise harm.

We are starting to see significant pressure on our unscheduled care services and hospital capacity is stretched. As we move further towards winter, it is vital that our health and social care system in Wales is prepared and can support pressures across all our settings.

Difficult choices will have to be made as services and our workforce start to be stretched beyond the levels that we would normally see at this time of year. NHS

organisations will need to take action to ensure they are ready to respond to increasing levels of COVID-19 in the coming weeks.

The revised Local Options Framework (attached) will enable NHS organisations to take local decisions and action to continue to provide care and support to the most vulnerable people in our communities. The Framework has been informed by our ongoing engagement with professional colleagues, including yourselves, Medical Directors, Directors of Nursing and the Royal Colleges.

We are collectively growing increasingly concerned about the potential risk of harm to patients who require access to essential healthcare services. The framework of actions for local consideration by NHS organisations is intended to mitigate the potential risk of harm in the system by:

- maximising use and deployment of the workforce;
- reducing long delays in crucial parts of the system;
- improving patient flow; and
- enabling people to leave hospital when ready, reducing the risk of readmission.

Where deployed these actions will ease the pressures on the NHS by allowing for services and beds to be reallocated and for staff to be redeployed to priority areas.

In considering any such options, I would expect Boards to be fully sighted of the decisions to be taken, potential impacts on local populations and the workforce and any associated risks.

Given the outcomes and recommendations from the essential services deep dive into paediatric and child health services, I am recommending that children's services (school nursing, health visiting, community children's nursing etc.) are omitted from the framework at this time. However, I anticipate that flex may be required within and between children's services to accommodate any peaks in demand, e.g. RSV.

As well as taking individual actions set within a local context, I also expect NHS organisations to work together to ensure the resilience of the emergency response beyond their own boundaries.

Yours sincerely

Personal Data

Dr Andrew Goodall CBE

cc: Chief Operating Officers,
Medical Directors
Directors of Nurses