



## Health and Social Care

**H**ealth and social care make up almost half of Welsh Government expenditure (46.2% or nearly £7bn in 2016-17)<sup>1</sup>. Most health spending is controlled by the seven regional health boards. Most spending in social care is administered by local authorities. From April 2016, their work (along with that of other public bodies) will be coordinated through the Public Service Boards established by the Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, one for each of the twenty-two local authority areas, and each will develop a 'well-being plan' for its area.

All political parties support greater coordination of health and social care planning and service delivery. This is a matter of great importance to those who need to access services and their carers. Patients' and carers' organisations regularly call for the process of getting hold of the right services to be simplified. This is especially important for those about to be discharged from hospital, those seeking care in their own homes, and those considering moving from their home to supported accommodation or residential care.

### The right services at the right time

The many developments in modern health care mean that treatments unimaginable a few years ago are now available, and people expect to have access to them. Some services – such as pharmacies – need to be readily accessible wherever you live. Others – such as specialised diagnostic scans and care for patients with cancer or heart disease, or treatment after a major accident – can only be provided in centres with all the latest equipment and highly-trained staff. Working out the best place to go in an emergency, or the best number to phone for advice, is not always easy for people who are not experts in the system. Proposals to reorganise services in an area often cause great anxiety to the local population. For services such as maternity, it can be very difficult to get the balance between local accessibility and the availability of specialised care if things go wrong.

Health and social care services in Wales have to cover both heavily populated urban areas and sparsely populated rural areas. Transport links in the South Wales valleys are difficult due to their geography. Planning for every eventuality is difficult<sup>2</sup>. There have been serious concerns about the efficiency and reliability of the ambulance services in Wales<sup>3</sup>.

For politicians seeking election, it can be difficult to be honest about the complexity of these matters, and to avoid getting caught up in populist campaigns to 'save' particular services in a local area even though they may not meet modern standards. Equally, Public Service Boards looking at things from the viewpoint of administrative efficiency may find it hard to understand the concerns of local people, and may not always listen to the wisdom and experience they have to offer.

### Carers

According to the 2011 census, there are over 370,000 carers in Wales, and over 100,000 of these provide 50 hours or more of unpaid care per week<sup>4</sup>. Churches are, through their membership and their work in the community, aware of the great pressures on carers. In recent years, a number of legislative changes have affected the rights of carers in Wales to seek an assessment of their needs and to have it implemented. The current situation is covered by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, and its associated Guidance and Codes of Conduct. Not all these provisions have yet been fully implemented and, with the introduction of Public Service Boards in 2016 (see above), this further period of change is causing anxiety to some carers.

### Questions for candidates

1. How do you think that health and social care services can be better coordinated? Does this need to involve further administrative reorganisation?
2. How would you ensure that people in every part of Wales have access to the services they need locally, and to specialised care from experts?
3. Do you think the needs of unpaid carers in Wales are adequately met? If not, what would you do to improve the situation?

### References

- 1 Martin Jennings and David Millett, *Draft Budget 2016-17*, National Assembly for Wales Research Service blog <https://assemblyinbrief.wordpress.com/2015/12/09/draft-budget-2016-17/> (viewed 13 January 2016)
- 2 See, for example, the 2013 consultation on reconfiguring health services in South Wales at <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/SWP/home> (viewed 13 January 2016)
- 3 Paul Worthington, *Performance against new Ambulance response targets in Wales*, National Assembly for Wales Research Service blog <https://assemblyinbrief.wordpress.com/2015/12/03/performance-against-new-ambulance-response-targets-in-wales/> (viewed 13 January 2016)
- 4 Quoted in the *Carers Wales Manifesto 2016* at [www.carersuk.org/wales/news/carers-wales-manifesto](http://www.carersuk.org/wales/news/carers-wales-manifesto) (viewed 18 January 2016)

