

Questions to Board 25 March 2026

Question 2:

Does the Health Board consider this policy to be consistent with the NHS principle of equitable access to care based on clinical need rather than postcode, and if so, how is that equity demonstrated?

Response

We consider this offers an equitable approach across Wales and across Powys, ensuring that wherever you live in Powys are you receive treatment based on Welsh Government performance measures.

Based on the most recent validated waiting times for Powys residents:

- 7,470 patients are on a "referral to treatment" pathways for appointments and procedures provided directly by Powys Teaching Health Board. Of these, 1% are waiting over 52 weeks. I should stress that due to rural and sparsely populated nature of Powys we can only provide less complex procedures within the county that are safe and feasible to provide in a rural community hospital setting.
- 7,739 patients are on a waiting list for other hospitals in Wales. Of these, 15% are waiting longer than 52 weeks and 0.4% are waiting over 104 weeks.
- 12,194 patients are on a waiting list for hospitals in England. Of these, 12% are waiting longer than 52 weeks and 1.1% are waiting over 104 weeks (this mainly relates to some challenged specialties at Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt, such as complex spinal surgery). Waiting times for Powys residents are therefore broadly comparable between England and Wales hospitals.

Supplementary question

While we note that Powys patients are treated according to Welsh Government performance measures, we remain concerned about equity in English hospitals, some Powys patients wait much longer than English patients for the same procedures, particularly complex specialties. Could you clarify how the Health Board ensures that access is based on **clinical need rather than postcode**, and what steps are being taken to reduce these longer waits?

The NHS principle states care should be provided **based on clinical need, not postcode**.

How does the Health Board reconcile this principle with a policy that allows Powys residents to wait **up to twice as long** as English patients for treatment in the same hospital?

Has the Health Board undertaken a **formal equality or equity assessment** specifically addressing the postcode-based difference between Welsh and English waiting time policies?

What evidence demonstrates that patients in Powys receive **equitable access to care** compared with patients living only a few miles away across the border?

Response:

Health service policy and performance are devolved matters in the UK. One impact of this is that eligibility for care and treatment will differ between England and Wales, for example through different approaches to waiting times, or to the provision of prescribed medicines (e.g. prescriptions are free for all residents of Wales, whereas charges are applied for some England residents).

As a health board within Wales, we therefore plan and commission based on Welsh Government policy and performance standards and not on the different standards for the health system in England. Through our accountability to Welsh Government we therefore ensure that our plans seek to achieve Welsh waiting time standards for all of our patients regardless of where they are treated.

Our impact assessment of these policies focusing on consideration of equity impacts for people within Powys within the framework of policies and priorities set by Welsh Government for the people of Wales. On the basis of this impact assessment, our request to providers in England to plan their services for Powys- registered patients based on NHS Wales waiting time standards specifically EXCLUDES the following treatments and populations:

- Cancer referrals
- Urgent and emergency referrals
- Appointments for people under 18
- Follow up appointments and ongoing care for long term conditions (e.g. diabetes)