

Minutes of the Community Meeting held on 22/10/2026 at 6.38pm in Welshpool Town Hall

Convened pursuant to section 27 and Schedule 12, Part V of the Local Government Act 1972.

CHAIR: Cllr Revd William Rowell, Mayor and Chair of Welshpool Town Council

PRESENT: 101 local government electors of Welshpool

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

- Richard Williams – Town Clerk & Responsible Finance Officer the designated Proper Officer of Welshpool Town Council
- 71 other persons not eligible to vote

CM221026/1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed those present and explained that this was a statutory Community Meeting of Welshpool electors, rather than a meeting of Welshpool Town Council. The Chair outlined the purpose of the meeting and the arrangements for questions and voting.

CM221026/2. PROPOSED CHANGES TO LOCAL HEALTH SERVICES

The Chair outlined the proposed changes by Powys Teaching Health Board to local hospital provision in Welshpool. He argued that the removal of beds makes the current Victoria Memorial Hospital vulnerable for closure.

CM221026/3. BALLOT PROCEDURE AND ELIGIBILITY

The Chair explained that the three published questions would be decided by ballot of local government electors of Welshpool present at the meeting, with one vote per elector on each question.

Ballot papers were issued to eligible electors, who were invited to record their votes and deposit their completed papers into a sealed ballot box.

At the conclusion of the voting process, the ballot box was opened and the votes were counted. The results of each question were subsequently declared by the Chair and are recorded under Minutes CM221026/5 to CM221026/7.

CM221026/4. QUESTIONS AND COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

On behalf of Steve Witherden MP, Cllr David France read aloud a statement expressing Mr Witherden's opposition to the proposed reductions in services by Powys Teaching Health Board.

In his statement, Mr Witherden raised concerns that the proposals would create a significant gap in healthcare provision between hospital treatment in Shrewsbury and care provided to patients in their own homes. He emphasised the importance of retaining local hospital services to support patients requiring care between these stages.

Mr Witherden encouraged residents to actively oppose the proposals through the consultation and democratic processes, including signing the relevant petition, writing to the Welsh Government's Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, and continuing to make the case for protecting healthcare services at Victoria Memorial Hospital in Welshpool.

Elwyn Vaughan MS addressed the meeting and expressed his opposition to the proposals put forward by Powys Teaching Health Board. He acknowledged the financial pressures facing the Health Board but questioned how the proposals had been developed and whether they represented an appropriate long-term solution to the challenges facing healthcare provision in Mid Wales.

He emphasised that simply opposing the proposals would not be sufficient and that a constructive alternative was required. He explained that he was working with medical professionals to develop a case for retaining and enhancing existing healthcare facilities, advocating for a comprehensive package of healthcare provision across Mid Wales, including Welshpool, Bronglais, Machynlleth and Llanidloes. He referred to the 2014 Longley Report and the importance of developing a sustainable, long-term approach to healthcare, rather than relying on short-term or technical solutions to cross-border healthcare arrangements.

Mr Vaughan also highlighted the importance of recognising the particular challenges facing rural communities, referring to proposals for a statutory duty to rural-proof public policy decisions. He suggested that consideration should be given to establishing a surgical hub within Powys and highlighted the benefits of existing local services, including dialysis provision in Welshpool, as examples of the value of delivering healthcare closer to patients' homes.

He raised concerns regarding the structure and administration of NHS Wales, suggesting that increases in NHS staffing since the COVID-19 pandemic had not necessarily translated into equivalent increases in frontline provision. He questioned the need for seven separate health boards and argued that reducing administrative bureaucracy could release resources for patient-facing services. He also referred to the role of Llais, relevant legislative changes and the importance of ministerial accountability in decisions affecting local healthcare.

In concluding, Mr Vaughan encouraged residents to take an active role in the consultation process by signing the online petition, contacting Llais, completing the Health Board's online consultation questionnaire and attending the public consultation events. He reiterated the importance of presenting a credible alternative to the proposals and ensuring that the needs of rural communities were properly reflected in future healthcare decisions.

County Councillor Richard Church addressed the meeting and outlined Powys County Council's opposition to the proposed changes to local health services. He emphasised the importance of communities standing together and presenting a united response to the proposals.

He reflected on the history of healthcare provision in Welshpool, explaining that hospital beds had been introduced approximately 150 years ago because of the distances patients would

otherwise have to travel to Newtown or Shrewsbury. He observed that those geographical challenges remained unchanged and that inpatient beds had been provided in Welshpool for approximately twice as long as the National Health Service had existed.

Cllr Church explained the distinction between the responsibilities of Powys County Council and Powys Teaching Health Board, noting that the County Council was responsible for social care rather than healthcare. This included residential care services delivered through contractual arrangements and domiciliary care provided to residents in their own homes. He explained that the County Council was carefully examining the potential implications of the proposals for social care services, which already represented a significant proportion of Council expenditure funded through Council Tax.

He expressed concern that reductions in local healthcare provision would place additional pressures on an already stretched social care system, potentially transferring costs from the NHS to Powys County Council. He argued that any resulting increase in demand for social care could ultimately have financial implications for Council Tax payers.

Turning to the proposed closure of the Minor Injuries Unit at Victoria Memorial Hospital, Cllr Church highlighted the distances residents would be required to travel to access alternative services. He noted that patients could face journeys of approximately 20 miles to either the Accident and Emergency Department in Shrewsbury or the proposed Urgent Care Centre in Newtown. He questioned the Health Board's assumption that patients would predominantly travel to Newtown and invited those attending to indicate whether they would be more likely to seek treatment in Shrewsbury or Newtown. He also expressed concern about the existing pressures on the Accident and Emergency Department in Shrewsbury.

Cllr Church emphasised that responsibility for the NHS in Wales rested with the Welsh Government, to which the Health Board was accountable, and that Welsh Ministers were in turn accountable to the Senedd. He argued that the Welsh Government could not distance itself from the consequences of decisions affecting healthcare provision in Mid Wales and should be held accountable for any resulting reduction in local services.

He encouraged residents to maintain pressure on the Health Board and elected representatives throughout the consultation process. He referred to two petitions circulating in opposition to the proposals, including a petition intended to secure consideration and debate by the Senedd.

In concluding, Cllr Church highlighted forthcoming opportunities for public engagement, including a planned protest through Welshpool on 14 November 2026 at 10.30am and a Powys Teaching Health Board consultation drop-in event at Welshpool Town Hall on 1 December 2026. He encouraged residents to participate in these activities and continue making their views known.

The Chair invited questions and comments from those attending. A wide-ranging discussion followed, during which members of the public, healthcare professionals, representatives of community organisations and elected members expressed concerns regarding the proposals.

The principal matters raised included:

- Accessibility and travel distances: Concerns regarding the distances residents would need to travel to access alternative healthcare provision, particularly in Newtown, Shrewsbury and Telford, and the availability of suitable public transport for patients and their families.
- Impact on rural communities: The importance of recognising the particular geographical challenges facing Welshpool and surrounding rural communities, including Llanfair Caereinion, and ensuring equitable access to healthcare compared with urban areas.
- Inpatient beds and intermediate care: The importance of retaining local inpatient beds to support patients recovering from strokes, serious illnesses and hospital treatment, particularly those transferring from acute hospitals before returning home.
- Pressure on neighbouring hospitals: Concerns that removing services from Welshpool would increase demand on already stretched facilities in Shrewsbury and Newtown, including Accident and Emergency services, and potentially contribute to delayed hospital discharges.
- Minor Injuries Unit: The importance of retaining accessible local treatment for injuries and emergencies, with several residents sharing personal experiences of receiving urgent treatment at Victoria Memorial Hospital.
- X-ray and outpatient services: Concerns regarding the potential loss of diagnostic and outpatient facilities, particularly in light of recent investment in equipment and improvements to the hospital.
- Palliative care and mental health provision: The importance of maintaining care close to patients' homes and families, including concerns about the financial and personal consequences of arranging placements outside Powys.
- Social care implications: The potential for reductions in NHS provision to increase demand for domiciliary and residential care, placing additional financial pressures on Powys County Council, service users and Council Tax payers.
- Local businesses and employment: The importance of accessible medical treatment for employees of local manufacturing, engineering and other businesses where workplace injuries may occur.
- Investment and community fundraising: Recognition of the longstanding contribution of the League of Friends of Victoria Memorial Hospital, including significant fundraising towards facilities and equipment, and concerns regarding the potential loss of services following recent investment.
- Clinical and staff engagement: Questions regarding the extent to which healthcare professionals and hospital staff had been consulted during the development of the proposals, with suggestions that further information should be requested from the Health Board.
- Consultation process: Concerns regarding the development and shortlisting of the proposed options, the consideration of alternatives and whether the consultation provided sufficient opportunity to influence the eventual decision.

- Governance and accountability: Questions regarding the composition and local representation of the Health Board, the role and independence of Llais, and the powers of the Welsh Government to intervene in decisions affecting healthcare services.
- Potential legal challenge: Discussion of the possible grounds for challenging any future decision, including the importance of identifying substantive legal or procedural issues should judicial review become necessary.
- Future healthcare provision: Calls for a longer-term strategy to retain, improve and expand healthcare services in Mid Wales, taking account of future demand, population growth and the needs of rural communities.
- Public engagement and campaigning: Encouragement for residents to participate in the consultation, complete questionnaires, sign relevant petitions, contact elected representatives and attend forthcoming events, including the planned demonstration on 14 November 2026 and the Health Board's consultation event at Welshpool Town Hall on 1 December 2026.

During the discussion, a member of the public invited those not eligible to participate in the formal ballot to indicate their views by a show of hands. A number of attendees indicated opposition to the proposals. This was an informal expression of opinion and did not form part of the formal ballot.

The Chair thanked all contributors for their participation and acknowledged the strength of feeling expressed regarding the future of healthcare services in Welshpool and the surrounding area.

CM221026/5. BALLOT QUESTION 1 - COMMUNITY HOSPITAL BEDS

Question: Do you support Powys Teaching Health Board's proposals to close inpatient beds at Welshpool and other affected community hospitals as part of its Better Together consultation?

Yes 1

No 93

Blank / rejected 0

Valid votes cast 94

Ballot papers issued / returned 101 issued, 7 not returned

The Chair declared that the proposals were NOT SUPPORTED by the majority of electors voting on the question.

CM221026/6. BALLOT QUESTION 2 – MINOR INJURIES UNIT AND X-RAY

Question: Do you support Powys Teaching Health Board's proposals to close the Minor Injuries Unit and X-ray services at Victoria Memorial Hospital, Welshpool?

Yes 1

No 92

Blank / rejected 1

Valid votes cast 93

Ballot papers issued / returned 101 issued, 7 not returned

The Chair declared that the proposals were NOT SUPPORTED by the majority of electors voting on the question.

CM221026/7. BALLOT QUESTION 3 – HALTING THE PROCESS

Question: To call on Welsh Government and the Senedd to halt and review the Powys Teaching Health Board's Better Together Programme.

Yes 93

No 1

Blank / rejected 0

Valid votes cast 94

Ballot papers issued / returned 101 issued, 7 not returned

The Chair declared that the question was SUPPORTED by the majority of electors voting on the question.

CM221026/8. OUTCOME AND NEXT STEPS

The meeting recorded its opposition to the proposed closure of inpatient beds and the proposed removal of Minor Injuries Unit and X-ray services. It further supported calling upon the Welsh Government and Senedd to halt and review the Better Together Programme.

CM221026/9. CLOSE OF MEETING

There being no further business, the Chair closed the meeting at 20:24.

These minutes were drawn up and signed at the conclusion of the Community Meeting.



Signed: _____

Date: 22 October 2026

Cllr Revd William Rowell
Chairman