



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

No Deal Brexit preparations in Health and Social Services

October 2019

Introduction

The risk of the UK leaving the EU without a deal remains very real. Despite our vigorous opposition to the UK Government's current political Brexit strategy, it is our responsibility to put plans in place to prepare for this possibility.

The Welsh Government has been working with its partners in health and social care to limit the damaging effects of a no deal Brexit.

Ensuring there are plans in place to prepare for the impact has been, and continues to be, our priority. We are in a strong position to respond quickly to issues and impacts as they arise after leaving the EU.

This document will show what actions we have already taken, and what we will do in the future, to protect health and social care services. This will allow professionals to work properly and with confidence, ensuring the public and patients are not adversely affected. This complements the Welsh Government [No Deal action plan](#)ⁱ published on 16 September

We have focused on making sure:

- **Medicines** continue to be available
- We can continue to get **medical devices and clinical consumables**
- **Food** supplies can reach health and care settings
- UK Government secures adequate **transport** arrangements
- EU members of our **workforce** are protected and know they are valued
- Our more vulnerable **social care** sector are protected
- Giving **clear, concise and timely communications**
- We **support partners** to help Wales prepare

Managing our medicines

Every month, 37 million packs of medicine arrive in the UK from the EU, with 45 million moving the other way. We are part of UK wide arrangements for the supply of medicines, working closely with the medicines industry. They will be using existing manufacturing, warehouses, and distribution arrangements. Extra import channels are being put in place into the UK through ports and airports. We are fully engaged in the UK-wide National Supply and Disruption Response system.

There are already processes in place to manage medicine shortages that happen routinely, and these will be used if there are any shortages caused by Brexit. We have also put in place legislation that means Ministers can issue serious shortage protocols if needed. This means community pharmacists can give substitute medicines instead of the medicine indicated on the prescription.

Our message to patients is to continue ordering medicines in the way they normally do, and in the way they have been prescribed. However we are alerting people to the fact they may be issued with a different brand to the one they are used to.

For radioisotopes, there are similar UK side arrangements, supported by a dedicated express freight channels into airports. These arrangements have been tested and rehearsed in response to some concerns raised by clinicians and professional groups. We will be looking for a high level of assurance from suppliers and the UK Government for these essential supplies, which are used for diagnostics and treatment.

Protecting our medical devices and clinical consumables

For medical devices and clinical consumables, we are working closely with NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership to build and maintain existing stocks. We are also working with NHC Clinical leads to increase the number of critical products which are not normally stocked centrally.

In Wales, we are also increasing our central stocks of major items used by social care. This will help social care providers if they become unable to access these produced through their normal supply channels. So far this additional stock has cost over £5million.

We are fully engaged with the UK-wide National Supply and Disruption response system. Arrangements are in place to increase the capacity of this system to help resolved supply disruption incidents with medicines, devices or clinical consumables, if needed.

We have taken extra steps in Wales to strengthen our storage capacity to make sure we can more effectively manage our supplies.

We have invested £11m in a storage facility to ensure supplies of medical equipment and essential items are not disrupted. This could have been spent on essential maintenance and improvements of our buildings, new imaging technology or seven replacement MRI scanners.

This significant investment was made necessary and urgent by the prospect of a no deal Brexit.

Strengthening our food supply arrangements

Whilst there is no evidence to suggest there will be an overall shortage of food, there will be choice and availability of certain products that are imported from the EU.

To prepare for this, we have asked health and social care organisations to look at ways which meals could be adapted if some ingredients are not available. However we would still hope that nutritional standards are not be compromised.

Many food supply services managed by Local Authorities, such as to the independent care providers, care homes and domiciliary support services, are likely to see cost increases or disruptions to their food supplies. Work is underway to try and mitigate any potential cost increases through financial and business support, and strengthening the contingency plans for the supply of food.

UK transport arrangements

UK Government are responsible for ensuring the flow of goods through ports, borders and airports. They have classified all health and care supplies as 'category 1', and have purchased 'express freight' capacity into airports for urgent supplies such as radioisotopes. However we still remain concerned that transport across the UK will still suffer significantly, for example due to congestion around ports or other pressure on road transport. We will continue to press for robust reassurances and that all the necessary actions are being taken to prevent the late or unpredictable arrival of products into Wales.

Protecting our health and social care workforce

Non-UK citizens make a vital contribution to our health and care system. We could not provide services without employing people from Europe and across the world.

It is important our non-UK health and social care staff know they are valued in Wales and play vital role in delivering services. They will always be welcome here.

We are continuing to press the UK Government to consider the impact that their proposals may have on the future availability of non-UK health and care professionals. This is especially concerning given the current UK Government proposals for a salary cap on employing staff from outside the UK and Ireland. If implemented this would cause real harm to our health and social care services.

While we have not seen evidence so far of a significant departure of EU nationals from health and social care in Wales, other parts of the UK have. However we are seeing a reduction in applications from overseas which, if it continues, will have a serious knock-on effect in the medium term.

We are working closely with organisations across health and social care, and the workforce regulator, to proactively identify any workforce pressures and concerns which may be affected by a no-deal Brexit. Promoting the UK's Settled Status scheme is an important part of our communications effort, and the Welsh Government has put in place extra support for our workforce to help them apply.

Challenges for social care

The social care sector in Wales, as in other parts of the UK, already faces many challenges and Brexit in any form is likely to have an impact.

Key challenges for social care include:

- Supply of goods and medicines
- Impact on the availability and costs of the workforce
- Any significant increases in the costs of food, energy and fuel.

The amount of data across the social care sector is limited, which makes it difficult for accurately assess and predict the impact of Brexit. This is due in part to the varying sizes, types and specialities of the 1275 care home providers delivering care and support to more than 26,000 people in Wales.

The risks to these businesses will vary according to the size, type, business model and location of these providers. Over 30% of care homes have 5 or fewer beds, making them particularly sensitive to any significant variations in costs or the availability of supplies. Commercial competitiveness means we are unable to gather a complete picture of what the difficulties could be, and so there is less scope for early intervention.

However significant work has already taken place with social care, local authorities, independent and third sector organisations to mitigate some of the challenges. This will be kept under review, and more work will be commissioned, as more intelligence is gathered.

Communications with the public and workforce

Clear, concise and timely communications underpins all our preparedness work. Our [Preparing Wales / Paratoi Cymru](#)ⁱⁱ website is a single, comprehensive source of information for the public. It sets out guidance, advice and steps that need to be taken to prepare for leaving the EU.

Within health and social services we have a cascade mechanism in place to get information out to all levels of the workforce through timely bulletins, as well as existing internal communication channels of each organisation.

The Welsh NHS Confederation have a detailed [frequently-asked-questions](#)ⁱⁱⁱ document that is promoted and shared with NHS and social care teams.

We have increased the intensity of our communications to make sure health and care teams are informed and to pick up any emerging issues that we may need to respond to. This will continue to provide public reassurance and ensure services continue to be delivered.

Supporting our partners

Through the European Transition Fund we have supported a number of organisations and projects, including the Welsh NHS Confederation, Food Standards Agency in Wales, and the Association of Directors of Social Services.

This has included reviewing our support for farmers' mental health and wellbeing, and engagement with farmers and agricultural organisations. It is recognised that farmers and those living in rural communities are facing a period of significant uncertainty, with a potential negative impact on their mental health and well-being. Brexit is a major consideration in this due to the potential impact on livelihoods and a number of actions are being taken to mitigate impacts on the industry.

Public Health Wales and the Mental Health Foundation have recently jointly published [an 'action framework to support mental health and well-being of farmers at times of uncertainty'](#)^{iv}. The framework was informed by a review of international literature and engagement with stakeholders from across the farming sector in Wales.

Conclusion

There has been an intensive amount of work and time invested at all levels of health and social care to prepare for a no deal Brexit. Our overriding priority is to ensure the certainty and continuity of essential supplies for NHS and social care in Wales, so that services can be maintained on a business-as-usual basis without interruption.

We will continue to do all we can to assess the probable impacts of leaving the EU and to ensure we are as prepared as we can reasonably be.

ENDS

ⁱ <https://gov.wales/no-deal-action-plan>

ⁱⁱ <https://gov.wales/preparing-wales> <https://llyw.cymru/paratoi-cymru>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.nhsconfed.org/resources/2019/02/managing-eu-withdrawal-in-health-and-social-care-in-wales-faqs>

^{iv} <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/supporting-farming-communities-times-uncertainty>