



Offthalmoleg Ardal  
De-ddwyrain Cymru  
South East Wales  
Regional Ophthalmology

# Planning Future Cataracts Services in South East Wales Briefing Document

## Introduction

This document has been produced to provide information about cataracts services across Aneurin Bevan, Cardiff and Vale and Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Boards. The document advises of issues experienced by cataracts services across the three health boards and how services could be delivered in the future. It is important that everyone who has an interest in eye care has an opportunity to understand the future options and to let us know their views.

## Background

Health boards have a responsibility to deliver all health services to their population including sight restoring cataract services. Whilst health boards must provide these services, they don't necessarily need to be delivered within the health board boundary area, and many services are now delivered on a regional basis e.g. some specialist care or where there are significant benefits to combining services, enabling more patients to be treated than would otherwise be the case.

Aneurin Bevan, Cardiff and Vale and Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Boards have therefore agreed to work together to review options about the possible benefits to patients and staff by combining our resources to increase the amount of cataract surgery undertaken and to reduce patient waiting times.

Temporary arrangements have been in place since January 2023 for some patients from Aneurin Bevan and Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Boards, enabling them to have their cataracts surgery using additional capacity at the University of Wales Hospital in Cardiff. In early 2024 there will also be some additional capacity in Nevill Hall Hospital in Abergavenny, enabling earlier cataract surgery for patients from Aneurin Bevan, Cardiff and Vale and Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Boards.

## **What are Cataracts Services?**

Cataract Services are provided by health boards to treat patients with cataracts, which is when the lens in the eye gets cloudy and vision is affected. The service involves an assessment to check the eye and see if the patient is suitable for surgery, and the eye surgery itself.

## **Why are we talking about Cataracts Services?**

We are talking about cataract services because there are now large numbers of patients waiting for cataract surgery. The numbers of patients needing the service are greater than the number of patients that the service can treat, and the waiting lists have been getting longer. As patients wait longer their vision deteriorates and they are more likely to come to harm as they wait.

## **Who is involved in this programme?**

Aneurin Bevan, Cardiff and Vale and Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Boards are involved in this programme. The three health boards have agreed to work together to increase cataracts services and hence reduce waiting times for their patients.

## **Who needs Cataracts Services?**

All patients experiencing cataracts can benefit from the service. Most (but not all) patients tend to be over 60 years old, and men and women are equally affected.

## **How are services provided now?**

Services are generally provided by each health board for their own patients. In Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, cataract assessments and surgery are delivered at the Royal Gwent Hospital in Newport and at Nevill Hall Hospital in Abergavenny. In Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, these are delivered at the University Hospital of Wales Hospital in Cardiff, and in Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board, these are delivered at the Princess of Wales Hospital in Bridgend and the Royal Glamorgan Hospital in Llantrisant.

## **How do services perform?**

Cataract services across the three health boards can treat around 8,500 patients per year. There is a backlog of approximately 18,000 patients waiting for cataracts services and every year 10,500 patients are added to the waiting list. Many patients wait over a year for cataracts services, and some are currently waiting up to two years. All the health boards agree that this is too long and needs to be addressed.

## Recent Issues affecting the service

### Patient waiting times and harm

Patients are waiting over a year for cataracts services following referral from their optician. During this time, a patients' sight is deteriorating, and this may lead to an increased risk of falls or other accidents and increase social isolation as leaving home may be more difficult. Patients have difficulty reading books, watching television, using a mobile phone, accessing the internet or doing detailed hobbies like crafts. As vision gets worse, quality of life is further affected, and independence is lost as many patients rely more on family and friends for self-care tasks like cooking, cleaning and shopping.

### Demand

Each year across the three health boards approximately 10,500 people will be referred to an eye specialist (ophthalmologist) for cataract surgery and this number has been increasing since the Covid19 pandemic in 2020.

Due to the backlogs created by the pandemic there are currently approximately 18,000 people across the three health boards on waiting lists for assessment or surgery.

The numbers of patients receiving assessment and surgery for cataracts is now back to pre-pandemic levels and about 8,500 patients per year can be treated. The backlog and the increasing demand for the service has led the three health boards to look at different approaches and options for cataracts surgery.

### Workforce

Across the three health boards and the wider UK there are vacancies for all levels of Medical, Nursing and Allied Health Professional staff. The average age of the current workforce is growing, and many experienced staff are approaching retirement age. There is a very limited pool of trained staff, and it is becoming challenging to recruit and retain sufficient staff of the required experience and expertise to support traditional workforce models

### Accommodation and physical space

Across the three health boards, accommodation to undertake cataract assessments and surgery is limited. Ophthalmology assessment clinics and theatres need to provide space for all types of eye care services including emergency cases and those treating irreversible blindness. The amount of suitable clinical accommodation and facilities that currently exists in the three health boards is insufficient to cope with the demand. There is also some 'mis-match' across the three health boards between the available workforce and the available space (for example, one health

board has sufficient staff but insufficient space, whilst another has the reverse situation).

### Capacity and efficiency

Cataract surgery is a generalist surgical skill that all ophthalmology surgeons perform along with their specialist surgery. Some specialists have a morning or afternoon list of surgery where they just do cataracts, whereas others add them to a more general theatre list where they are undertaking other procedures (as there is insufficient capacity for dedicated cataracts lists). Best practice indicates that the service can be made more efficient through doing more frequent **cataract only lists** and by streamlining the processes through assessment and surgery. There is a desire to follow this best practice, but this would require more space and staff.

### Sustainability and equal access

As a result of the issues outlined above, some services across the three health boards are not considered to be sustainable in the long term. Demand outstrips capacity at different rates across the three health boards and waiting lists in some areas are longer than others. Patients in some areas are waiting longer than others for cataracts assessment and surgery. The three health boards believe that patients across south east Wales should receive the same levels of care and that waiting times should be broadly the same, regardless of where someone lives.

### Planning the Future Service

The three health boards have agreed to work together to achieve the following aims:

- to provide additional joint capacity for cataract services
- to use our assets and resources in the most effective and efficient way
- to work together to address current long waiting times and make these equitable across south east Wales
- to reduce clinical risk for all patients

A number of possible options have been put forward in respect of how future cataract services could be increased to best achieve these aims. These options are in addition to the current capacity at Royal Gwent Hospital, University Hospital of Wales, Royal Glamorgan Hospital and Princes of Wales Hospital.

1. **One South East Wales Centre:** To have one larger centre in south east Wales that will specialise in cataracts within an existing hospital setting. This would be a robust and sustainable option and would be likely to result in the greatest number of patients being treated (and therefore the largest reduction in waiting times) but would mean more patients traveling to one location for a dedicated service.
2. **Two Joint Units:** To extend the current temporary arrangements and have two cataract Units, one along the M4 corridor and one closer to the heads of the valleys. This would also make the service more sustainable and result in significant reductions in waiting times and would generally require less travelling for patients than option 1.
3. **Increasing capacity on three sites:** Each health board to increase the capacity at one site within each health board boundary. Some sites will be more able to increase capacity than others. This would reduce waiting times but at a much slower pace and would vary across each health board.
4. **Outsourcing:** to arrange for cataracts patients to be treated by private providers. This could be anywhere within South Wales or at a nearby site in England. This would also reduce waiting times (at a slower pace) but would be more expensive and would increase travelling for patients.
5. **Do Nothing:** maintain current services and worsening waiting times

### Seeking the Views of the Public

We are seeking your views regarding the above options and what you consider to be the most important issues and priorities for the future cataracts service. We will then use your views and feedback to inform our future conclusions and decision making about the best way to provide safe and sustainable services in the future.

It is important to us that all those with an interest in the cataract service understand the options and have an opportunity to provide full feedback. This will provide valuable information that will influence final decisions and the details of the service. We will also use the information received to update our Equalities Impact Assessment.

### How will the three health boards do this?

To ensure that everyone is able to make their views known, the three health boards are undertaking a joint 12-week period of engagement involving the following:

- Prominent display of information in service areas, to include posters and displays
- Information / survey forms provided for patients attending appointments
- Dedicated information page on each Health Board website, to include FAQs, access to patient survey (with option of paper version), contact points / numbers and updated as plans progress
- Face to face and online public information sessions / engagement events
- Social media messaging
- Presentations to stakeholders
- Management meetings for internal NHS stakeholders

It is planned that a 12-week engagement period will run from **9.00am on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2023 until 5.00pm on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2024**

### Survey

Please provide us with feedback by completing the online survey either via the QR code or URL link below:



URL: <https://forms.office.com/e/XZfKjdSApg>

More information can be found via the following websites:

<https://abuhb.nhs.wales/SEWalesCataracts>

<https://cavuhb.nhs.wales/our-services/ophthalmology/planning-future-cataracts-services-in-south-east-wales/>

<https://ctmuhb.nhs.wales/services/planning-future-cataracts-services-in-south-east-wales/>

**You may also wish to scan it, or take a good quality photo and email it to us at:** [sewales.cataracts@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:sewales.cataracts@wales.nhs.uk)

**Or Post it to the address below:**

ENGAGE WITH US  
Corporate headquarters  
St Cadocs  
Lodge Road  
Caerleon  
NP18 3XQ

**Public Engagement Sessions**

Each Health Board will be actively engaging with older people via a variety of groups and events. In addition to this people can attend a generic public engagement session, where you will find out more about the proposal and ask any questions on the following dates:

<b>Online via Teams</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 5pm to 6.30pm, Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> December 2023</li><li>• 5pm to 6.30pm, Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2024</li></ul>
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**Contact us**

By e-mail with any comments or if you would like to join one of the on-line sessions above at **[sewales.cataracts@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:sewales.cataracts@wales.nhs.uk)** and we will arrange to send you a link for the session.

Contribute to any conversations via the Health Board's social media channels

### What will happen after the engagement period?

Once the engagement period is complete, all responses and views will be collated, and conclusions reached regarding the most appropriate arrangement option for future cataract services. A final report and conclusions will be prepared and shared with Llais (the new health watchdog body that has replaced Community Health Councils in Wales). The response from Llais will enable us to conclude whether a final decision can be made on future service provision, or whether further actions are required.

Subject to further discussions with Llais, we may wish to enter a period of formal consultation, and should we do that we will once again invite your views.

### References

[Age-related cataracts - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

[Cataracts: Causes, Symptoms, and Treatment | Patient](#)

[Population estimates by local health boards and age \(gov.wales\)](http://gov.wales)