

## **A MID WALES HEALTH BOARD**

### **Real or Virtual?**

*Paper prepared by Allan Wynne Jones and submitted to the Marcus Longley study group on health care in Mid Wales 2015. It complements earlier submissions by the Machynlleth based campaigning group, Bro Ddyfi dros Bronglais.*

**Defining the region.** Based on an analysis of the boundaries of 'Mid Wales' (see note below) the most appropriate, meaningful and effective delineation of the region would be based on the current counties of Powys and Ceredigion, along with the former county of Meirionnydd. However, given the recent experiences of marginalisation in Bro Ddyfi, the Dyfi Valley, it is important that particular attention is given to the circumstances of people who live on the periphery of the region. Boundaries should therefore be regarded as 'fuzzy' rather than linear.

**A Mid Wales Health Board?** It is significant that some leading politicians at national and county level are now calling for Y Canolbarth / Mid Wales to become a separate entity / county / region in any future local government reorganisation. Furthermore, given that the current discussion about the recommendations of the Williams Commission has placed the boundaries and responsibilities of all public service delivery organisations on the political agenda, it is wholly appropriate that the realignment of health board boundaries and responsibilities as they affect Mid Wales be reconsidered. It could be argued that now is the time to create a Mid Wales Health Board, recognising the challenges and opportunities of developing a new model of delivery for rural areas.

**Combined functions.** In recognition of the need for more effective integration of health provision with social care and other regional services, the model of combining health services with other statutory county council duties as advocated by the Williams Commission for Powys (exclusively) is certainly worthy of consideration for a Mid Wales county / regional entity. It could provide economies of scale and a greater sense of identity and community cohesion in Wales's most sparsely populated area.

**A 'virtual' health board?** However if the concept of a new Mid Wales Health Board or an integrated, holistic county / regional entity proves to be unacceptable in political terms, an alternative, if less satisfactory, answer would be to create a 'virtual' health board or commission to overlay the mid Wales sections of the three existing boards: Betsi Cadwaladr, Powys and Hywel Dda. It would draw together the financial, staffing and property resources pertinent to the region, with its own plan, budget, management and independent chair. This would involve progressively devolving responsibilities by the three health boards to the new 'virtual' entity and, over time, relocating some key managers and administrators.

**Hospital integration.** Within such an arrangement, Bronglais Hospital could re-emerge as a centre for planning and development for Mid Wales but given the

widespread, fragmented nature of the region, not necessarily the only provider of emergency and elective care, especially in the east, towards the English border. Strengthening Bronglais would also allow for coherent and, where appropriate, integrated planning for the retention and redevelopment of the region's ten or more community hospitals, only two of which are currently run by the same health board as Bronglais.

**Out of region treatment.** This new 'virtual' Mid Wales Health Board would need to set up special arrangements or protocols for specialist hospital referrals to hospitals outside the region for its patients. This would involve acknowledging cultural sensitivities, recognition for the distances travelled for treatment, public/private/arranged transport considerations, patient choice in referrals, appropriate timing for appointments and serious consideration of the need for reasonably priced overnight accommodation for relatives at all relevant locations.

**Serious commitment.** It is vitally important that this concept of a 'virtual' health board is taken seriously by the three existing statutory organisations as well as the Welsh Government Health Minister. In view of the short lived, failed attempt to set up a 'planning committee' to better plan the needs and expectations of patients living within the three health boards in the Bronglais catchment area, there would need to be an all round commitment that the new arrangement would be effective and transparent in the long term.

**Role of Bronglais.** A key aspect of this re-organisation should be a complete re-evaluation of the pivotal role of Bronglais. It should be enabled not just to maintain services but to develop and grow, creating new links with Aberystwyth University, Swansea Medical School and Bangor's nursing department, especially in the fields of rural medicine and general surgery.

**Information.** Transparency should be at the heart of any monitoring of the proposed arrangement. This should involve greater provision of information about service provision at Bronglais and the community hospitals in question, using detailed websites for each establishment as well as developing, agreeing and providing key indices of performance

**Monitoring.** Inevitably this would call for a comparable re-alignment of Community Health Councils. The councils or committees for Meirionnydd, Montgomeryshire, Brecknock and Radnorshire, and Ceredigion should reorganise and refocus their activities, setting up a Mid Wales CHC confederation as the region's principal monitoring organisation. They should be fully involved in designing the websites mentioned above and contribute to the discussion on developing indices of performance.

---

***Background briefing on defining 'Mid Wales' follows.....***

## **CENTRAL? RURAL? MID? HEART of? Wales.**

**North and South Wales only.** For centuries the only major regional differentiation within Wales was between 'north' and 'south'. For the west coast road traveller, North Wales was perceived to start at Pont ar Ddyfi, near Machynlleth, with the marked change in topography, settlements, industries, farming, Welsh language dialect and accent.

**Central Wales.** In modern times the first official use of the term 'Central Wales' was in the original name of the Craven Arms to Llanelli railway line, changed to the '**Heart of Wales Line**' only in recent times. The term 'Central Wales' was revived in the 2004 Wales Spatial Plan (no longer in use by the Welsh Government) for this, its largest, unwieldy planning region, extending from inland areas of Conwy county south to rural northern Carmarthenshire, effectively from Llanrwst to Llandeilo.

**Rural Wales.** Rural depopulation became a major concern for academics, planners, politicians, language activists and community leaders throughout the 1960's. Although the public enquiry chaired by Sir Ben Bowen Thomas (in the former Parish Hall, Aberystwyth) into the creation of a Wales Rural Development Board in 1969 did not have a specific regional remit, it was understood that the focus was on the area now referred to as 'Mid Wales'. (The author of this document attended the enquiry to give evidence on behalf of the then Wales Tourist Board; his submission appears in the public record.) When eventually the Development Board for Rural Wales was created in 1977 its remit was to cover the five (former) counties of Meirionnydd, Montgomeryshire, Cardiganshire, Radnor and Breconshire. During part of its existence the DBRW used the title 'Mid Wales Development' as its 'trading' name. (Incidentally, the name of the earlier 'Mid Wales Development Corporation' which had existed since 1965 and was absorbed by the above DBRW, was a misnomer as its principal focus had been the development of a major 'new town', extending from Caersws to the original Newtown, but it was later scaled down and modified considerably in response to widespread protests.)

**Mid Wales.** The first attempt to delineate 'Mid Wales' as such was a major aspect of the (David) 'Cole Report' on tourism in Wales published by the Welsh Office in 1965 which advocated the setting up of three regional tourism entities as part of Wales's first publicly funded research and development programme in support of tourism. When in 1969 the new statutory Wales Tourist Board (WTB) took over the assets of the former voluntary Welsh Tourist and Holidays Board, then Wales Tourist Association, it was decided to confirm this tripartite regional division of Wales, with Mid Wales consisting of the five counties mentioned earlier with its own regional tourism council based in Machynlleth, mainly responsible for consultation, information and promotion. (At an early WTB meeting in a rear room of the Metropole Hotel, Llandrindod, the author vividly remembers having the responsibility of leading and resolving the discussion on

the actual boundaries between the three proposed regions and nervously marking them on a blow up map of Wales.)

**The region's heyday.** For many years during the '70s, '80s and '90s, the Mid Wales Tourism Council co-existed with the DBRW / Mid Wales Development; consequently many commercial and voluntary organisations operating in the region adopted the 'Mid Wales' appellation. In terms of economic and social development, this could be regarded as the 'golden age' of the region with an intensive programme of commercial marketing; bilingual business support services, grants and other incentives; factory building; infrastructure and transport improvements and the creation of thematic centres or festivals in virtually every town, some built around pre-existing events such as the Sesiwn Fawr in Dolgellau others being new, innovative events such as the Literature festival in Hay on Wye. Jointly with the regional tourism council it helped to focus attention on the region and provide local businesses and organisations with an unprecedented sense of optimism and engagement. The demise of this flourishing period started with the 'Bonfire of the Quangos' towards the end of the millennium.

**After Devolution.** In the earlier years of devolution, especially during the first term, the National Assembly for Wales advocated a regional approach to strategic planning, setting up a Mid Wales Committee which met regularly in the region, arranging well attended public hearings on specific development themes in a variety of locations. However the committee was not revived in the second term of the Assembly and there are no plans for its re-establishment. As noted above in 2004 the Welsh Government's Spatial Plan section for this area ('Central Wales') had a considerably greater geographical reach, causing some confusion and misunderstanding.

**Demise of 'Mid Wales'.** DBRW or 'Mid Wales Development' was absorbed by the Welsh Development Agency in 1998 which was itself dissolved in the final 'Bonfire of the Quangos' in 2006. Although the Wales Tourist Board suffered a similar fate, a mid Wales tourism entity remained for several years: originally called the Mid Wales Tourism Council it was later reconceived as Tourism Partnership Mid Wales. TPMW remained an important aspect of 'Croeso Cymru / Visit Wales' well after the functions of the Wales Tourist Board were absorbed by the Welsh Government. However in 2014 Visit Wales decided to reconfigure its activities, resulting in the demise of TPMW. When this happened on 30 September 2014, **Mid Wales no longer existed as a public service delivery entity.** Although many voluntary organisations, trade associations and businesses have since then retained the term 'Mid Wales' as part of their regional structure or commercial presence, the region under that name no longer exists or is delineated in official terminology or public service in Wales.

Allan Wynne Jones,

06/08/2014 – 20/08/19

## ALLAN WYNNE JONES

### MANYLION GYRFA AMLINELLOL

Yn ei yrfa gynnar roedd Allan yn ymchwilydd i BBC Cymru, swyddog yna'n Gyfarwyddwr Marchnata gyda'r Bwrdd Croeso, perchennog Plas Maenan y gwesty Cymraeg cyntaf a chyfarwyddwr grŵp o westyau cenedlaethol Cymreig. Yn ddiweddarach bu'n ymgynghorydd a darlithydd mewn agweddau cysylltiedig o'r economi, busnes, marchnata, diwylliant ac iaith.

Bu ar fwrdd sawl corff cyhoeddus gan gynnwys Canolfan y Dechnoleg Amgen, Canolfan Iaith Genedlaethol Nant Gwrtheyrn, Canolfan Ysgrifennu Tŷ Newydd, Cwmni Traddodiadau Cerddorol Trac, Canolfan Ectarc Llangollen, Canolfan Celtica gynt, Biwro Ewropeaidd yr Ieithoedd Llai ym Mrwsel a Delyn, Sefydliad Gwarchod Ieithoedd Bregus a Phwyllgor Unesco Dyn a'r Biosffer y DG. Roedd yn gadeirydd cyntaf Partneriaeth Biosffer Unesco Dyfi. Ers ymddeol bu'n Gyd-Gadeirydd cwmni datblygu cynaliadwy Ecodyfi, Cadeirydd cyntaf Llywodaethwyr Ysgol Bro Hyddgen, Cadeirydd Canolfan Owain Glyndŵr Machynlleth, arweinydd ymgyrch Bro Ddyfi dros (Ysbyty) Bronglais ac aelod o Fforwm Cleifion Machynlleth.

### OUTLINE CAREER DETAILS

In his early career, Allan was a BBC researcher, Tourist Board officer and later Marketing Director, proprietor of Wales's first bilingual hotel and director of a Welsh hotel group.

In later years he has been an adviser, lecturer and consultant in related aspects of economic development, business, marketing, culture and language.

Organisations with which he has served at board level include the Centre for Alternative Technology, National Language Centre Nant Gwrtheyrn, Tŷ Newydd Writers Centre, Trac the Traditional Music Development Organisation, former Celtica Centre Machynlleth, European Centre for Traditional and Regional Cultures Llangollen, European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages in Dublin and Brussels, Unesco's Man and Biosphere UK Committee and the Foundation for Endangered Languages.

He was the founding Chair of the Dyfi Unesco Biosphere Partnership. Since retiring he has been Co-Chair of sustainable development company Ecodyfi, first Chair of Governors for Ysgol Bro Hyddgen, Chair of the Owain Glyndŵr Centre Machynlleth, member of Machynlleth Patients' Forum and a leader of the Bro Ddyfi dros Bronglais (Hospital) campaign group.

Allan Wynne Jones.