



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Helen Whately MP
Minister of State for Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU*

[REDACTED]

Jacqueline Lake
Senior Coroner for Norfolk
County Hall
Martineau Lane
Norwich
NR1 2DH

25 April 2024

Dear Mrs Lake,

Thank you for your report of 8 January 2023 about the death of Lyn Mary Brind. I am replying as Minister with responsibility for urgent and emergency care. Please accept my sincere apologies for the significant delay in responding to this matter. I would like to assure you that the department is mindful of the statutory responsibilities in relation to prevention of future deaths reports and we are prioritising responses as a matter of urgency.

Firstly, I would like to say how saddened I was to read of the circumstances of Mrs Brind's death. I offer my sincere condolences to her families and loved ones. I am grateful to you for bringing these matters to my attention.

The report raises concerns about ambulance handover delays, capacity at Queen Elizabeth Hospital and patient flow through the hospital including the discharging of medically fit patients. Further, I note the report raises concerns regarding appropriate safety checks for patients waiting in ambulances but that you are satisfied with the action taken in respect of these matters by the East of England Ambulance NHS Trust and Queen Elizabeth Hospital King's Lynn NHS Foundation Trust.

I recognise the significant pressure the urgent and emergency care system is facing. That is why we published our 'Delivery plan for recovering urgent and emergency care services' which aims to deliver sustained improvements in waiting times, including to improve A&E wait times to 78% of patients being admitted, transferred, or discharged within four hours by March 2025. The plan also plan also commits to reducing average Category 2 ambulance response times to 30 minutes across this fiscal year. The plan is available at <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/B2034-delivery-plan-for-recovering-urgent-and-emergency-care-services.pdf>

Your report highlights that the hospital was under high demand with long handover delays at the hospital at the time of the incident. I recognise that ambulance trusts work within a health

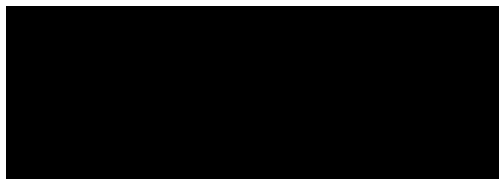
and care system and issues such as delayed patient handovers to hospitals can impact on capacity and response times. That is why a key part of the delivery plan is about improving patient flow and bed capacity within hospitals. We achieved our 2023/24 ambition of delivering 5,000 more staffed, permanent hospital beds this year compared to 2022-23 plans, backed by £1 billion of dedicated funding, and we will maintain this capacity uplift in 2024/25. Further, we also achieved our target of scaling up virtual ward bed capacity to over 10,000 ahead of winter 2023/24, and there are now over 11,000 beds available nationally.

We are also investing an additional £1 billion this year through the Discharge Fund, to support the NHS and local authorities to ensure timely and effective discharge from hospital. This funding follows £600 million last year and £500 million in 2022/23. The NHS and local authorities are using this funding to help provide people with the right care in the right place when they are discharged from hospital. We have also ensured every acute hospital has access to a care transfer hub, bringing together professionals from the NHS and social care to manage discharges for people with more complex needs who need extra support with a view to promoting early planning and timely discharge. These measures are helping improve patient flow through hospitals, reducing delays in patient handovers so ambulances can swiftly get back on the roads.

We have seen improvement in urgent and emergency care performance this year following the delivery plan's publication. In February 2024 A&E performance at The Queen Elizabeth Hospital King's Lynn NHS Foundation Trust for patients to be admitted, transferred or discharged within 4 hours was 70.7%, an improvement of 8.3 ppt from the same month last year. In March 2024, average handover times in the EEAST region were 30 minutes 12 seconds, an improvement of almost 6 minutes from the previous month. However, I recognise there is still more to do to reduce response times down further and back towards pre-pandemic levels – and this is the action we will continue to be taking as part of the government's commitment to improving NHS services and reducing waiting times.

Thank you once again for bringing these important issues to my attention.

Yours,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Helen Whately.

HELEN WHATELY