



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Helen Whately MP
Minister of State for Care*

*39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU*



Ms Alison Mutch OBE
HM Coroner Court
1 Mount Tabor Street
Stockport
SK1 3AG

25 April 2024

Dear Ms Mutch,

Thank you for your letter of 4 February 2023 to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care about the death of Benjamin Stanley. I am replying as Minister responsible 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 Mr Stanley's death and I offer my sincere condolences to their family and loved ones. The report raises concerns about Accident and Emergency (A&E) waiting times and a lack of bed capacity at Stepping Hill Hospital, Stockport NHS Foundation Trust. I am grateful to you for bringing these matters to my attention.

In preparing this response, my officials have made enquiries with the Care Quality Commission (CQC). The CQC notes that there are improvements at the trust including work to increase the footprint of their emergency department, the provision of an additional ward for medically optimised patients to help free up beds, and work with local care home providers to focus on ways to increase community capacity to further enable prompt patient discharges.

As the Minister responsible for urgent and emergency case services, I recognise the pressures our A&E services are facing and the impact on waiting times for patients. That is why we published our delivery plan for recovering urgent and emergency care services which aims to deliver sustained improvements in emergency waiting times. The ambition is to improve A&E wait times to 78% of patients being admitted, transferred, or discharged within four hours by March 2025.

A key part of the plan has been to increase hospital capacity to improve patient flow and reduce overcrowding in A&E. We have achieved the ambition of delivering 5,000 more staffed, permanent beds this year compared to 2022-23 plans - backed by £1

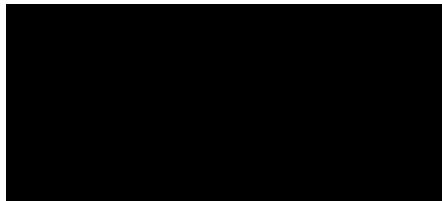
billion of dedicated funding. Further, we also achieved our target of scaling up virtual ward beds to over 10,000 in advance of winter.

We recognise that a whole-system approach is needed to ensure people get the emergency care they need when they need it. This is why we have made £1.6 billion of funding available over two years to support the NHS and local authorities to ensure timely and effective discharge from hospital, helping to free up beds and reduce long waits for admission from A&E. NHS England also launched its universal support offer, available to all systems, including Stockport NHS Foundation Trust which supported systems to implement high impact initiatives and improve emergency care performance ahead of winter this year.

We have seen improvement in A&E waiting times this year following the delivery plan's publication. National A&E 4-hour performance improved by 3.3ppt to 74.2% in March 2024 from 70.9% in February 2024, and up from 71.5% in March 2023. However, we recognise there is more to do, and reducing waiting times is a priority for this Government.

Thank you once again for bringing these concerns to my attention.

Yours,



HELEN WHATELY