



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care

*From Minister Whately  
Minister of State for Health and Social Care*

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**Annex A**

Anna Crawford  
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2 April 2024

Dear Ms Crawford,

Thank you for your letter of 31 March 2023 to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care about the death of Veronica Jenkins. 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 Ms Jenkins' death and I offer my sincere condolences to her family and loved ones. I am grateful to you for bringing these matters to my attention.

Your report raises concerns about ambulance response times by South East Coast Ambulance Trust (SECAmb). In preparing this response, Departmental officials have made enquiries with NHS England (NHSE). I note they have responded separately to you and provided a response which addresses how they are increasing availability of staff and are working with partners to address handover delays.

As the Minister responsible for urgent and emergency case services, I recognise the significant pressure the ambulance service has been facing, including SECAmb. That is why we published our ambitious Delivery plan for recovering urgent and emergency care services. This aims to deliver sustained improvements in waiting times, reducing Category 2 response times to 30 minutes on average this year.

Your report also highlights pressures on SECAmb's operational capacity at the time of the incident. A primary aim of our delivery plan is to boost ambulance capacity. Ambulance services are receiving £200 million of additional funding this year to expand capacity and improve response times alongside the delivery of new ambulances and specialist mental health vehicles. With more ambulances on the road, patients will receive the treatment they need more swiftly.

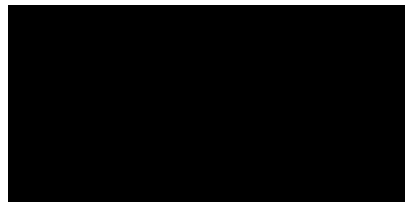
Regarding handover delays, a key part of the plan has been to increase hospital capacity to improve patient flow. We have achieved the ambition of delivering 5,000 more staffed, permanent beds this year compared to 2022-23 plans - backed by £1 billion of dedicated funding. Further, we also achieved our target of scaling up virtual ward beds to over 10,000 in advance of winter. These measures will improve patient flow through hospitals, reducing delays in ambulances handing over patients so they can swiftly get back on the roads.

Regarding staffing capacity, we have made significant investments in the ambulance workforce – the number of NHS ambulance staff and support staff has increased by over 50% since 2010. In addition, the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan published in June 2023 sets out how the NHS will address existing and future workforce challenges by recruiting and retaining thousands more staff over a 15-year period and working in new ways to improve staff experience and patient care. This will help ensure we have the ambulance workforce to meet the future demands on the service, building on the 40,000 more ambulance staff that have already joined the service since 2010.

At a national level, we have seen significant improvements in performance this year compared to last year. In winter 2023-24, average Category 2 ambulance response times (including for serious conditions such as heart attacks and strokes) were over 12 minutes faster compared to the same period last year, a 24% reduction. For SECAmb, in 2023-24 winter, their average Category 2 response times was over 5 minutes faster compared to the same time period last year, a 16% reduction.

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

Yours,



**HELEN WHATELY**