



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Maria Caulfield MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department of Health & Social Care*

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John Taylor
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South London Coroner's Office
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9 May 2024

Dear Mr Taylor,

Thank you for your Regulation 28 report to prevent future deaths dated 24 April 2023 about the death of Samuel Thomas Howes. I am replying as Minister with responsibility for mental health and patient safety.

Firstly, I would like to say how saddened I was to read of the circumstances of Samuel's death and I offer my sincere condolences to his family and loved ones. The circumstances your report describes are concerning and I am grateful to you for bringing these matters to my attention. Please accept my sincere apologies for the significant delay in responding to this matter.

Your report raises concerns over the provision of care for children and young people with complex needs.

In preparing this response, Departmental officials have made enquiries with NHS England as the matters of concern you have raised are mainly for NHS England to address. I understand that NHS England has already provided you with a comprehensive response, setting out what progress is being made to improve children and young people's mental health services, and how the Framework for Integrated Care (Community) Framework is helping young people with the most complex needs.

From a national perspective, I would add that under the NHS Long Term Plan, the NHS forecasts that, between 2018/19 and 2023/24, spending on mental health services has increased by £4.7 billion in cash terms, compared to the target of £3.4 billion set out at the time of the NHS Long Term Plan in 2019. This includes expanding and transforming children and young people's mental health services. As part of this, the aim is for an extra 345,000 more children and young people to get the NHS-funded mental health support they need by March 2025 compared to 2019.

With regard to the concerns around the response from mental health services to Samuel's alcohol and/or drug dependency, we recognise that we need to do more to tackle this issue. As highlighted in the independent review of drugs, individuals with co-occurring mental

health and drug and/or alcohol conditions are often passed from one service to the other, excluded from mental health services until they resolve their substance misuse needs, and excluded from drug services until their mental health needs have been addressed.

This is why the Department and NHS England are working together on a joint action plan to improve the mental health treatment offer for people who use drugs and alcohol. This includes improving access to mental health services for people using drugs and alcohol as people are currently too often excluded from, and/or fall between the thresholds of, services. It will also promote better links between mental health services and drug and alcohol treatment services to ensure people receive joined-up care. The first phase of the programme targets adult mental health services, and a second plan for children and young people will follow.

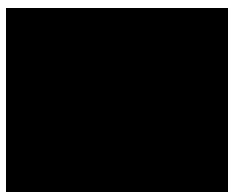
In addition, the Government has committed to investing an additional £532 million to improve drug and alcohol treatment and recovery services from 2022/23 to 2024/25, building on an £80 million investment in 2021/22. This includes improving the capacity and quality of children and young people's treatment, with an ambition to get an extra 5,000 children and young people in treatment by 2024/25.

The Department has also published a commissioning quality standard providing guidance for local authorities to support them in commissioning effective alcohol and drug treatment and recovery services in their area. This is available at: [Commissioning quality standard: alcohol and drug services - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/commissioning-quality-standard-alcohol-and-drug-services). This encourages a partnership approach to commissioning that includes the local NHS and other health providers in the planning and delivery of these services.

In addition, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (formerly Public Health England) has published guidance to support the commissioning and provision of joined up services for people with co-occurring mental health and substance misuse problems. The guidance sets out the principles which should underpin the way substance misuse and mental health services work together, including that each person should have access to a care co-ordinator to help ensure all their needs are addressed. This is available at: [Better care for people with co-occurring mental health, and alcohol and drug use conditions \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/publications/better-care-for-people-with-co-occurring-mental-health-and-alcohol-and-drug-use-conditions)

I hope this response is helpful. Thank you for bringing these concerns to my attention.

Yours sincerely,



MARIA CAULFIELD