



Department of Health & Social Care

*From Helen Whately MP
Minister of State for Care*

*39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU*

Alison Mutch
Coroner's Court
1 Mount Tabor Street
Stockport
SK1 3AG

22 April 2024

Dear Ms Mutch,

Thank you for your letter of 19 July 2023 to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care about the death of Bernhard John Marek. I am replying as Minister with responsibility for Urgent and Emergency Care. Please accept my sincere apologies for the 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 deeply sorry I was to read the circumstances of Mr Marek's death and I offer my sincere condolences to his family. I am grateful to you for bringing these matters to my attention.

Your report raised concerns about ambulance response times by North West Ambulance Service NHS Trust (NWAS) and resource issues leading to ambulance handover delays at Stepping Hill Hospital, Stockport NHS Foundation Trust.

In preparing this response, my officials have made enquiries with NHS England and the Care Quality Commission (CQC). My officials advise me that Greater Manchester Integrated Care, wrote to you in August to provide information on the improvements being made locally following Mr Marek's death which have supported improved ambulance response times and reductions in handover delays. In addition, I understand the CQC has had regular engagement with the North West Ambulance Service and partners to monitor ambulance delays, the plans to address them, and the management of risk.

I recognise the significant pressure the urgent and emergency care system is facing. In January 2023 we published our ambitious 2-year Delivery plan for recovering urgent and emergency care services to drive sustained improvements in urgent and emergency care waiting times. Our ambitions for this year are to improve A&E waiting times to a minimum of 78% of patients to be admitted, transferred, or discharged from A&E within four hours by March 2025, and to reduce 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 NWAS were under high demand at the time of the incident. A primary aim of our delivery plan is to boost ambulance capacity. Ambulance services received

£200 million of additional funding in 2023/24 to expand capacity and improve response times, and we are maintaining this additional capacity in 2024/25. This is 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.

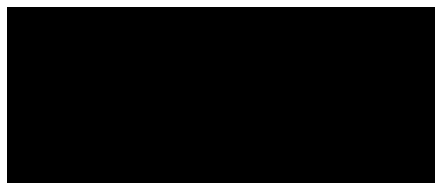
I recognise that ambulance trusts work within a health and care system and issues such as delayed patient handovers to hospitals can impact on capacity and response times. That is why a key part of the delivery plan is about improving patient flow and bed capacity within hospitals. We achieved our 2023/24 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 also have provided £1.6 billion of funding over two years to support the NHS and local authorities to ensure timely and effective discharge from hospital. These measures are helping improve patient flow through hospitals, reducing delays in patient handovers so ambulances can swiftly get back on the roads.

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 reduction of nearly 25%. NWAS average Category 2 response times in winter 2023-24 were over 8 minutes faster compared to the same time period last year, a 18% reduction.

However, I recognise there is still more to do to reduce waiting and 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 concerns to my attention.

Yours,



HELEN WHATELY