



Department
of Health &
Social Care

From Helen Whately MP
Minister of State for Care

39 Victoria Street
London
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Jacqueline F Lake
Senior Coroner
County Hall
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N21 2DH

2 May 2024

Dear Mrs Lake,

Thank you for your letter of 13 September 2023 to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Victoria Atkins, about the death of Geoffrey Douglas Hoad. 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 Hoad'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 the response time performance of East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust (EEAST). I note that you have raised these concerns with EEAST and Norfolk and Norwich University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust who are best placed to respond on the specific action being taken locally to support reduced ambulance response times.

As the Minister responsible for urgent and emergency case services, 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 reduce Category 2 response times (including for serious conditions such as heart attacks and strokes) to 30 minutes on average this 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 EEAST 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.

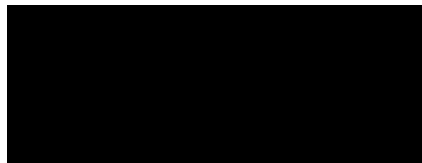
I recognise that ambulance trusts work within a health and care system and issues such as delayed patient handovers to hospitals can impact on capacity and response times. That is

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. This year, average Category 2 ambulance response times (including for serious conditions such as heart attacks and strokes) were over 13 minutes faster compared to last year, a reduction of over 27%. EEAST average Category 2 response times were over 23 minutes faster this year compared to last year, a 34% reduction. In March 2024, average patient handover times in the EEAST region were 30 minutes and 12 seconds, and improvement of over 5 minutes from the previous month (information on ambulance handover times has been published since October 2023). 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 (information on ambulance handover times has been published since October 2023). However, I recognise there is still more to do to reduce response times further, and the Government will continue to work with NHS England to achieve this.

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

Yours,

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

HELEN WHATELY