



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Helen Whately MP
Minister of State for Care*

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[REDACTED]

Hannah Berry
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[REDACTED]

17 May 2024

Dear Ms Berry,

Thank you for your letter of 1 December 2023 about the death of David John Briggs. I am replying as Minister with responsibility for urgent and emergency services. 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 Briggs' death and I offer my sincere condolences to his family. It is vital that we learn from incidents, where they are identified, to improve NHS care. I am grateful to you for bringing these matters to my attention.

Your report raised concerns about the capacity of Yorkshire Ambulance NHS Trust (YAS). You have appropriately shared your report and concerns South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board, who are best placed to respond on the action being taken locally to improve ambulance response and patient handover times.

As the Minister responsible for urgent and emergency care 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. Our ambitions for this year include reducing Category 2 ambulance response times to 30 minutes on average 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 YAS 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 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 have also 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.

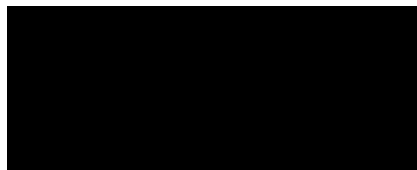
Regarding staffing capacity, we have made significant investments in the ambulance workforce – the number of NHS ambulance staff and support staff has increased by over 50% since 2010. To help ensure we have the ambulance workforce to meet the future demands on the service, the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan sets out plans to boost the number of paramedics by up to 15,600 to deliver services in ambulance and other care settings.

At a national level, we have seen significant improvements in performance this year compared to last year. In 2023/24, average Category 2 ambulance response times (including for serious conditions such as heart attacks and strokes) were over 13 minutes faster compared to the previous year, a reduction of 27%. In the Yorkshire region, average Category 2 response times were over 9 minutes faster in 2023/24 compared to the previous year, a reduction of nearly 23%.

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,

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HELEN WHATELY