



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Helen Whately MP
Minister of State for Health and Secondary Care*

39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU
020 7210 4850

[REDACTED]

Darren STEWART OBE
HM Area Coroner for the coroner area of Suffolk
The Coroner's Court and Offices
Beacon House
Whitehouse Road
Ipswich IP1 5PB

2 April 2024

Dear Mr Stewart,

Thank you for your letter of 15 January 2024 to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Victoria Atkins, about the death of Dennis John William King. 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 and I am thankful for the extension you have granted.

Firstly, I would like to say how deeply sorry I was to read the circumstances of Mr King'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, delays in transferring patients to specialist units within the East of England, the centralisation of services and the action plan provided by the local ambulance trust. I understand that NHS England (NHSE) has written to you to respond to those specific concerns within their remit as have East of England Ambulance Service Trust (EEAST) on action being taken locally. NHSE note in their response note if ambulances are not available immediately for patient transfers, the incident should be escalated to ensure an appropriate response.

I recognise the pressures our A&E and ambulance services are facing and the impact of waiting times for patients. That is why we published our ambitious Delivery Plan for Recovering Urgent and Emergency Care Services which aims to deliver sustained improvements in waiting times. The ambition is for 76% of patients to be admitted, transferred, or discharged from A&E within four hours by March 2024, and to reduce Category 2 ambulance response times to 30 minutes on average this year.

Your report highlights that EEAST were under high demand at the time of the incident. A primary aim of the 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.

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 hospital's patient flow and bed capacity. We have met our planned targets of delivering 5,000 more staffed, permanent hospital beds, supported by £1 billion of dedicated funding, and increased virtual ward bed capacity to over 10,000 ahead of winter. This builds on the £500 million used last winter and a further £1.6

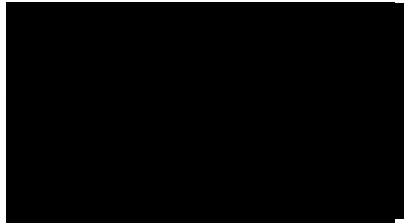
billion of funding over two years to support the NHS and local authorities to ensure timely and effective discharge from hospital. These measures are helping improve patient flow through hospitals, reducing delays in patient handovers so ambulances can swiftly get back on the roads.

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 the East of England this winter, average Category 2 response times were nearly a third faster. However, we know there is more to do and reducing waiting times is a priority of this Government.

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

Yours,



HELEN WHATELY