



Department of Health & Social Care

*From Helen Whately MP
Minister of State for Care*

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[REDACTED]

Peter Taheri
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[REDACTED]

12 April 2024

Dear Mr Taheri,

Thank you for your letter of 25 May 2023 about the death of Michael Bray. I am replying as Minister with responsibility for Urgent and Emergency Care. Please accept my sincere apologies for the significant 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 saddened I was to read of the circumstances of Mr Bray's death and I offer my sincere condolences to their family and loved ones. I am grateful to you for bringing these matters to my attention.

Your report raises concerns about the ambulance response times by East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust (EEAST). You have raised these concerns directly with EEAST which is best placed to respond on the specific action being taken locally to improve response times. In preparing this response, Departmental officials have made enquiries with the Care Quality Commission who have also met EEAST to discuss the circumstances around Mr Bray's death and local action being taken.

I recognise the significant pressure services are facing. That is why we published our [Delivery plan for recovering urgent and emergency care services](https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/B2034-delivery-plan-for-recovering-urgent-and-emergency-care-services.pdf), which aims to deliver sustained improvements in waiting times, including to reduce Category 2 response times 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>

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.

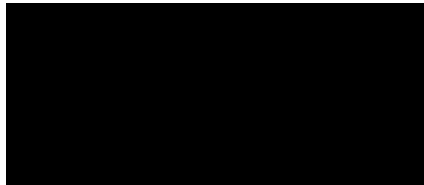
I recognise that ambulance trusts work within a health and care system and issues such as delayed patient handovers to hospitals can impact on capacity and response times. That is why a key part of the delivery plan is about improving patient flow and bed capacity within hospitals. We achieved our 2023/24 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 made £1.6 billion of funding available over two years to support the NHS and local authorities to ensure timely and effective discharge from hospital, helping to free up beds and reduce long waits for admission from A&E, reducing delays in ambulances handing over patients so they 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 24% reduction. For EEAST, in winter 2023-24, average Category 2 response times were almost 23 minutes faster compared to the same time period last year, a 32% reduction. However, I recognise there is still more to do to reduce response times down further and back towards pre-pandemic levels – reducing waiting times is a priority for this Government.

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

Yours,



HELEN WHATELY