

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Patient Safety, Women's Health and Mental Health.

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Our Ref:

Rachael Griffin
Senior Coroner for Dorset
Coroner's Office for the County of Dorset
BCP Civic Centre
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Bournemouth
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09 September 2024

By Email:

Dear Ms Griffin,

Thank you for your Regulation 28 report to prevent future deaths dated 31 May 2024, about the death of Frazer Charlie Williams. I am replying as the recently appointed Minister with responsibility for mental health and offender health.

Firstly, I would like to say how saddened I was to read of the circumstances of Frazer's death and I offer my sincere condolences to his family and loved ones. The circumstances your report describes are deeply concerning and I am grateful to you for bringing these matters to my attention.

I understand the concerns raised in your report over a lack of equity regarding accessing treatment for individuals with severe mental illness in prison settings; a lack of national guidance relating to a range of healthcare issues in prison settings; operational issues regarding the assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) process and engagement with prisoners' family members.

I am aware that NHS England has now provided its response to your report, which sets out the steps it is taking to address inequity in the system for prisoners accessing treatment and responds to your concerns around the transfer of mentally unwell prisoners and the provision of healthcare in prison settings.

I share your concerns about the length of time it can take to transfer some mentally unwell prisoners to hospital when needed, and we are taking steps to improve that. As highlighted in NHS England's response to you, the Department is working with NHS England, and His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service to respond to the concerns highlighted in His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons' thematic review *The Long Wait*, published in February 2024, which focuses on delays in the transfer of mentally unwell prisoners. NHS England is leading on this response, which I will be reviewing and I will be keeping a close eye on how this work progresses.

In addition to this, the Mental Health Bill will be introduced in this Parliamentary session. The Bill sets out vital reforms to support people with severe mental illness in the criminal justice

system with the aim of speeding up access to specialist inpatient care and ensuring that offenders and defendants with severe mental health needs are able to access appropriate and timely support in the most appropriate setting.

The reforms proposed in the Bill will speed up access to specialist inpatient care and treatment by introducing a new statutory time limit of 28 days for the transfer of patients from prison and other places of detention to hospital. This mirrors the time limit set out in the NHS England good practice guide published in 2021: *Guidance for the Transfer and Remission of Adult Prisoners and Immigration Removal Centre Detainees under the Mental Health Act 1983*. I hope that these reforms will help to reduce the likelihood of the issues outlined in your report from being repeated.

With regard to the other concerns you have raised around a lack of national guidance relating to a range of healthcare issues in prison settings; operational issues regarding the ACCT process and engagement with prisoners' family members, I would expect the other recipients of your report to address these in their responses, as they are responsible for matters relating to day to day operations within prison settings. I look forward to seeing their responses and working with them where appropriate, to avoid a repetition of the horrific events of this case.

I hope this response is helpful in setting out how we plan to address some of the issues you have raised. Thank you for bringing these concerns to my attention.

Yours sincerely,

