



Department
of Health &
Social Care

Minister of State for Health (Secondary Care)

39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

Our ref:

HM Senior Coroner David Reid,
Worcestershire Coroner's Court,
The Civic, Martins Way,
Stourport-on-Severn,
Worcestershire
DY13 8UN

By email:

20 December 2024

Dear Mr Reid,

Thank you for the Regulation 28 report of 21 October 2024 sent to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care about the death of Henry Willems. I am replying as the Minister with responsibility for urgent and emergency care.

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

Your report raises concerns over delayed ambulance response times at West Midlands Ambulance Service University NHS Foundation Trust (WMAS), and handover delays between WMAS and the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust. In preparing this response, my officials have made enquiries with NHS England to ensure we adequately address your concerns.

I understand that WMAS is implementing urgent changes to improve ambulance response times. I am advised WMAS is increasing the number of operational staff who will be actively responding to patients and the number of ambulances on the road to reduce service pressures. WMAS is also increasing the number of paramedics and nurses working in the control rooms to increase 'Hear and Treat' rates and, where appropriate, refer the patient onto a range of other NHS services such as urgent care, occupational health teams or arrange for the patient to go directly to a specialist ward in hospital. This work helps patients avoid unnecessary hospital visits and receive more timely care in the community, which in turn relieves pressure on the emergency departments. WMAS has also established an Operational Oversight Delivery Programme Board, which is chaired by their CEO, that aims to provide comprehensive oversight of operational performance, with a specific focus on improving Category 2 call response times.

Regarding ambulance handover times, WMAS uses a dynamic conveyancing process to make real-time decisions on where to take patients based on the current demands within the region. The aim is to direct patients to hospitals with lower pressure to prevent overloading any single site and increasing handover delays. WMAS has been actively collaborating with NHS England and the six Integrated Care Boards in the West Midlands to reduce handover times at hospitals.

At a national level, this government is committed to returning to the safe operational waiting time standards set out in the NHS Constitution. In doing so we will be honest about the challenges facing the health service and serious about tackling them. The Health Secretary ordered an independent investigation of NHS performance to provide an assessment of the issues and challenges it faces. This reported on 12th September 2024 and the investigation's findings will feed into the government's work on a 10-year plan to radically reform the NHS and build a health service that is fit for the future.

In the short-term, a range of action is being taken by the NHS this year to improve urgent and emergency care performance, including by maintaining capacity gains in acute hospital beds and ambulance hours on the road achieved in 2023-24, increasing the productivity of acute and non-acute services across bedded and non-bedded capacity, and directing patients to more appropriate services in the community where these can better meet their needs. This government is also working to improve hospital flow to make sure people do not spend longer than necessary in hospital and reduce delayed discharges, increasing urgent and emergency care capacity.

I hope this response is helpful. Thank you for bringing these concerns to my attention.

Yours sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the Minister of State for Health.

MINISTER OF STATE FOR HEALTH