

**Strictly Confidential**

Mr Paul Appleton  
HM Assistant Coroner  
Teesside and Hartlepool  
The Coroner's Service  
Middlesbrough Town Hall  
Albert Road  
Middlesbrough  
TS1 2QJ

**NENC ICB**

Pemberton House  
Colima Avenue  
Sunderland  
SR5 3XB

11<sup>th</sup> April 2025

Dear Mr Appleton

**Re: Diana Fairweather-Purkis, deceased (date of death 03/10/2022)**

In relation to the matters of concern you identified following your investigation, please find the following response from the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board.

**1. There is insufficient ambulance service availability/resource to enable ambulances to attend to patients in a timely manner and in accordance with relevant target attendance times.**

Since the creation of the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENC ICB) in July 2022 there has been significant investment of additional resources into ambulances services to increase capacity and availability. Over £40m of additional funding, made up of local ICB investment and a share of nationally funded NHS England growth monies, has been made available to the North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) since 2023/24 to increase the number of vehicles on the road and also strengthen clinical advisory services.

NEAS have established an Integrated Urgent Care Clinical Assessment Service (IUCAS) which includes paramedics, nurses, advanced practitioners, pharmacists, GPs and clinical specialists who provide enhanced clinical support to call handlers and patients ringing 111 and 999. Senior clinical advisors (clinicians) provide additional clinical assessment via telephone triage, improving the journey and experience for our patients by ensuring they can pass through to services quickly and efficiently. The team also promotes self-care, provides advice and support for patients at home, facilitating onward referral where necessary to a range of primary and secondary care services. By being able to increase the number of patients who are treated and discharged in the community, the IUCAS helps to reduce pressures on ambulances, emergency departments, and other NHS services.

With regard to ambulance performance and the target response times, NEAS are consistently the highest performing ambulance provider in England across all 4 response time categories and continue to implement system-wide improvement programmes in conjunction with ICB and our acute hospital providers to further improve response times throughout 2025/26 and work towards achieving the NHS constitutional standards.

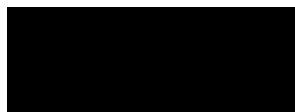
**2. There are excessive delays in ambulance crews being released following attendance at hospital, due to delays in patients being handed over to hospital staff.**

Ambulance handover delays are a priority area of focus for the ICB, NEAS, and acute provider Foundation Trusts across NENC Integrated Care System (ICS). The multi-agency NENC Strategic Urgent & Emergency Care Network and Local A&E Delivery Boards provide leadership and oversight of a range of transformation initiatives that are being taken to improve patient handover times. There has been a significant programme of work taking place in the second half of 2024/25 to bring together colleagues from across the system (ICB, FT, ambulance trust) to look at ambulance handover improvement and transformation. This programme was externally facilitated and has led to a number of revised and standardised policies and procedures being agreed for elements of the ambulance handover process (e.g., immediate release, cohorting, diverts and deflections etc.). Alongside the wider ICS programme there have also been individual improvement programmes taking place across Foundation Trusts to reduce handover delays. A strong example of this is the work that has taken place at South Tees FT to make tangible improvements to their internal processes resulting in increased flow through the Emergency Department and reduced average handover times.

Average ambulance handover times are improving after a difficult and challenging winter period and in the last 3 weeks the average handover time has been less than 20 minutes across NENC, just above the constitutional standard of 15 minutes and significantly below the target of 45 minutes in the 2025/26 NHS operational planning guidance. There have also been significant reductions in the number of ambulance handovers in excess of 60 minutes, the threshold beyond which we know patients are at an increased risk of experiencing harm. These improvements have been delivered whilst the demand for ambulances has continued to rise, and general & acute bed occupancy has remained above 92% across NENC. There continues to be a strong focus on reducing handover delays so that ambulance crews can be released back onto the road as quickly and efficiently as possible to respond to patient demand in the community. This is evidenced by the consistently strong performance of NEAS across the four categories of ambulance response times compared to other ambulance services in England.

I hope that this answers your queries. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information on this.

Yours sincerely

A black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the Chief Contracting and Procurement Officer.

**Chief Contracting and Procurement Officer**