

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Roland Wooderson
Area Coroner for Gloucestershire
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Gloucester GL4 3DJ

Chief Executive's office
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1010 Pioneer Avenue
Gloucester Business Park
Brockworth
Gloucester
GL3 4AW

Tel. 0300 421 8348
[REDACTED]

Sent by email and Recorded Delivery

18 June 2025

Dear Mr Wooderson,

Re: Inquest touching the death of James Oliver Sheppard

I write in relation to the above inquest which concluded on 8 May 2025.

On 8 May 2025 you made a report under paragraph 7, Schedule 5, of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 and Regulations 28 and 29 of the Coroners (Investigations) Regulations 2013. Your report was sent to the Department of Health and Social Care and to me, as the Chief Executive Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust ("the Trust"). I am writing to provide you with the Trust response to your concerns which relate to insufficient beds available in psychiatric units to meet patient demand.

We are grateful for the acknowledgement during your concluding remarks at the inquest that the Trust is responsible for delivery of psychiatric beds locally and issues of commissioning and total levels of available resource are responsibilities held in the wider health system locally and nationally. As such, our response is focused on what we can influence. As examined during the hearing, particularly in consideration of the witness testimony provided by [REDACTED], significant work has been undertaken over the past few years to manage mental health bed capacity and patient flow within the Trust. Although bed availability and resourcing continue to present challenges across mental health wards nationally, the measures implemented by the Trust have improved the structure and efficiency of bed management systems and significantly reduced the use of Out of Area Placements over the past three years, clearly demonstrating the Trust commitment towards an ongoing improvement of processes to ensure that every possible effort is made to ensure that those patients who require in-patient mental health care have access to a bed as quickly as possible. Our further work is focused on reducing, wherever possible, the average length of stay of inpatients to ensure that the current number of beds are being used as efficiently and effectively as possible. The Trust will be monitored nationally on this measure as part of NHS England's Performance Assessment Framework.

In its ongoing efforts to improve the position locally, the Trust has also engaged in discussions with the local Integrated Care Board (NHS Gloucestershire ICB) and the development of an inpatient strategy is one of the agreed priorities for the Integrated Care System this year. We will ensure that the importance of adequate access to inpatient care is formally acknowledged through our Contract Management Board meeting with the ICB.

As a Trust, the safety and wellbeing of those we provide service to is paramount and despite the unfortunate circumstances in which this query has arisen, we welcome the opportunity you have provided for us to further address the issue of beds availability in psychiatric units. We will also note the response you receive from the Department of Health and Social Care on this issue which we are aware presents a challenge to mental health providers across the country. We have taken this opportunity, as we do with all inquests, to learn from this and continue to implement steps to ensure that we provide the best possible quality care.

Yours sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the Chief Executive.

Chief Executive