



Department
of Health &
Social Care

From Helen Whately MP
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Caroline Russell AM
Chair of the Police and Crime Committee
London Assembly
By email to: janette.roker@london.gov.uk

3 November 2023

Dear Ms Russell,

Thank you for your correspondence of 20 June, co-signed by Dr Onkar Sahota, about the London Ambulance Service (LAS). I apologise for the delay in replying.

Regarding LAS resourcing, I understand that you received a letter from Martin Machray, Executive Director of Performance at NHS England. I hope this provided reassurance that the LAS is adequately resourced to deliver services across the capital, including responding to major incidents.

I recognise the significant pressure the ambulance service as a whole has been facing since the pandemic, especially last winter. That is why NHS England published the *Delivery plan for recovering urgent and emergency care services*, which aims to deliver one of the fastest and longest-sustained improvements in emergency waiting times in the NHS's history. The ambition is to bring down category 2 response times to 30 minutes on average this year, with further improvements towards pre-pandemic levels next year.

A primary aim of this plan is to boost ambulance capacity. Ambulance services are receiving £200million of additional funding this year to grow capacity and improve response times. Orders have been placed for the delivery of over 800 dual-crewed ambulances as well as specialist mental health vehicles for this year. With more ambulances on the road, patients will receive the treatment they need more swiftly.

In addition, we are helping cut emergency waiting times with six new ambulance hubs and 42 new and upgraded discharge lounges that are opening at hospitals across the country, backed by nearly £50million of investment. The ambulance hubs will cut out unnecessary handover delays and get ambulances back on the road faster, while the discharge lounges will speed up the safe and effective discharge of patients from hospital, freeing up hospital beds.

We have also implemented a new tiering performance and improvement approach to support challenged ambulance trusts and wider systems. There is support in place at national and regional level to support tiers 1 and 2, with a universal improvement support offer being made available for all systems.

I also recognise that ambulance trusts work within a health and care system. A key part of NHS plans is about improving hospital patient flow and bed capacity. The recovery plan

will deliver 5,000 more staffed, permanent beds and scale up virtual ward beds to 10,000. This increase is backed by £1billion of dedicated revenue funding and £250million of capital funding. A further £1.6billion of funding for social care over two years is being provided to reduce the number of beds occupied by patients ready to be discharged. These measures will reduce delays in ambulances handing over patients so they can swiftly get back on the roads.

It is critical that we have the workforce to help deliver these improvements in ambulance response times. The *NHS Long Term Workforce Plan* published in June sets out how the NHS will address existing and future workforce challenges by recruiting and retaining thousands more staff over a 15-year period and working in new ways to improve staff experience and patient care. This will help ensure we have the ambulance workforce to meet the future demands on the service, building on the almost 14,000 more clinical and support ambulance staff that have already joined the service since 2010, a 45 per cent increase. NHS England also aims to train 3,000 paramedic graduates nationally this year, further increasing the domestic paramedic workforce to meet future demands on the service.

We have already seen significant improvements in performance. Nationally, average category 2 response times were over ten minutes faster this September (at 37 minutes 38 seconds) than the same month last year, when they were on average 47 minutes 59 seconds. The LAS specifically has also improved on its response times. So far this financial year, the LAS's average response time for category 2 incidents is 37 minutes 33 seconds, almost nine minutes faster than the same period last year, which was 46 minutes 33 seconds. We aim to continue improving performance down towards pre-pandemic levels over the next two years.

Thank you once again for raising this important matter. I would be grateful if you could share this reply with your co-signatory.

Yours,



HELEN WHATELY