



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care

*From the Rt Hon Wes Streeting MP  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care*

39 Victoria Street  
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Paulette Hamilton MP  
Acting Chair, Health and Social Care Committee  
House of Commons  
[By email]

12 June 2025

*Dear Paulette,*

Thank you for your letter of 21 May 2025.

You are right to highlight the significant strain under which the NHS was put last winter and the impact this had on overall performance across urgent and emergency care services (UEC). While performance was not at the level that patients would rightly expect, I want to reassure the Committee that we undertook extensive preparations ahead of last winter to minimise the impact on staff and patients. In my previous reply to the Committee on 5 February, I set out the key actions taken to support the health and care system, working with NHS England, UKHSA, adult social care providers and local government.

Nevertheless, we know that we need to go much further and do everything we can to make sure NHS services are improved next winter for patients. That is why we have published the NHS Urgent and Emergency Care Plan for 2025/26, setting out where the NHS needs to focus its efforts to make urgent and emergency care services significantly better for patients and staff.

The plan is clear that all parts of the health and care system must come together and focus on achieving those improvements that will have the biggest impact on services next winter. These include the targets for A&E and category 2 ambulance response times, but also a stronger focus on those patients waiting longest in A&E (those over 12 hours), improving flow through the hospital and tackling corridor care. As already set out in the NHS planning guidance, we are asking systems to reduce avoidable ambulance dispatches and conveyances in order to make sure patients get the right care in the right place in the most timely manner. We will also do more to reduce the number of long waits in A&E for all patients, including targeted action for patients requiring a mental health admission. NHS Trusts are also being asked to improve vaccination rates for frontline staff, in order to protect the most vulnerable and keep vital health and care services running when respiratory viruses surge over winter.

Second, we want the development of collective winter plans to take place over the summer and, more importantly, the stress testing to occur in September. As part of this process, NHS England are taking a new approach to testing the robustness of winter plans. These plans will continue to need to be supported and signed-off across the system, including by integrated care boards (ICBs). The plans will need to demonstrate how the system will work together collectively to meet the challenges over the winter period. I note your concern in relation to the funding changes underway at integrated care boards, however, the reduction in ICB running costs is a necessary step to ensure that more funding is

directed towards frontline health services, where it is needed most. These changes will streamline commissioning and administrative costs so we can prioritise patient care and improve health outcomes. Despite the changes being made to ICBs, they will continue to have a critical coordination role over winter for the NHS. Sir Jim Mackey, CEO of NHS England, has also stressed that any cuts should be made without compromising statutory responsibilities and protecting frontline staff from cuts remains a priority for this government.

Finally, we are committing to aligning our improvement resource and capital investment where it can make the biggest impact. As set out in the NHS planning guidance, this includes making new capital available to increase the number of co-located Urgent Treatment Centres (UTC) and expansion of Same Day Emergency Care (SDEC).

I hope the publication of our plan provides you with reassurance over the concerns you raised in your letter and demonstrates the seriousness with which we are continuing to approach this vital area. More broadly, and as noted previously, we remain committed to delivering our 10-year plan to reform the NHS and deliver a health service fit for the future.

As ever, please do not hesitate to get in touch if I can be of any further assistance to the Committee.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Wes', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**RT. HON. WES STREETING MP**  
**SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**