



Department of Health

Your Ref: Council – NHS - 20150204

PO00000920028

Dr Carolyn Wilkins
Chief Executive
Oldham Council
Level 3, Civic Centre
West Street
Oldham OL1 1UG

From the Rt Hon the Earl Howe PC
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Quality (Lords)

Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2NS

Tel: 020 7210 4850

10 MAR 2015

Dear Dr. Wilkins,

Thank you for your letter of 9 February to Jeremy Hunt about the NHS.

With A&E attendances higher than in any year on record, the Government is very conscious of the demands on urgent and emergency care services.

To help prepare for these pressures, all local system resilience groups were required to produce operational resilience and capacity plans, involving all relevant local organisations, which draw together actions on emergency and elective care. Best practice guidance, *Operational Resilience and Capacity Planning for 2014/15*, was published on 13 June 2014 and provided further detail of the important elements of a 'system resilience group', including membership and role and responsibilities.

To support these plans, this financial year we have given the NHS a record £700million of additional funding, specifically to help it cope with winter pressures. Local plans to spend this money provided nearly 8,800 extra staff and almost 6,500 extra beds. The money has also funded other local initiatives, including extended hours in primary care settings and information campaigns, so that people know the best services to access if they are unwell.

The Government is also acting to ease the pressure on A&E departments by supporting faster discharge from hospitals. We have given a ring-fenced grant, totalling £37million, to councils to help prevent delayed discharges.

The Autumn Statement set out our commitment to providing £1 billion of funding over four years for investment in new primary care infrastructure. Last year, the Government invested £50million through the Prime Minister's Challenge Fund to

help over 1100 practices, covering 7.5 million people, develop new ways of improving GP access, including 8am to 8pm opening seven days a week and greater use of telephone, email and video consultations. We have committed to invest another £100million into the scheme this year. We will also invest £10million in the general practice workforce, to recruit new GPs, retain those that are thinking of leaving the profession and encourage doctors to return to general practice.

You also raise concerns over A&E departments declaring major incidents. The major incident procedure is in place for hospitals if their facilities or resources are overwhelmed. The recent major incident declarations have shown that hospitals have made, and are putting into practice, tested plans enabling them to make special arrangements and mobilise extra resources should they need to do so.

We are aware of the impact poor performance or problems with access in one area of the health system can have across the wider system. That is why the Urgent and Emergency Care Review is looking at ways to improve the system, including easing pressures on A&E departments. The Government commissioned the review because urgent and emergency care services do not always work together as well as they might. The review is currently considering what needs to be done to ensure that services can cope with demands and provide the right care, in the right place, by those that have the right skills.

I hope this reply is helpful.

with every good wish,

Yours sincerely,

Earl Howe

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