



Public Accounts Committee

Amanda Pritchard
Chief Executive
NHS England
Wellington House
133-155 Waterloo Road
London SE1 8UG

By email: nao.parliaccountability@nhs.net

27 June 2023

Treasury Minute response – Managing NHS backlogs and waiting times in England

Dear Mrs Pritchard,

Thank you for the response to the Committee's report on Managing NHS backlogs and waiting times in England and your correspondence of 15 May 2023. I read your responses with interest.

I was pleased to see that the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England accepted the Committee's recommendations, with one exception. I am grateful for the additional information you provided on elective and cancer spending, the evaluations that have been put in place to monitor recovery programmes and the real-world impacts of these recovery programmes including on Community Diagnostic Centres, Surgical Hubs, the Independent Sector and Advice and Guidance.

There are two points which I would like to raise:

Recommendation 1: the response states that this has been implemented and therefore implies that cancer treatment is back at an acceptable standard, which would mean 85% of people with cancer being treated within 62 days of an urgent referral, as we made very clear in our recommendation. Yet Quarter 4 of 2022-23 saw the lowest recorded performance (58.8%) against the operational standard of 85%. And 6,300 people waited for more than 104 days for treatment following an urgent referral. I would ask in future correspondence and discussions with the Committee on cancer for less selective reporting of indicators and greater realism about the scale of the challenge. I also ask that you reconsider whether this recommendation has indeed been implemented, or if you would not be better to consider it work in progress until such time as your operational standard is met or, at the very least, there has been substantial progress towards it. As you will be aware, the 'Treasury Minute progress reports'



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Westminster
SW1A 0AA

@houseofcommons
parliament.uk

provide a mechanism for reporting progress against recommendations which government has accepted but not yet fully implemented.

Recommendation 6a: once the workforce plan is published it would be useful for the Committee, and indeed anyone with an interest, to understand NHS England's assessment of what it plans to achieve on waiting times with the workforce it intends to employ. I do not understand why what you describe in response to our recommendation would preclude you from writing to us, following publication of the workforce plan, to set that out – unless you simply do not plan to assess what you can achieve. Please reconsider the rejection of this recommendation, or explain more clearly why you do not expect to be able to describe what you expect to achieve on waiting times.

I would be grateful for a response by 27 July.

In addition to the Treasury Officer of Accounts I am also copying this letter to the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Permanent Secretary at the Department of Health and Social Care.

Cc'd to Sir Chris Wormald, Department of Health and Social Care

Yours Sincerely

Dame Meg Hillier
Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts