

*From the Permanent Secretary  
Sir Chris Wormald*



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*Dear Chair*

### **PAC Hearing on Clinical Correspondence Handling at NHS Shared Business Services**

At the PAC hearing on clinical correspondence handling at NHS Shared Business Services (NHS SBS) on 16 October, the Committee asked for further information on a number of matters.

#### **Concerns raised by the Rt Hon Ben Bradshaw MP in 2011**

The Committee raised the matter of concerns highlighted by the Rt Hon Ben Bradshaw MP in a debate on 8 November 2011, and asked about enquiries made by the Department and Ministers in response to his concerns. Mr Bradshaw raised concerns in relation to the performance of NHS Shared Business Services in the transfer of medical records specifically, and the performance of NHS Shared Business Services more generally. Mr Bradshaw did not however raise concerns in relation to the redirection of clinical correspondence.

The Minister responsible at the time, the Rt Hon Sir Simon Burns, met with Mr Bradshaw on 22 November 2011 to discuss his concerns. Sir Simon Burns subsequently wrote to Mr Bradshaw on 7 December 2011 following further investigation by officials. As set out in that letter, in relation to Mr Bradshaw's concerns about the transfer of medical records in North East London, officials found that:

- the figures quoted by Mr Bradshaw at the time related to the whole end-to-end medical records transfer service, rather than the element for which NHS SBS were responsible;
- the figures related to a period before NHS SBS took over the service; and

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- NHS SBS were delivering a two-day turnaround (against a five-day target) for the part of the medical records transfer process for which they were responsible.

With regards to NHS SBS's performance more generally, NHS SBS were found to be achieving positive customer satisfaction ratings and to have a track record of delivering efficiency savings to the NHS.

I hope this helps to clarify the extent of investigation at the time in response to Mr Bradshaw's concerns regarding the performance of NHS SBS both specifically in relation to the transfer of medical records and more generally.

### **Review of the archive and other primary care support services**

There was some discussion relating to the findings of NHS SBS's auditors (BDO) and NHS England's auditors (Deloitte) with regards to the review of the archive. It is important to make clear that a risk based approach was taken to assessing archive material, and that this approach was agreed with the National Incident Team. The approach taken to the review of archive material involved sampling the contents of archive boxes where there was evidence that they may have been accessed by NHS SBS, or contain clinical notes, to determine whether the boxes contained clinical correspondence.

On the basis of the issues found at NHS SBS, NHS England has reviewed other areas where mail redirection services had operated to establish if there were any similar issues. This has led to the identification of additional documents that are now being processed by the National Incident Team.

NHS advise that there are also 12,001 additional items which have been identified through proof of delivery to have been transferred from the NHS SBS Primary Care Support Service. They are currently being processed as part of the incident in accordance with established protocols. NHS SBS had not been aware of this issue prior to the committee hearing as it was being handled as part of the review of correspondence found at other primary care support service sites, rather than as part of the NHS SBS backlog.

I believe that the SBS archive review, and the review of NHS facilities more widely, represented a proportionate response to the risk of further such material being held in archive. The proportionality of these processes will remain under review pending the outcome of the clinical review process.

### **Review of documents by General Practice**

8,320 practices were asked to review and assess correspondence by NHS England who advise that 2,132 practices (accounting for 17.4% of the items) chose not yet to reply. Following legal and clinical advice, NHS England concluded the returns from GPs in August 2017 having written to GP practices that had not provided returns reminding them of their responsibilities to have dealt with the correspondence on

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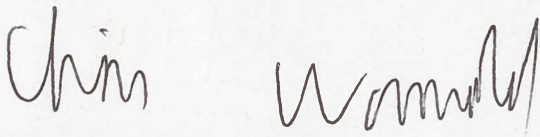
behalf of patients. In NHS England's view the onus for having now done so rests with the registered GP.

**Further Updates**

I will provide an update on the review and assessment of documentation to the Committee in December 2017 and March 2018. This aligns with the returns from GP practices and the timeline given to you by Simon Stevens.

I am copying this letter to the clerk of the committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Wormald', written in a cursive style.

**SIR CHRIS WORMALD  
PERMANENTSECRETARY**

