

PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL

The Senior Coroner
The Court House
Woburn Street
Ampthill
Bedfordshire
MK45 2HX



**Chief Executive's Office
Watford General Hospital**

Vicarage Road
Watford
Herts
WD18 0HB

08 March 2017

Dear Sir,

I am writing to you to respond to the concerns raised by Mr Thomas Osborne's investigation into the circumstances surrounding the tragic death of Jennifer Clark, which led to him making a regulation 28 report with respect to the issues discussed at the conclusion of the Inquest on 10 January 2017. Mr Osborne was concerned that without adequate neonatal facilities at Watford General Hospital there is a high risk of babies' lives being at risk in the future.

Based on the latest figures available, in 2015 5451 babies were delivered at Watford General Hospital. The Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) is a designated Level 2 unit which provides neonatal care for the population within the West Hertfordshire catchment area, except for the sickest babies who require complex or longer-term intensive care in a Level 3 unit. We have a total of 24 cots (3 intensive care cots; 5 high dependency cots and 16 special care cots). Babies requiring Level 3 intensive care are transferred to the nearest Level 3 Intensive Care Unit within our regional neonatal network.

Within the East of England Neonatal Operational Network there are eight units. Department of Health Toolkit for High Quality Neonatal Services¹ suggest that planned capacity should not exceed an average occupancy of 80%. Our aggregate occupancy rate for all cots in 2015 was 69%. The Trust has, since 2015, a Neonatal Unit Admissions and Escalation Policy (enclosed), which sets out what actions are required when the Unit reaches 90% capacity.

¹ <http://www.londonneonatalnetwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Toolkit-2009.pdf>

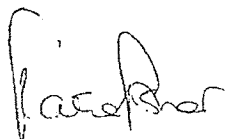
Chair: Professor Steve Barnett

Chief Executive: Katie Fisher

Reflecting on the available data and Department of Health guidance set out within the Toolkit, the Trust considers that for the number of births there is adequate facilities available at Watford General Hospital. We do however recognise that the Neonatal Unit, along with many of our buildings, requires modernisation. On 2 February 2017 the Trust Board approved a redevelopment plan as part of the Your Care, Your Future Programme, which will include extensive redevelopment of hospital estates and facilities and this will include plans for development of the NICU. The Trust's Strategic Outline Case is due to be considered at the Herts Valley Clinical Commissioning Group Board meeting; at the time of writing a date is yet to be set.

I hope that the information provided offers assurances that the area highlighted in the prevention of future deaths report is being adequately managed and that there are wider plans that are going to improve services across the whole site for patients who require a variety of the services we are able to offer. We will continue to work with Level 3 Neonatal Intensive Care Units in ensuring the safety of babies born at Watford General Hospital who may require intensive care.

Yours sincerely



Katie Fisher

Chief Executive

CC: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] CQC Inspection Manager

[REDACTED] Head of Quality Assurance, Herts Valley CCG

Mr Thomas Osborne, Senior Coroner, The Coroner's Office, 1 Saxon Gate East, Central Milton Keynes MK9 3EJ

Encl. Escalation Process for Neonatal Intensive Care Unit