



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care

From Jackie Doyle-Price MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Mental Health,  
Inequalities and Suicide Prevention

39 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0EU

020 7210 4850

Your Ref: 2428  
Our Ref: PFD-1158745

Mr Geoffrey Sullivan  
HM Senior Coroner, Hertfordshire  
The Old Courthouse  
St. Albans Road East  
Hatfield  
AL10 0ES

13 March 2019

Dear Mr Sullivan

Thank you for your correspondence of 30 November to the Department of Health and Social Care about the death of Mr Thomas Nicol. I am responding as Minister with responsibility for mental health and prison health services and I am grateful for the additional time in which to do so.

I have noted the concerns raised in your report about the time taken to assess prisoners for a mental health inpatient bed and the availability of beds in secure adult hospitals. I note that these matters are not found to have contributed to the death of Mr Nicol but were raised as general concerns by those providing evidence at the inquest into his death as an issue common to the prison estate.

Alongside the Department, you issued your report to the Ministry of Justice and NHS England. I am advised that NHS England has responded in detail to your concerns. As you will know, NHS England is responsible for the commissioning of prison health care services and the commissioning of specialist mental health services, including secure adult mental health beds.

I will not repeat the detail of NHS England's response. However, I hope you will be assured by the work outlined by NHS England around improving access to mental health services, including secure inpatient care, for offenders with mental health difficulties.

In line with the *Five Year Forward View for Mental Health*<sup>1</sup> and the *Strategic Direction for Health Services in the Justice System*<sup>2</sup>, NHS England is working with partners to ensure that offenders receive the right care, in the right place, at the right time. It is carrying out service reviews across all adult high, medium and low secure services. The review will include the service capacity required, taking into account a number of criteria such as levels of security, gender, service types and geographical location.

NHS England is also reviewing the current prison transfer and remission guidance, published by the Department of Health and Social Care in 2011<sup>3</sup>. In particular, the review is looking at whether the timescales within the guidance take into account clinical urgency and need. The revised guidance will be subject to full, public consultation in due course.

In addition, a new service specification for an integrated mental health service for prisons in England<sup>4</sup> is being implemented, its aim to provide clear, minimum service requirements that will deliver improved standards and outcomes, including on transfer times where appropriate.

I hope this information is helpful and outlines the steps that are being taken to improve access to mental health services for offenders with mental health difficulties. Thank you for bringing these concerns to my attention.



**JACKIE DOYLE-PRICE**

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Mental-Health-Taskforce-FYFV-final.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/hlth-justice-directions-v11.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-transfer-and-remission-of-adult-prisoners-under-s47-and-s48-of-the-mental-health-act>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/service-specification-integrated-mental-health-service-for-prisons-in-england/>