

From Simon Burns MP
Minister of State for Health

POLICY AND COMMUNICATION



Your Ref: SC

25 OCT 2010

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Councillor Brian Bedwell
Policy and Communication
West Berkshire Council
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21 OCT 2010

Dear Cllr. Bedwell

Thank you for your letter of 20 September to Andrew Lansley about response times of the South Central Ambulance Service. I am responding as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

I note the concerns you raise on behalf of the SCAS about the impact of last winter's severe weather on the Ambulance Trust's performance. The ambulance contract was agreed by the NHS management board and is applicable to all service providers.

We appreciate that from time to time there will be adverse weather events that will hinder performance. As a result, we expect providers delivering healthcare to have sufficiently robust plans and contingencies in place to cope with the worst conditions.

The ambulance service contracts are between local commissioning primary care trusts (PCTs) and the ambulance providers. The framework for the contract contains those provisions that are fixed national priorities and locally agreed requirements. There are provisions in the contract that allow for extreme events to be taken into account and this is for the local provider and commissioner to discuss.

The ambulance performance times are to be seen as a whole year performance, so it would be expected that the provider will try to over-perform when

conditions are good to allow for performance slippage when the weather or another event adversely affects the service.

Whilst I therefore appreciate SCAS' concerns, the Trust did sign up to the targets set out in the contract. It would therefore not be appropriate for me to intervene in this issue, or to support the Trust's application. However, I am aware that the Care Quality Commission has upheld the Trust's application for extenuating circumstances and has written to South Central Strategic Health Authority (SHA) to that effect. You may therefore wish to contact the SHA directly for further information.

I hope this reply is helpful.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Burns', with a stylized flourish at the end.

SIMON BURNS