



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Karin Smyth MP
Minister of State for Health*

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Blake Stephenson MP

By email to: blake.stephenson.mp@parliament.uk

3 October 2024

Dear Blake,

Thank you for your correspondence of 3 September about healthcare in Mid Bedfordshire following the Westminster Hall Debate. I apologise for the delay in replying.

I appreciate your concerns.

The Government is committed to delivering an NHS that is fit for the future, and this means better utilising and expanding primary care infrastructure across the NHS estate. I understand the pressures that local health facilities are currently facing in Bedfordshire and across the country and share your concerns about patients not being able to access the care they need.

The Department is aware of the additional demand and challenges placed upon primary care infrastructure by rapid housing development, such as what you reference in Wixams. The Department is working closely with the Minister of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to address this issue in national planning guidance and ensure all new and existing developments have an adequate level of healthcare infrastructure for the community. However, it is the responsibility of Bedfordshire, Luton, and Milton Keynes integrated care board to allocate the NHS budget for its area according to local needs, including prioritising capital investment for new health facilities.

Any future national capital programmes for NHS organisations seeking new primary care infrastructure will be considered as part of the forthcoming Spending Review.

While the Government is committed to shifting healthcare away from the acute estate and closer to the home. The Department knows that NHS trusts need support to implement digitisation and address unacceptable levels of backlog maintenance. The Frontline Digitisation programme is working to improve the digital maturity of all providers so that they have adequate enabling hardware, robust connectivity, electronic patient record systems and other core capabilities in place. National support is in place for trusts to procure and implement Electronic Patient Records.

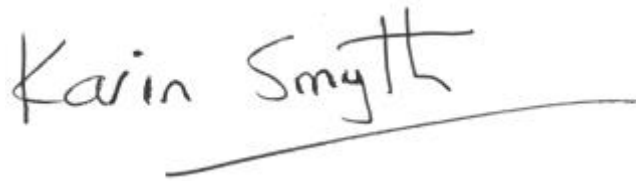
The Government recognises the health inequalities faced by rural communities in England, particularly around access to healthcare services. In response, the Department is working closely with NHS England, and regional Directors of Public Health to develop approaches

that address these inequalities. In line with the Government's Health Mission, the goal is to create a fairer healthcare system that leaves no person or community behind.

Given the task ahead I am unfortunately unable to meet to discuss these issues at present. However, please rest assured we are committed to fixing the front door to the NHS and further funding to support NHS organisations delivering local and national priorities will be considered as part of the forthcoming Spending Review.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karin Smyth". The signature is written in a cursive style. Below the signature is a solid horizontal line that extends across the width of the signature.

KARIN SMYTH