



Victoria Atkins MP

*Via email*

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Dear Victoria Atkins,

### **East Kent Hospitals maternity services and capital allocation**

Congratulations on your new role as Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. I wanted to share with you the contents of a letter I sent your predecessor that he may not have had chance to consider yet.

I would like to seek your support for additional capital funding for health services for East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust (EKHUFT). Specifically, this is for maternity services which have been under scrutiny following the Kirkup Report published in October 2022. Significant improvements are required in the maternity service, including a clear need for £123m to improve the maternity units at Queen Elizabeth Queen Mother (QEQM) & Willam Harvey Hospital (WHH) in Margate and Ashford respectively.

Kent's Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) has considered EKHUFT maternity services 6 times since 2019. In addition, the Kent and Medway Joint HOSC has met 6 times to discuss the east Kent acute care Transformation Programme.

At a recent briefing on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023, we heard that there have been significant improvements in patient outcomes, with a marked reduction in stillbirths and neonatal death rates, which are now both below the national standards.

There have been improvements in training and support for trainees, student midwives returned to QEQM and WHH last month and the Midwife Led Unit is expected to reopen at WHH in the next few weeks.

Feedback from doctors training in Obstetrics and Gynaecology at QEQM and WHH has significantly improved, particularly at QEQM, as seen in the latest GMC survey of doctors in training.

Listening and acting on patient feedback is now embedded in the service, as evidenced by the Your Voice is Heard programme, where midwives have

spoken in detail to over 5,500 women who have given birth in EKHUFT care since May 2022.

EKHUFT now have a clear plan for improvement, but the leadership recognise there is much more to do, particularly to improve service users' experiences of the service. A Maternity and Neonatal Improvement Programme (MNIP) was developed throughout Spring and Summer 2023 and involved bringing together people who use the service, the maternity leadership team, all grades of midwifery, obstetric and neonatal staff, Kent & Medway Local Maternity and Neonatal System (LMNS), Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership (MNVP) and members of NHS England's regional maternity team to ensure it was truly co-produced. The programme was also benchmarked against, and aligned to, requirements of the recently published Three Year Single Delivery Plan for Maternity and Neonatal Services.

I carried out a site visit in October 2022 and saw for myself, the age and quality of the Trust's buildings, a lack of funding for maternity and neonatal estate is a significant, ongoing challenge. EKHUFT requires £123 million to build new maternity units at QEQM and William Harvey hospitals that meet modern building standards, provide patients and families with a dramatically improved environment to give birth in, and for staff to work in. EKHUFT is experiencing challenges attracting and retaining suitably skilled staff to facilities that are degrading.

Currently, the birthing rooms at both hospitals are too small to fit essential equipment and the number of staff required in emergency situations. The rooms also lack ensuite facilities for families, or any space for clinical teams to train. At QEQM an additional obstetric theatre is required as currently, if the unit's theatre is busy, patients are taken through the hospital's main corridors to the main theatres.

External investment is required to deliver this much-needed transformation of both units as without it, maternity alone would consume almost all EKHUFT's capital allocation over the next five years (£130m total), preventing investment to address critical infrastructure risks and replacing aging medical equipment.

You may be aware that this specific need for investment to provide two new maternity units sits within a wider need for long-overdue funding for east Kent's hospitals. The Trust was informed in May 2023 that it had not been selected as one of the next schemes to receive capital investment to fund either of the two options for a long-term reconfiguration of its clinical services. The Department of Health and Social Care received 128 expressions of interest to the New Hospitals Programme (NHP) from 100 trusts, including East Kent Hospitals. The five schemes chosen all carried significant safety risks related to Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC).

The lack of NHP funding required to transform services for the long term means that EKHUFT faces significant clinical and infrastructure safety risks. These will continue to manifest and accelerate without significant new investment to address them. The investment required is significantly greater than EKHUFT's limited capital resources.

In late 2021 EKHUFT calculated that at least £211m capital investment was needed to maintain safe services over the next five years. This included essential upgrades to the aging hospital estate, some buildings dating back to the 1930s, and to replace medical devices and equipment that are essential for safe patient care. EKHUFT is undertaking an updated assessment of the full costs associated with critical infrastructure and backlog maintenance, and the emerging and potential future risks. This is over and above the £123m needed to upgrade the maternity departments.

I would be pleased if you could give this request for £123m additional capital for new maternity facilities careful consideration and would be pleased to meet with your team, along with senior management from EKHUFT, to discuss this in more detail.

Kind regards



Paul Bartlett  
**Chair, Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee**  
**Kent County Council**

CC Kent & Medway Council Leaders,  
Kent MPs  
Chair of Medway Council's HASC