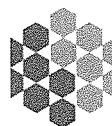


FROM THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH,  
SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY  
Edwin Poots MLA



Department of  
**Health, Social Services  
and Public Safety**

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Mr Henry Downey  
Belfast City Council  
Chief Executive's Department  
City Hall  
BELFAST  
BT1 5GS

Our Ref: COR/148/2014

Date: 6 March 2014

*Dear Henry*

Thank you for your letter of 7 February bringing to my attention Belfast City Council's Notice of Motion about emergency department pressures in Northern Ireland. I can assure the Council that I am committed to protecting and improving the quality of services that our Health and Social Care system delivers. I greatly value the work carried out by the staff who work in our emergency departments and I know the pressure that they often face.

While emergency department performance has been improving, I am aware that recent reports have raised concern about some aspects of emergency departments. I am therefore seeking assurance for the public and myself as Minister that our emergency departments are providing care of the highest quality and safety. I also want to identify areas where there may be opportunities to make improvements.


To this end, I have commissioned the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) to do two things to help ensure that the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and the wider Health and Social Care system can act as effectively as possible on the issues arising from recent events and to ensure that there is a full and open process of review.

Firstly, I instructed the RQIA to carry out inspections at the Royal Victoria Hospital site. Over the weekend of 31 January the RQIA assessed the quality of care and dignity that was afforded to patients in the emergency department and the acute medical unit. The Council may be aware from my recent statements that the preliminary findings identified a range of issues which cause me concern about whether the Belfast Trust is consistently performing to the high standards that I require in executing its responsibilities to patients and staff, and I am resolved that this will be fully and comprehensively addressed as a matter of priority.

Secondly, the RQIA will facilitate a separate, external review of emergency services in the Royal Victoria Hospital. This second review will, among other things, identify learning points and make recommendations for improvement in the management of unscheduled

and emergency care in Northern Ireland. I expect the report of the review to be submitted to me in June.

I hope this reply reassures Belfast City Council of my determination to ensure that our emergency care services are as safe and effective as they can be.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edwin Poots', written in a cursive style.

**Edwin Poots MLA**  
**Minister for Health Social Services and Public Safety**