

# Out of hours bereavement arrangements at Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust - Update

Date: 16<sup>th</sup> January 2024

Report of: Head of Democratic Services

Report to: Scrutiny Board (Adults, Health and Active Lifestyles)

Will the decision be open for call in?  Yes  No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?  Yes  No

## Brief summary

- In September 2019, the Adults, Health and Active Lifestyles Scrutiny Board received a briefing from Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust (LTHT) regarding changes to its out of hours bereavement arrangements aimed at improving the experience of bereaved families. Such changes involved the introduction of new processes to enable the timely release of deceased adult patients for ceremonial and burial purposes for religious and cultural reasons.
- However, in early 2023 it was brought to the attention of the former Scrutiny Board Chair that the Trust was encountering service pressures and therefore planning to undertake a further review of its out of hours bereavement arrangements to find a more sustainable approach.
- Early engagement with the Scrutiny Board was undertaken in February 2023 and in supporting the key principles of the review, the Scrutiny Board requested to be kept informed of progress in relation to the new arrangements.
- The Scrutiny Board requested that future update reports also include reference to the new national Statutory Medical Examiner System, which is expected to be introduced in April 2024. As this new system will require Medical Examiners to provide independent scrutiny of all deaths not taken for investigation by a coroner, it was recognised that this will inevitably have an impact on service delivery too.
- An update report from the Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust in relation to its out of hours bereavement service has now been provided and is appended to this report for Members consideration.

## Recommendations

Members are requested to consider and provide any comment on the appended update report from the Leeds Teaching Hospital's NHS Trust in relation to its out of hours bereavement arrangements.

## **What is this report about?**

1. In September 2019, the Adults, Health and Active Lifestyles Scrutiny Board received a briefing from Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust (LTHT) regarding changes to its out of hours bereavement arrangements aimed at improving the experience of bereaved families.
2. Such changes involved the introduction of new processes to enable the timely release of deceased adult patients for ceremonial and burial purposes for religious and cultural reasons. Linked to this, the Trust had implemented a new release authorisation form and removed the requirement for the Green Disposal Certificate in order to release a body to a Funeral Director. Secondly, the responsibility for releasing deceased adult patients to funeral directors out of hours was taken on by Clinical Site Managers.
3. However, in early 2023 the Trust advised the former Scrutiny Board Chair that it had not been possible for Clinical Site Managers to provide the service to the intended level primarily due to the following:
  - The level of operational pressure within the Trust and the NHS had increased during 2022. Clinical Site Managers were required to coordinate functions across the whole hospital out of hours and the demands on their time for a range of priorities had also increased.
  - Each release from the mortuary can take up to two hours. Coordination and liaison with wards, funeral directors and families can take up to five hours to coordinate. There are a significant amount of quality checks with requirement to check paperwork and quality assurance to ensure that the release of bodies of deceased patients is undertaken correctly and safely. During this time Clinical Site Managers are not contactable for urgent site issues.
  - Clinical Site Managers are often called directly from families and Funeral Directors to arrange an out of hours release, despite them not being an established first point of contact. Receiving a high volume of calls gives a demand on CSMs' limited time and CSMs reported feeling pressurised to facilitate the release of bodies ahead of other priorities.
4. The Trust advised that it was undertaking a further review of its out of hours bereavement arrangements, which would include an options appraisal and testing to provide a service with less reliance upon Clinical Site Managers.
5. Representatives from the Trust attended the Scrutiny Board's February 2023 meeting to engage with Members during the early stages of its review process. Having supported the key principles of the review at that stage, the Scrutiny Board requested to be kept informed of progress in relation to the new arrangements being put in place.
6. The Scrutiny Board requested that future updates also include reference to the new national Statutory Medical Examiner System, which is expected to be introduced in April 2024. As this new system will require Medical Examiners to provide independent scrutiny of all deaths not taken for investigation by a coroner, it was recognised that this will inevitably have an impact on service delivery too.
7. An update report from the Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust in relation to its out of hours bereavement service has now been provided and is appended to this report for Members consideration.

## **What impact will this proposal have?**

8. At the request of the Adults, Health and Active Lifestyles Scrutiny Board, the Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust has provided an update report in relation to its out of hours bereavement arrangements, including reference to the anticipated introduction of the new national Statutory Medical Examiner System.

## How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing

Inclusive Growth

Zero Carbon

## What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected:

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

9. The Trust engaged with the former Adults, Health and Active Lifestyles Scrutiny Board in February 2023 during the early stages of its review process.

10. Representatives from the Trust will be attending today's meeting to present the appended update report and also address any further questions from Board Members.

## What are the resource implications?

11. The information provided in this report largely relates to external organisations, which may be subject to other considerations relating to resource implications. Specific matters may need to be taken into account if any additional scrutiny activity is deemed appropriate.

## What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

12. The information provided in this report largely relates to external organisations, which may be subject to other considerations relating to risk management. Specific matters may need to be taken into account if any additional scrutiny activity is deemed appropriate.

## What are the legal implications?

13. This report has no specific legal implications.

## Appendices

14. Appendix 1 – An update report from the Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust on its out of hours bereavement arrangements.

## Background papers

15. None.