

Statement

Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to make a statement about the very troubling situation which our local health and social care system finds itself in. I have this week written to the Secretary of State to express my concerns, and I wish to share the current situation with Council.

Over the last two years we have become used to the quite exceptional dedication and commitment of our NHS and social care staff as they have managed massive pressures to cope with the challenges brought by the Covid pandemic. In the face of unprecedented demands, regularly putting their own health and lives at risk, they have delivered incredible outcomes, and I know that we all share huge admiration and gratitude for their work. It can be easy to forget that there were times - particularly early on - when it looked as though the system might be overwhelmed, and when all that stood between us and the worst were these amazing people.

As the severity of the pandemic has lessened, as the latest Covid statistics are no longer headline news, and as government restrictions

and guidance have melted away, it can be tempting to think that the NHS is now back to Business as Usual and that all is now well.

It is not.

I learned this week of a deeply upsetting case of a 93 year-old resident who fell at church on Sunday evening and fractured his femur. It took almost six minutes for the 999 call to be answered, and almost twelve hours for the ambulance to arrive. Due to his injury, the gentleman could not be moved, so he spent the night on the church floor accompanied by his elderly wife and the vicar.

Discussions over the last few days have revealed that this sort of event has become all too common in recent months, despite the very best efforts of staff across the system to deliver the level of care that they joined the service to provide. The RUH is under tremendous pressure, and has had to declare a critical incident several times in recent months.

Last Monday, 26% of its beds - that's 111 in total - were occupied by people who were medically fit for discharge, but who could not be released due to shortfalls in capability in domiciliary care. In addition

to this, the hospital had 44 Covid patients - with 7 in intensive care - and over 90 further beds unavailable for Covid infection control reasons. And staff absence with Covid infections is once more on the rise.

This all has a direct knock-on effect on ambulance services, and it is not unusual to see 15 or 20 ambulances queueing outside A&E unable to hand over patients to hospital staff on account of shortages of beds or other capacity within the hospital. This in turn means that those ambulances cannot respond to new calls or emergencies.

In short, the system is in crisis, and has suffered longterm from funding deficits, staff shortages - particularly now that many European employees have left the UK - and regular reorganisations. This has undermined its resilience, and that in turn has led to shortages of critical items like PPE and to far too much knee-jerk, tactical responses where properly thought-through and funded strategic measures were needed.

Colleagues, the situation that faces our local services is outrageous and unacceptable for a country like ours in 2022. Our dedicated NHS and care service staff deserve so much better, and I ask you to join me in paying them the credit they deserve for their commitment and in

seeking to ensure that they receive proper resources and support for the future.

Thank you.