



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP  
Secretary of State for Health  
Department of Health  
Richmond House  
79 Whitehall  
London SW1A 2NS

15 February 2017

Dear Jeremy,

We understand that in the coming days you will receive a letter of referral from the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) regarding the Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust's decision to suspend obstetric services at the Horton General Hospital.

As you will know from our numerous conversations with both yourself and your officials, the suspension of obstetric services at the Horton General Hospital came unexpectedly and with no public consultation last summer. We have opposed the suspension since it was first announced. Despite the Trust's assurances that they would continue their recruitment drive, they have failed to find sufficient obstetricians to reopen the unit and the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group is now undertaking the first phase of its Transformation Programme consultation which proposes to make the suspension permanent.

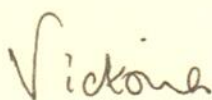
Prior to the suspension, the hardworking consultants and midwives at the Horton General Hospital helped provide a safe, personal and positive experience for mothers and their babies. Satisfaction rates were high. However, since the downgrade took effect over 90 per cent of mothers have had to deliver their babies elsewhere. Birth choice has been severely limited: the majority now face an over 90 minute journey to the John Radcliffe Hospital before even finding somewhere to park. We simply do not believe it is safe for expectant mothers to travel this distance, nor do we feel that they are presented with a genuine choice when considering their birth options. Our concerns are reinforced by the report of the Independent Reconfiguration Panel who reviewed the Horton's maternity unit only in 2008. At the time, they declared that the Trust's attempt to downgrade the maternity unit was unsafe, owing to the travel times. Since then, the situation has only got worse.

We believe that the Trust could have done more in their search for obstetricians. Offers to help make job advertisements more appealing, for example by providing bursaries to the children of obstetricians, have not been explored. We also feel strongly that the Trust could have worked more collaboratively with Health Education England and the Deanery to find genuine solutions to the training accreditation issue which has been used to justify the suspension. A lack of forewarning about the recruitment crisis, particularly in relation to the unsustainable Clinical Research Fellows Programme, makes it difficult for us to truly believe this situation came about so unexpectedly. Ultimately, we feel strongly that more could and should have

been done for the mothers and babies in the north of the county and the surrounding areas who heavily relied on the consultant-led service at the Horton General Hospital.

It will come as no surprise to you that we support JHOSC's referral. We hope that you will look carefully at the evidence when deciding whether the Independent Reconfiguration Panel should look at this decision once again. We would be grateful if we could set up another meeting to discuss this.

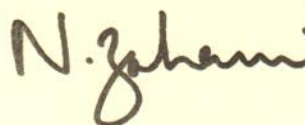
Yours,



**Victoria Prentis MP**



**Robert Courts MP**



**Nadhim Zahawi MP**