

House of Commons
Westminster
London
SW1A 0AA
0117 953 3575
karin.smyth.mp@parliament.uk



Karin Smyth
Labour MP for Bristol South

Sir Robert Chote
UK Statistics Authority

10 May 2024

Dear Sir Robert,

I am writing to you in my capacity as Shadow Health Minister, to query claims made by the Department of Health & Social Care with reference to NHS waiting list data.

In a [video published](#) to the Department of Health & Social Care's social media accounts on 20 April, the Secretary of State stated that "we've cut waiting lists for five months in a row". This claim was latterly repeated by other Health Ministers.

However, in the [statistical release](#) of RTT waiting time data published by NHSE in April, the recording of these figures was altered. The release stated that community service pathways would "no longer be reported in the RTT datasets", and instead be captured in community health services data collections. According to the statistical release, this constituted "about 36,000 of those pathways" being excluded from February figures.

Given the reported fall in the waiting list from January to February in the RTT dataset was 36,198 – equal to the number of community service pathways removed from the figures – it appears that the claimed 'cut' in the waiting list could merely account for a change in the reporting method, rather than a material difference in the number of patients on incomplete pathways.

I wrote to the Department to query this matter, but their response failed to provide clarity on the data. I have attached both my letter and their reply to this email.

Can you therefore please confirm, as is my understanding, that the Secretary of State's claim that waiting lists fell from January to February misrepresents the data? The drop in figures appears to simply reflect a change in reporting methods, rather than an actual fall in the number of patients on NHS waiting lists – as the public would understand it.

Yours sincerely,

Karin Smyth
Shadow Health Minister
Labour MP for Bristol South

I will treat as confidential all personal information you give to me or my staff. I may need to pass on this information to others so they can help you. I undertake to handle the information you give me in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018. I may contact you again using this information. If you do not wish to receive further correspondence please write to me at the House of Commons, Westminster, SW1A 0AA.

This letter should not be relied upon as legal or professional advice or as a substitute for it.