

Winterbourne View scheme an 'abject failure', minister admits

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A combined health and local government drive to help people with learning disabilities move out of hospitals by next month has been an "abject failure", Norman Lamb has said in a scathing assessment.

With just one month to go before a key milestone is due to be reached, the care minister has branded progress "distressing", "frustrating" and "utterly hopeless".

The June deadline had been set in a "concordat" signed in December 2012 by the Department of Health, NHS England, the Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services. It had pledged to "support everyone inappropriately placed in hospital to move to community-based support as quickly as possible and no later than 1 June 2014".

Mr Lamb said he had been left "completely frustrated; to then discover that it's business as usual in too many places I find very distressing, so it makes one somewhat cynical about this.

“The abject failure of some people in the system to do the right thing and change the model of care just makes me all the more determined that we see this through, even though it will take longer than I originally hoped,” he said.

Data from NHS England showed that, by the end of December, 1,932 people did not have a transfer date identified.

Asked why the programme had failed to meet its targets, Mr Lamb cited the lack of information about placements and the difficulties of transferring funding from NHS England to local commissioners. A mechanism must now be put in place to allow funding transfer when people with learning disabilities were moved from hospital settings, he said.

“At one stage I was presented with regional summaries for what the position was around the country,” he said. “I just said that was utterly hopeless. It sort of covers the great and the awful. It tells you absolutely nothing.”