SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

WRITTEN ANSWER

**27 September 2019**

Index Heading: Health and Social Care

**Angela Constance (Almond Valley) (Scottish National Party):** To ask the Scottish Government, further to the Cabinet Secretary’s statement in Parliament on 29 January 2019, what it understands NHS Lothian’s position is on reinstating the full 24/7 service paediatric service at St John’s Hospital from October 2019.

S5W-25531

**Jeane Freeman:**NHS Lothian has assured me that reinstatement of the full 24/7 paediatric service has the full commitment of the board and will continue to receive the highest level of priority.

Whilst NHS Lothian has been reasonably successful in recruiting additional consultants and Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioners, there has been an issue with staff leaving their post for various reasons, including personal circumstances and decisions to move on to other posts.

The clinically-led Paediatric Programme Board met on 27 August and heard that appropriate clinical cover continues to be a clinical risk; from October, 40 out of hours shifts require cover per month and only 32 can currently be covered. Subsequently, Scottish Government officials continued to engage with the Board to explore if other options were open.

However, the unanimous clinical view from the Programme Board was that, regrettably, the current staffing situation prevents the safe reinstatement of a 24/7 inpatient service at St John’s from October. The Scottish Government’s Chief Medical Officer supports NHS Lothian’s position and will keep in touch with them going forward.

I fully appreciate how disappointing this will be for local people, but I am sure you will agree that the safety of children must be of paramount concern. NHS Lothian have sought to assure me that the Board remains fully committed to the reinstatement of the 24/7 service as soon as possible; and that the inpatient service which re-opened in March for operation between Mondays and Thursdays will be at least maintained until full 24/7 services can be safely reinstated.

I understand that the Paediatric Programme Board is due to meet again in October to review the position and that recruitment efforts to recruit beyond the required level of 40 shifts a month is underway.

The Government will continue to keep this under close review and I would reiterate my commitment to the reinstatement of the full service as soon as possible.