

Morecambe Bay inquiry chair to lead new investigation

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Jeremy Hunt has appointed Dr Bill Kirkup to lead an investigation into the death of baby whose case has exposed “regulatory gaps” and “significant risks” in the care of sick children.

Dr Kirkup led the inquiry into maternity failings at the University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust and also led an investigation into the allegations of sexual abuse by Jimmy Savile at Broadmoor Hospital.

“I remain committed to ensuring all these issues are properly investigated”

Jeremy Hunt

An independent report in 2013 confirmed that Elizabeth Dixon had been left permanently brain damaged after staff at Frimley Park Hospital NHS Foundation Trust failed to monitor or treat high blood pressure following her premature birth in 2000.

Less than a year later, she suffocated to death when a newly qualified nurse failed to keep her breathing tube clear.

- [Francis inquiry adviser to lead baby death review](#)
- [Trust launches maternity care review after baby death](#)

In a handwritten note on a letter to Elizabeth’s parents last week, Mr Hunt said: “I do hope the appointment of Dr Kirkup will give you confidence that we are totally determined to get to the bottom of what happened and learn the necessary lessons.”

Dr Kirkup's appointment follows a decision by Professor Peter Hutton, former chair of the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges and president of the Royal College of Anaesthetists, to step down from leading the investigation due to personal issues affecting the time he could commit to the case.



Bill Kirkup

The health secretary said: "I regret deeply that your family has not yet received the answers you have been seeking for so long, and that this has added to your grief and distress. I would like to assure you that I remain committed to ensuring all these issues are properly investigated."

The case was highlighted in 2014 when NHS England withdrew from a planned joint inquiry with the Care Quality Commission, despite the former's role as a commissioner and responsibility for patient safety at the time.

The decision exposed what CQC chief executive David Behan described as a "regulatory gap", because it meant the case could not be examined.

- [NHS England pulls plug on probe into baby death](#)
- [Hunt orders investigation of 'regulatory gap' baby death care](#)

Mr Hunt intervened after the health service ombudsman refused to investigate the case in 2015, saying that the Dixon family's concerns had been "passed around the system [for] far too long".

The family have amassed a dossier of evidence suggesting their daughter's care at Frimley Park, Great Ormond Street Hospital NHS Foundation Trust and by the community services provider was flawed, and that her death was the subject of a cover-up.

A thematic review of similar cases by the CQC, prompted by Elizabeth's death, concluded there was "significant risk" to hundreds of babies and children because of inconsistent practices and a lack of clear guidance on treatment.



Elizabeth Dixon

Dr Kirkup said it was a “privilege” to be asked to take on the investigation. He said: “Mr and Mrs Dixon have had an exceptionally difficult time, and this will not have been made any easier by the unavoidable need for a new start to the investigation. I hope to meet them as soon as possible to talk about how we can take this forward.”

Elizabeth’s parents, Anne and Graeme Dixon, said they welcomed Dr Kirkup’s appointment and were looking forward to working with him.

They said: “We are pleased that the secretary of state for health has appointed Dr Bill Kirkup as investigation lead.

“We hope that a thorough investigation into the antenatal care, Elizabeth’s care and death and the events afterwards will now proceed quickly and that we will finally be told the truth about what happened to our daughter, over 15 years ago,” they added.