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***For further information, contact Philip Aylett on 07984 181135 or at***

***Philip.aylett@gmail.com***

**WATFORD GENERAL HOSPITAL WARD KITCHENS RATED WORST IN NHS FOR FOOD SAFETY**

**Hygiene failures put patients ‘at serious risk’**

Ward kitchens at Watford General Hospital have been officially rated the worst in the NHS for food safety.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has given the Watford General Hospital wards a hygiene rating of one out of a possible five, meaning that ‘major improvement’ is necessary.

The Hospital is the only hospital of many hundreds in the NHS in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to get the FSA ‘one-star’ rating. It has not improved since 2019.

A damning report by Watford Borough Council health inspectors on behalf of the FSA uncovered a litany of hygiene failures. A kitchen in a children’s ward had a dirty floor and bare plaster on the walls. Separately, patients with allergies have been put at ‘serious risk’ by poor safety practices, with stroke patients among those exposed to the danger.

Local health group the New Hospital Campaign (NHC) today said:

**‘No-one would feel safe eating in a café with a one-out-of-five rating. Why should vulnerable patients be exposed to such risks - in a hospital, of all places?’**

The report reveals that there were:

* **No consistent control measures in place across the wards to keep patients with allergies safe;**
* **Failures of food safety management of allergens and temperature monitoring controls;**
* **A lack of controls on food handling, breakfasts and snacks provided to patients;**
* **‘Problematic’ management of food safety on Elizabeth ward;**
* **Dirty kitchen floor and unhygienic bare plaster on the walls on the Starfish children’s ward;**
* **Lack of a dedicated wash hand basin for staff on Langley Ward;**
* **Food and drinks served by staff without the required training;**
* **Food monitoring records missing on Katherine ward at weekends.**

The report demands a range of ‘immediate and ongoing’ action to tighten up controls.

The report, based on a November 2022 inspection, has only been made public after pressure from the NHC. And the public are still not being allowed to see the full evidence. Key parts of the report have been ‘redacted’ - blanked out - by Watford Borough Council after an ‘appeal’ by the Trust.

New Hospital Campaign Co-ordinator Philip Aylett said today:

‘The Trust should be ashamed to be bottom of the UK league for food hygiene on wards. The vast majority of NHS hospitals get good or very good ratings of four or five, despite working under great pressure. What is wrong with one-star Watford General?

‘This report lays bare the West Herts Trust’s shocking approach to food safety for patients. It is astonishing that, after more than three years, Watford General has still not managed to improve the standards of its food handling above the desperately low level of 2019. It has not delivered on its promises before. Why should we believe it this time?

Mr Aylett also attacked the Trust for not considering the report in a Board meeting.

‘The Trust has reacted slowly and ineffectively to this report. In nearly six months since the inspection, there has not been a single discussion of this critical situation in a Trust Board meeting. This is a failure of transparency, accountability and oversight by management and the Trust Board, especially the non-executive Board members who should be acting as independent voices on the Board. The public have the right to know whether their hospital is being made safe and that there is robust unbiased scrutiny of standards.

‘And the report should not have been redacted. Either the blanked-out sections are inaccurate, in which case the report should have been withdrawn and the inspection done again, or the Council is allowing the Trust to keep key facts from the public. In the public interest, the Council should publish the unredacted report without delay.’

ENDS

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