

Police to probe 'cover-up' by bosses over baby deaths

POLICE are to probe the alleged cover-up by health bosses over a hospital where up to 14 babies died.

Officers will consider a report released last week which detailed how bosses at the Care Quality Commission deleted evidence that they failed to investigate an NHS trust properly.

The Morecambe Bay trust runs Furness General Hospital where the deaths occurred.

Detectives in Cumbria will take three weeks to consider whether action will be taken against executives at the regulator.

The move comes two weeks after it was announced that police would investigate hundreds of patient deaths due to appalling neglect in Mid Staffordshire.

Barrow and Furness MP John Woodcock said: 'I welcome this promise of swift action from Cumbria police which could bring home the appalling human cost of the cover-up at the CQC.'

But neighbouring South Lakes MP Tim Farron, who first called for a police inquiry, said the victims should wait 'days and not weeks'.

He said: 'I understand complex issues take time to deal with, but for the police to read a report and to make a judgement if an investigation can be launched cannot take three weeks.'

The order to suppress an internal CQC review critical of maternity services at Furness General Hospital was issued last March, according to a report from consultants Grant Thornton.

Up to 14 babies and two mothers may have died due to poor care since

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2001, but the CQC gave the hospital a clean bill of health in 2010.

Jill Finney, who was the CQC's deputy chief executive, yesterday strenuously denied she had ordered the internal report to be deleted. She told the BBC they had not wanted it published because it was 'not thorough enough'.

Former chief executive Cynthia Bower, who also denies being part of a cover-up, told the Independent: 'I've been hung out to dry, with no chance to tell my story.'

Tory MP Charlotte Leslie, who sits on the influential Health Select Committee, called for a 'Leveson-style' inquiry led by a judge into the culture and practices of the health service. She said she feared the revelations about Morecambe Bay were not an isolated case.

Robert Francis QC, who chaired the public inquiry into Mid Staffordshire, said the revelations about Morecambe Bay had 'considerable echoes' of the earlier scandal.

He told Radio 4's Today programme: 'There has been a lack of candour and openness at trust level, a failure of the regulator to find out that things were going wrong and there appears to have been a lack of transparency.'

Former Labour health secretary Andy Burnham faces claims that the CQC was put under pressure by the then government to bury bad news in the run-up to the 2010 election.

Tory former health secretary Andrew Lansley denies that he ignored a whistleblower's fears about the scandal-hit trust in Cumbria in 2011.

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