

MPs call in police over 'disturbing' emails in health watchdog scandal

By Laura Donnelly and Tim Ross

THE police have been asked to investigate whether an NHS watchdog suppressed emails that would have exposed its failures in preventing a maternity deaths scandal.

Last month a report accused former executives at the Care Quality Commission of deleting a critical document which revealed its own shortcomings.

Yesterday it emerged that investigators had also not seen emails which showed that CQC managers were aware in January 2010 of "systemic" problems at University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay Foundation trust, but wanted to give it a clean bill of health.

Investigators were denied access to the information because CQC officials claimed that just one year's emails were available, when in fact they were stored for six years. In the same correspondence, described by MPs yesterday as "disturbing", regional officials decided to tone down the language describing problems at the trust.

John Woodcock, the MP for Barrow, has written to the Metropolitan Police, which is considering whether to launch a criminal investigation, asking it to examine the latest disclosures. He said: "If the health

'Failures' Hospital chief resigns over poor care

A hospital chief executive has resigned amid accusations she presided over a "prevailing culture of failure".

Tameside Hospital NHS Foundation Trust in Greater Manchester announced that Christine Green had tendered her resignation, following revelations about poor patient care.

Two reviews by the hospital found patients were having to wait up to four days to see a consultant, or were left in corridors for hours when A&E was full.

It is understood that Ms Green's decision to resign was agreed last week but was not announced until now.

watchdog gave false information to the independent inquiry that prevented damning emails coming to light, those responsible could be criminally liable.

"The new managers at the CQC say they want to be more open, but this latest scandal happened on their watch, they have serious questions to answer."

The disclosures came as ministers told *The Daily Telegraph* that the current regulatory system was "completely flawed". They promised changes so that directors

of hospitals and care homes could face criminal prosecution and unlimited fines if patients are neglected or abused.

Last summer, after being appointed as the CQC's chief executive, David Behan asked consultants at Grant Thornton to examine concerns about its failure to prevent the scandal. Their report, published last month, accused the watchdog's former chief executive Cynthia Bower, her deputy Jill Finney and her media manager Anna Jefferson of suppressing evidence, which all three deny.

At a hearing of the Commons health select committee yesterday, Sterl Greenhalgh, one of Grant Thornton's partners, said the company was "surprised" to be told by CQC officials that its investigation could only access one year's emails.

It later emerged, after the report had been published, that this information was "inaccurate," he said.

This meant that investigators not only missed correspondence between regional officials, but could have missed many more disclosures about the scale of the cover-up, MPs said. Charlotte Leslie, a Conservative MP on the committee, said it was of "significant concern" that MPs were examining an email which "puts an additional different light on the nature and extent of the cover-up".