

Report into ambulance delays 'a whitewash'

By **Laura Donnelly** HEALTH EDITOR

AN INVESTIGATION into deliberate ambulance delays has been called a "whitewash" after it failed to establish who is to blame for an NHS scandal.

An eight-day-old baby and a patient clearly suffering from a stroke were among up to 20,000 patients whose ambulances were delayed as part of a secret policy by South East Coast Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust. For two months, "life threatening" cases referred to them from the 111 phone

line were routinely forced to wait twice as long for an ambulance.

NHS England yesterday published its investigation into the matter, the findings of which were revealed by *The Daily Telegraph* earlier this week.

The report was unable to establish which senior managers were responsible for the scheme, and how it came to be hidden from the trust's medical director, non-executives and the public.

Under NHS rules, calls designated as "life-threatening" are supposed to receive an ambulance response within

eight minutes regardless of whether the caller dials 999 or the 111 number.

But the ambulance trust "unilaterally" invented its own system resulting in the routine downgrading of thousands of 111 calls. The scheme was introduced by a group which was established by Paul Sutton, the trust's chief executive, and overseen by at least four executives, but health officials could not work out who was responsible.

Katherine Murphy, chief executive of the Patients Association, said: "This is a whitewash and a major scandal."

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