# From stamp duty rumours to hospital outbreaks: why policy shifts demand clearer accountability



London movers have been watching for signs of any shift in stamp-duty policy, with rumours swirling that a new property tax could replace or replace-like the current stamp duty regime. The Evening Standard flagged the question in bold terms—“An end to stamp duty?”—and asked what such a change could mean for London home movers navigating a market that remains sensitive to policy signals. In parallel to this housing debate, practical questions about public-sector planning and safety have dominated headlines in recent years, none more stark than the outbreak at Royal Papworth Hospital in Cambridge after it moved to the Cambridge Biomedical Campus in 2019. The hospital’s experience offers a sobering counterpoint to the housing policy debate, illustrating how large-scale public decisions and investments can have unintended consequences if governance, safety and accountability frameworks are not kept robust.

The Public Health and hospital coverage around Royal Papworth illuminate how policy and infrastructure decisions interact with patient safety. BBC reporting on the 2019 outbreak notes that 21 patients with lung conditions were infected in the months after Papworth’s move to the Cambridge Biomedical Campus, with investigators identifying the water supply as the most probable source of Mycobacterium abscessus transmission. In response to the outbreak, hospital staff fitted taps and showers with filters and introduced additional safety measures. This episode underscored the fragility of hospital water systems in new campuses and the urgent need for proactive risk management as facilities scale up. According to that BBC account, such incidents prompted public-health responses aimed at preventing recurrence across new NHS facilities. The same period saw legal and professional scrutiny, with Irwin Mitchell representing families seeking accountability and answers in the inquest process. In a statement, the firm emphasised that the families deserved answers and accountability, highlighting the demand for transparency after traumatic events linked to transplant care.

A separate, parallel thread in the Papworth story concerns the trajectory of official oversight and clinical safety guidance. A Cambridgeshire coroner prepared a Prevention of Future Deaths report that warned current guidance on preventing water-borne bacteria in new hospitals was lacking and could contribute to further deaths. The coroner cited evidence that dozens of patients had contracted mycobacterium abscessus since Papworth opened in 2019, with immunosuppressed patients most at risk, and urged urgent review and amendment of safe-water documentation, alongside consideration of how hospital water systems are designed, installed and operated in new builds. The hospital itself has since published details of its protective measures, including point-of-use water filters, hydrogen peroxide dosing, ultraviolet treatment, bottled water for vulnerable patients and expanded water sampling, with testing and public-health collaboration continuing to monitor outcomes. Government and industry safety discussions in this area mirror the gravity of these undertakings, illustrating how critical it is for policy and practice to keep pace with changing infrastructure needs.

On the legal and financial front, the Papworth outbreak translated into meaningful civil-action activity. An Evening Standard report described a nine-patient outbreak leading to six-figure compensation settlements, with Irwin Mitchell quoted as noting that three patients died and the remaining six suffered serious complications linked to the water supply; the NHS trust involved denied liability. Separately, Irwin Mitchell has highlighted that more than 20 patients were affected, with the firm reiterating its commitment to supporting families through the inquest process and seeking transparency and accountability in how such outbreaks are managed. The combined picture—disputes over liability, settlements, and ongoing inquests—emphasises how quickly public-health incidents can morph into complex legal and policy questions, shaping public trust in healthcare and, by extension, confidence in public policy more broadly.

Against that backdrop, observers returning to London’s housing debate may reflect on the broader theme: policy changes—whether a tax regime or hospital safety standards—carry consequences that stretch beyond the initial sector. The rumoured property-tax shift discussed in the Evening Standard continues to prompt questions about how London’s housing market would adjust to altered cost structures, and how policymakers communicate risk and manage expectations for movers who are weighing timing, financing and location. As the market awaits clarity, the Papworth case serves as a reminder that governance, due-diligence, and clear, credible guidance are essential when policy decisions intersect with people’s daily lives and long-term plans.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/royal-papworth-hospital-irwin-mitchell-cambridge-lawyers-derek-b1243700.html), [[4]](https://www.royalpapworth.nhs.uk/mycobacterium-abscessus)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-54073966), [[5]](https://www.irwinmitchell.com/news-and-insights/newsandmedia/2022/november/inquest-into-deaths-of-mums-who-contracted-bacterial-infection-after-undergoing-transplants)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cjr28p1yxgqo), [[4]](https://www.royalpapworth.nhs.uk/mycobacterium-abscessus)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/royal-papworth-hospital-irwin-mitchell-cambridge-lawyers-derek-b1243700.html), [[7]](https://www.irwinmitchell.com/news-and-insights/newsandmedia/2020/september/more-than-20-patients-affected-by-bacterial-outbreak-at-royal-papworth-hospital-in-cambridge), [[1]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/royal-papworth-hospital-irwin-mitchell-cambridge-lawyers-derek-b1243700.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/royal-papworth-hospital-irwin-mitchell-cambridge-lawyers-derek-b1243700.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-54073966> - A BBC report outlines the 2019 bacterial outbreak at Royal Papworth Hospital, where a patient died after developing pancreatitis likely linked to antibiotics given to treat the infection. The serious incident review recorded 21 infected patients across those treated for lung conditions after the hospital moved to the Cambridge Biomedical Campus in 2019. Investigators concluded the hospital's water supply was the most probable source of Mycobacterium abscessus transmission. In response, hospital staff fitted filters to taps and showers and implemented additional safety measures. The article also notes public health responses to prevent similar incidents in new NHS facilities across England.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cjr28p1yxgqo> - Following inquests into Anne Martinez and Karen Starling, a Cambridgeshire coroner prepared a Prevention of Future Deaths report warning that guidance for preventing water-borne bacteria in new hospitals was lacking and could lead to further deaths. The report cited evidence that 34 people had contracted mycobacterium abscessus at Royal Papworth Hospital since it opened in 2019, with immunosuppressed patients most at risk. It urged urgent review and amendment of safe-water documentation and consideration of design, installation, commissioning and operation of hospital water systems in new builds, to prevent recurrence in future. The coroner urged clearer guidance to protect patients everywhere.
4. <https://www.royalpapworth.nhs.uk/mycobacterium-abscessus> - Royal Papworth Hospital explains the Mycobacterium abscessus outbreak occurred after moving to the Cambridge Biomedical Campus in August 2019, with two post-lung transplant patients testing positive for the bacteria. The hospital conducted a thorough SI investigation and confirmed bacteria in the water supply. In response, it implemented multiple protective measures, including point-of-use water filters, hydrogen peroxide dosing, ultraviolet treatment, bottled water for vulnerable patients and expanded water sampling. The hospital states these actions have reduced mycobacteria counts and that no outlet has yielded M. abscessus with a POU filter installed. Testing and collaboration with public health advisers remain in place.
5. <https://www.irwinmitchell.com/news-and-insights/newsandmedia/2022/november/inquest-into-deaths-of-mums-who-contracted-bacterial-infection-after-undergoing-transplants> - Lawyers at Irwin Mitchell announced they are representing families following the Royal Papworth Hospital bacterial outbreak, focusing on the inquest into the deaths of Karen Starling and Anne Martinez after their transplants. The article notes that more than 30 patients were believed to be affected, with the inquest and investigations examining the link to the hospital's water supply. The firm emphasised the families' desire for answers and accountability, and highlighted concerns about how such outbreaks were handled during the early stages after the hospital's 2019 opening. The firm pledged to pursue the inquest process to obtain transparency and lessons learned.
6. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/royal-papworth-hospital-irwin-mitchell-cambridge-lawyers-derek-b1243700.html> - An Evening Standard report states that a nine-patient outbreak at Royal Papworth Hospital led to compensation payments totalising a six-figure settlement. The article quotes Irwin Mitchell as saying three patients died and the remaining six suffered serious complications following infection with Mycobacterium abscessus after hospital treatment linked to the water supply. It notes the NHS trust denies liability. The piece emphasises that the civil action arose from a group of patients affected by the waterborne outbreak between 2019 and 2022, and that the settlements aim to provide some closure and access to support services for the families involved across England.
7. <https://www.irwinmitchell.com/news-and-insights/newsandmedia/2020/september/more-than-20-patients-affected-by-bacterial-outbreak-at-royal-papworth-hospital-in-cambridge> - Irwin Mitchell announced in September 2020 that more than 20 patients were affected by a bacterial outbreak at Royal Papworth Hospital in Cambridge. The internal investigation noted 21 people with lung conditions infected after the hospital opened in May 2019, including five transplanted patients, with three developing infections. The hospital's water supply was identified as the most credible source. The law firm stated it was supporting families seeking answers, noting the outbreak's impact on vulnerable patients such as those awaiting or having undergone transplants. The case underscored the challenges posed by waterborne pathogens in large public healthcare settings in England.