

7<sup>th</sup> January 2021

## New Healthwatch in Sussex reports on Patient Transport Services

Today, Healthwatch in Sussex is publishing a series of reports which indicate high levels of satisfaction amongst local users of Non-Emergency Transport Services, but which sets out how they could and should be improved to better meet their needs and preferences.

Non-Emergency Patient Transport Services cover all of Sussex, are free at the point of use for all eligible patients, and currently provide around 25,000 journeys per month. The service is scheduled to be recommissioned with the process commencing in 2021. In the past the commissioning process was inadequate, and the former service provider (Coperforma) failed patients, and this is why it is so important that work such as this is used to let NHS Commissioners and providers understand what is working well and what needs to improve.

**Just over three-quarters (78.5%) of the 130 users engaged in September 2020 were 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the service, but this varied from 95% in West Sussex to 56.5% in Brighton and Hove. This geographical pattern is the same for those who would recommend the current service to others, and these trends require further interrogation.**

Feedback also indicated that the service performed well during the first COVID-19 lockdown, with 84% of users during this period being satisfied with the service they received.

Patients told us that they had experienced relatively few issues with many aspects of their transport. They told us that transport was appropriate for their needs, and only small numbers of patients had experienced issues with same day cancellations of their journeys or missing their appointments due to transport delays.

**However, some 59% of patients had experienced delays, changes, or problems with their transport or journeys, and 68% of patients had experienced delays being picked up on time from hospital.**

These trends indicate that whilst the service has performed well recently, there is room for improvement, especially in delivering services equally effectively in different parts of Sussex.

Patients told us that they wanted to see the following changes made to the service:

- to be notified of any changes or delays to their journeys, and to be given an exact time for when their vehicle will be arriving
- to be able to speak with someone at any time to check where their vehicle is
- renal patients want to see a dedicated service created for them
- to improve communications, patients want to receive a text or call telling them when their vehicle is 30 minutes away; a telephone call centre service with extended operating hours; an online account facility, and a mobile phone app which allows them to track the whereabouts of their vehicle.

In parallel with its engagement activity with users in Brighton & Hove, East Sussex and West Sussex, Healthwatch in Sussex has also undertaken a detailed analysis of

similar schemes in other parts of the country. This review of over 30 publications identified key lessons from similar services delivered elsewhere.

All of these findings, together with a clear set of key recommendations for the future delivery of non-emergency patient transport services in Sussex are set out in two reports which we have shared with NHS Commissioners and the current provider of the service.

These will be used to inform the specification of the new £20 million contract for the delivery of Non-Emergency Patient Transport Services in Sussex in early 2021, which will start in 2022.

**Healthwatch in Sussex said today:**

*“One of the most basic issues people face is travelling to and from health appointments.*

*It is welcome news that patients, particularly renal patients, have reported high satisfaction with most aspects of the service. But further efforts are needed to correct deficiencies: patients should experience timely pick-ups from hospital, and be routinely notified of changes, or delays, to their transport.*

*Crucially, patients have also told us what changes they would like to see made to the current service specification and Commissioners should aim to incorporate these in the new contract specification.*

*The findings from our patient engagement and review of literature should form a vital component in the process of refreshing the service specification and ensuring that NHS Commissioners are able to commission a robust and responsive service going forward.*

*Healthwatch in Sussex welcome the CCG’s engagement with us on this important work and we will work closely with them to deliver a successful new contract.”*

**NHS Sussex Commissioners said:**

*“It is pleasing that the Healthwatch survey shows that a large proportion of patients are satisfied with most aspects of the service, currently provided by South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS). The results reflect well on the work of SCAS to deliver improvements since they took over the contract in 2017.*

*However, we recognise that there are always areas where further improvements can be made. These have been clearly flagged in the report. We have taken this feedback and are working with SCAS to improve the offer patients receive now.*

*The Sussex CCG will continue working with Healthwatch, and using their recommendations, to ensure that patient engagement is maintained whilst we move into new service provision.”*

**Press release ends**

## Further Information

Using patients' feedback, and our research, Healthwatch in Sussex have

- made 14 recommendations, shared with NHS Commissioners responsible for designing the new service
- already shared patients' ideas and feedback with potential bidders for the new contract at a market engagement event held in October 2020
- secured changes to the draft specification for the new contract, including stronger targets around timeliness, and better patient communications.

Looking forward, we will:

- issue a joint briefing with NHS Commissioners to city-leaders and decision-makers to raise awareness of the issues identified
- continue to work with NHS Commissioners in 2021 as they develop the new contract to ensure that patients' views are reflected
- review the draft specification for the new contract. We will also help set and evaluate the questions which potential bidders need to answer and fulfil.

In the past, patients across Sussex have suffered a poor service, notably in 2016, when Coperforma were awarded the contract but after just one year of poor performance walked away from the contract at an undisclosed cost to the taxpayer. In 2017, South Central Ambulance Service took over the contract and have worked hard to deliver improvements and greater patient satisfaction levels.

In 2019, Healthwatch England carried out a nationwide conversation on the NHS Long Term Plan, engaging with over 30,000 people across the country. They found that travel was a key issue, with nine out of 10 people saying that convenient ways of getting to and from health services is important to them. Indeed, people put transport above other things, such as choice over where to be treated and improving digital access to services

**For further help and advice and to escalate issues of concern contact:**

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## Previous reports on Patient Transport Services in Sussex:

### Healthwatch reports

Healthwatch Brighton and Hove	<a href="#">Users' perspectives on the Patient Transport Service April - September 2016</a> Perspectives of Renal Outpatient Department patients at the Royal Sussex County Hospital, Brighton	September 2016
Healthwatch in Sussex  Partnership working across the Healthwatch teams operating in East and West Sussex and Brighton and Hove	<a href="#">The New Sussex- wide Patient Transport Service</a>	September 2017
	<a href="#">Sussex wide Non-Emergency Patient Transport Service (PTS) provided by: South Central Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust: What patients and carers and some staff told us about how the service has changed.</a>	April 2018
Healthwatch England	<a href="#">What people have been telling us about health and social care A review of our evidence Jan-March 2019</a>	2019
	<a href="#">There and back What people tell us about their experiences of travelling to and from NHS services</a>	October 2019

### NHS Report

NHS England national review	In autumn 2019 NHS England and NHS Improvement announced it would review non-emergency patient transport services (NEPTS). <a href="#">The review</a> closed in March. No outcomes have been published at the time of writing	Autumn 2019
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### Independent review

TIAA	<a href="#">Adequacy of the mobilisation arrangements for the new Patient Transport Service contract</a>	June 2016
TIAA	<a href="#">Patient Transport Services Mobilisation - incorporation of lessons learned</a>	April 2017