

Brighton & Hove City Council

Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Agenda Item 24

Subject: Non-Emergency Patient Transport Services (NEPTS) Contract

Date of meeting: 31 January 2024

Report of: Executive Director, Governance, People & Resources

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Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

Glossary of Terms

- **NEPTS:** Non-Emergency Patient Transport Services. NHS-commissioned services to transport eligible patients to, from and between healthcare settings where patients are unable to safely convey themselves
- **NHS Sussex:** NHS Sussex commissions NHS services for the population of Sussex. Much of this commissioning is done by local teams working at place (e.g. Brighton & Hove), but some is undertaken at a Sussex level for services with a larger population footprint, such as NEPTS
- **SCAS:** South Central Ambulance Service: NHS Trust operating emergency ambulance services across Hampshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire. Current NEPTS provider for Sussex
- **SECamb:** South East Coast Ambulance Service: NHS Trust operating emergency ambulance services across Surrey, Sussex and Kent

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 This report presents an update from NHS Sussex (see Appendix 1) on the tendering of the Sussex Non-Emergency Patient Transport (NEPTS) contract.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Committee notes the update on the Non-Emergency Patient Transport contract.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 Non-Emergency Patient Transport (NEPTS) is transport provided to patients to help them get to appointments or to travel between healthcare sites. NEPTS is only provided in specific circumstances where a patient's health condition means they would be unable to travel safely without assistance. In general, patients are expected to make their own way to appointments without NHS help.
- 3.2 The Sussex NEPTS contract was last let in 2016, with the contract awarded to Coperforma. Prior to this the contract holder was South East Coast Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SECAMB). There were major problems with the mobilisation and delivery of the new contract, and in 2017 Coperforma withdrew as provider. South Central Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SCAS) agreed to take on the contract.
- 3.3 The contract was due to be re-let in 2021/22, but was instead extended until 2025. This was due to Covid pressures and because commissioners needed to take account of the findings a national review of NEPTS (2021) which was also delayed by the pandemic. The contract was put out to tender in summer 2023, with an announcement of the preferred provider planned for January 2024. There will then be an extended mobilisation period, in accordance with market feedback received, with the new contract going live in April 2025.
- 3.4 The contract currently being tendered reflects the findings of the 2021 national review (in which Sussex was one of 3 pathfinder sites), learning taken from the previous procurement, feedback from system partners and patient groups, including Healthwatch, with Healthwatch in Brighton playing a significant role in service design, development and evaluation of the bids received.
- 3.5 The national review made a number of recommendations for NEPTS, including being clear about eligibility for patient transport and signposting people to alternative services if they did not meet eligibility criteria; ensuring that NEPTS met provider needs, so that NHS trusts were not obliged to commission parallel transport services to ensure the timely transfer or discharge of patients; designing a service that meets user expectations (e.g. including an app people could use to track their vehicle/texts to confirm a pick-up is imminent); and meeting NHS net zero targets.
- 3.6 The new service specification includes these recommendations and also describes a transformational service that both meets the statutory eligibility obligations for a NEPTS alongside meeting the wider patient transport needs to improve patient outcomes, optimise system flow and deliver efficiencies across the system.

- 3.7 Given the challenges of the 2016 contract award, members may be particularly interested in measures taken to ensure that lessons were learnt. Following the termination of the 2016 contract with Coperforma, Sussex Clinical Commissioning Groups arranged for an independent assessment of the award and mobilisation process. Sussex HOSCs and Healthwatch organisations were also very active in scrutinising the process undertaken, finding fault in areas such as the decision to proceed with the contract award with only one bid received; how diligently commissioners had assessed Coperforma's suitability as a provider; the time allotted to contract mobilisation; and whether the funding allocated to the contract was sufficient to deliver a high quality service. These areas have all been given priority consideration and incorporated in the current procurement processes and associated governance.
- 3.8 Members should note that the HOSC was not made aware of the re-tender of this contract at an early stage in planning, and was consequently not able to contribute further to the development of a contract model.
- 3.9 Commissioners for NEPTS have welcomed both Healthwatch and additional patient representation into their work when developing the new contract specification. This has taken the form of regular attendance by Healthwatch at NEPTS Task and Finish groups, inviting comment on draft Service Specifications and involving patient representation in the assessment of bids to deliver the new service.
- 3.10 It should be noted that Healthwatch have commended NHS Sussex Commissioners leading on NEPTS for their openness and transparency and for actively involving patient groups in their work and consider this provides a benchmark for what good commissioning can look like and what it can achieve.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 Not relevant to this report to note. Members may, if they wish, make comments to NHS Sussex on the NEPTS contract model or tender process.

5. Community engagement and consultation

- 5.1 This report has been shared with Healthwatch Brighton & Hove for comment.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 Members are asked to note an update from NHS Sussex on the current tender for Non-Emergency Patient Transport Services.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 Not relevant to this report for information.

8. Legal implications

8.1 No legal implications have been identified.

Name of lawyer consulted: Elizabeth Culbert Date consulted 30/10/23

9. Equalities implications

9.1 Appendix 1 to this report includes information on how the new NEPTS contract addresses access for people with protected characteristics.

10. Sustainability implications

10.1 Appendix 1 to this report includes information on how the new NEPTS contract addresses NHS carbon reduction targets.

Supporting Documentation

1. Appendices

1. Information on NEPTS provided by NHS Sussex