

**Subject: Non-Emergency Patient Transport (NEPTS) Contract Award and Mobilisation**

**Date of meeting: 10 April 2024**

**Report of: Executive Director Governance, People & Resources**

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**Ward(s) affected: All**

**For general release**

**1. Purpose of the report and policy context**

- 1.1 At its 31 January 2024 meeting, the HOSC heard from NHS Sussex commissioners on plans to tender for a new Sussex Non-Emergency Patient Transport (NEPS contract). At this point, the tender process was live and NHS Sussex were only able to share limited details of the tender.
- 1.2 It was agreed that more information would be provided to the HOSC at its 10 April 2024 meeting, including the name of the new provider and details of planning for contract mobilisation.

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 That Committee notes the information contained in this report.

**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 early 2024. This will be followed by 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 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.

3.9 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.

3.10 When the HOSC received a report on the NEPTS contract at its 31 January 2024 meeting, the procurement was still live, which meant that commissioners were able to share only limited information with members. The formal procurement process has now concluded and NHS Sussex will be less restricted in what it is able to share.

#### **4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options**

4.1 Not relevant to this report for information.

#### **5. Community engagement and consultation**

5.1 None directly. Please note information in the body of the report detailing NHS Sussex engagement with Sussex Healthwatch organisations around the design of the new NEPTS contract.

#### **6. Conclusion**

6.1 Members are asked to note further information on the award and mobilisation of the NEPTS contract.

#### **7. Financial implications**

7.1 Not relevant to this report for information.

#### **8. Legal implications**

8.1 There are no legal implications to this report.

Name of lawyer consulted: Elizabeth Culbert    Date consulted (dd/mm/yy):

#### **9. Equalities implications**

9.1 None directly to this report. See Appendix 1 for more information on how the NEPTS service will ensure that it is accessible for users, including people who struggle to access digital, who do not have English as a first language, or who have other accessibility needs.

#### **10. Sustainability implications**

10.1 None directly to this report. See Appendix 1 for more information on how the NEPTS service will have a positive impact on carbon emissions.

## 10.2 Supporting Documentation

### Appendices

1. Information provided by NHS Sussex