



Public Meeting

Getting to Medical Appointments Community Transport

27th March 2014

Report



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Community Transport Public Meeting Report

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Public Meeting

Getting to Medical Appointments

Community Transport

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Background to the public meeting

Healthwatch North Somerset's statutory duty and remit, which is laid out in The Health and Social Care Act 2012, is to provide a voice for people who use health and adult social care services, by:

Influencing

- Giving people an opportunity to have a say about their local health and social care services, including those whose voice isn't usually heard
- Taking public views to the people who make decisions – including having a representative on the Health and Wellbeing Board
- Feeding issues back to government via Healthwatch England and the Care Quality Commission (CQC)

Signposting

- Providing information about health and social care services in the local area
- Advising people on where to go for specialist help or information (signposting)
- Helping people make choices and decisions about their care
- Working closely with other groups and organisations in the local area

Setting up the meeting

The meeting was held at For All Healthy Living Centre, Weston super Mare. Consideration was given to the time and location of the event, and there is an understanding that any chosen time or location would exclude part of the population. To ensure Healthwatch meetings are widely accessible it seeks to ensure public meetings vary in terms of time, weekday and venue.

The meeting was advertised in the local press – Weston Mercury and North Somerset Times and was widely advertised through local community websites, community newsletters, social networks and details were emailed to all Healthwatch North Somerset’s members and contacts and via Voluntary Action North Somerset’s database of more than 700 contacts. Invitations were also sent to stakeholders. Details were added to the Healthwatch North Somerset website and social media.

The meeting

The meeting was attended by approximately 30 members of the public who were each given an information pack which included feedback forms and information about Healthwatch North Somerset. Cards and leaflets were handed out by the speakers.

The presenters at the meeting were:

- **Dick Whittington**
West of England Rural Network / Director Healthwatch North Somerset
Introduction
- **David Steel**
Clevedon Care
- **Vicky Jenkins**
Referral Support Services Manager, North Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group
Community Transport
- **Vic Ryland**
Weston Wheels

Dick Whittington

West of England Rural Network / Director Healthwatch North Somerset

Introduction

Dick outlined the issues with public transport and the vital role of community transport not only for the rural areas of North Somerset but also for anyone in North Somerset who needs to travel for medical appointments. Lack of funds, the distance to the Bristol Hospitals and public transport all create difficulties for people seeking to attend medical appointments.

The purpose of the meeting is to understand the issues of transport to medical appointments from the patient and provider's standpoint, to consider what more might be done to help and to identify what Healthwatch can do.

The methods of getting to medical appointments for those without access to their own transport are either public transport, the Patient Transport Service, taxi or Community Transport.

The widening range of locations for medical treatment means that they are difficult to access by public transport. There is also a perception that the Public Transport Service criteria is tightening.

The role of community transport is vital and requires volunteers, funding, Council and NHS support. There are twenty Community Transport organisations in North Somerset (details can be found in the North Somerset Council's leaflet 'Community Transport' which can be downloaded from <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/>)

Questions from the public

Q. Is there any organisation that will get to all of the services?

A. No.

A. There is a hub bus from Cabot Circus and Temple Meads station that takes patients to all Bristol hospitals.

David Steel

Clevedon Care

David explained the background to Clevedon Care which started 27 years ago to cover all kinds of community care and over the years has evolved into a community transport scheme with 30 office volunteers and 58 drivers. They accept wheelchair users if they operate them independently, bring someone with them to handle the wheelchair or if they can get porters at the hospital. The locations vary but can include Taunton, Cheltenham and Bath but are predominantly Bristol, Weston and local.

There has been a big increase in numbers for the service which covers Clevedon and the surrounding villages that do not have a transport scheme. They have an open service, they do not means-test passengers and there are no age limits. The charge is a 45p per mile donation – any tips are used towards running costs.

They have reasonably secure funding as they were left a bequest which covers much of the running costs. In 2012 they provided 3300 medical transport runs; in 2013 the number increased to 3630. Clevedon Care has a website, they are often featured in the local press but mostly people hear about the service through word of mouth.

Although very successful, ongoing management is needed to ensure driver standards are kept up.

Parking, whilst waiting for a passenger to finish their appointment, is an issue particularly in Bristol, and can create problems for the volunteer drivers as some outpatients appointments can take a long time. Increasingly parking is being restricted. Recently, a driver for another community transport organisation had a parking ticket whilst parking in a designated disabled parking area and using the correct disabled badge.

Capacity is another issue that Clevedon Care grapples with. Last year only two appointments were refused due to last minute emergency appointments phoning late in the afternoon. It is expected that more volunteer drivers will be needed to keep up with demand for the service.

Questions from the public

Q. How do blind passengers going to the eye hospital get from the car to the hospital door if the car cannot park outside the hospital?

A. Usually passengers will have a blue badge and they can have porters waiting to assist them.

Q. Do hospital staff help passengers?

A. Passengers are encouraged to ask the hospital for help.

A. If a patient was given an indication of how long the appointment / treatment is expected to take it would help the public when making arrangements to get to and from the hospitals.

Vicky Jenkins

Referral Support Services Manager, North Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group

Transport schemes funded by the CCG and the information on the CCG transport pilot. Vicky explained that Patient Transport Services i.e. ambulance/hospital transport is available for people who have a medical need and meet the criteria for accessing this service. The Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme (HTCS) enables those in receipt of certain benefits to claim back the cost of travelling to their appointment. Further details can be found on the North Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group website <http://www.northsomersetccg.nhs.uk/>.

North Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group is currently undertaking a pilot of booking Patient Transport Services on behalf of five GP Practices in North Somerset. As part of this the Referral Support Service, a team within North Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group, are assessing whether patients qualify to use the service. If a patient qualifies, the transport is booked, but if they do not qualify they are provided with details of alternative services such as community transport and the Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme.

The pilot scheme seeks to provide consistency and fairness in the provision of transport to hospital appointments as well as freeing up GP surgery capacity. The pilot will roll out in 2014 to all GP surgeries in North Somerset.

Questions from the public

Q. Are patients informed about the transport process when calling in?

A. Yes, patients are informed that an assessment will take place and advised if they do not meet the criteria they will be given other options such as community transport. Advice is also given on how to claim back any costs for those on certain benefits. Information is also posted to the patient.

Q. What travel / transport information is provided to patients when they receive notification of a hospital appointment?

A. A leaflet should be sent along with a note to contact their GP Practice if there is likely to be difficulties getting to an appointment. This note will be adjusted soon to ask people to call North Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group instead of their GP Practice.

Q. How efficient will the service be? Will people be kept on hold for a while when they call?

A. North Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group is currently in the process of recruiting an extra member of staff. It would be rare for someone to not be able to get through. The phone system may be upgraded to support the service.

Q. Do you mention transport costs?

A. The caller is given an indication of the costs when they contact a community transport provider which is calculated on a per mile basis.

Q. People who are temporarily staying in care homes and under the care of a GP have been told they are not eligible as they have temporary address.

A. Issues like this should not happen and a benefit of developing this service is that situations such as this should not occur.

Q. Are you liaising with the public transport services?

A. Public transport services are currently being assessed.

Q. Patients who qualify for the transport services often find there are delays in being taken to and picked up from their appointment and their travel is very lengthy as the ambulance will pick up several passengers en route. This can be difficult when a patient is very unwell.

A. Delays can occur when there are too many people using the transport service. It is hoped the new scheme will make sure only eligible patients are using it which should improve the efficiency of the service. Ambulances often do transport more than one patient at a time as this is more efficient however if it was not clinically appropriate (i.e. would be detrimental to a person's health) for a patient to spend a long time on a vehicle this would be accommodated and would be assessed on an individual basis.

Q. Which GP surgeries are you working with now?

A. Locality Health Centre; Cedars; Riverbank; Long Ashton and Clevedon Riverside surgeries

Vic Ryland

Weston Wheels

Weston Wheels was set up in April 2013 when it was discovered that Weston did not have a voluntary hospital car driver scheme. Volunteer drivers were recruited and over the first twelve months there have been 200 journeys. Most referrals are from patients but some have been from North Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group.

The cost of journeys to hospital is fixed and the journeys are measured from the Weston Wheels office to the hospital, not from passenger's houses. This means the cost of the journey can be given in advance. Weston Wheels have a carefully prepared questionnaire which every would-be passenger is asked to determine whether the costs of the transport can be claimed back from the Healthcare Travel Cost Scheme. Approximately 50% of passengers are eligible to claim their travel costs back but do not know that they can as they are not aware of the scheme.

Vic contacted Southmead and Frenchay Hospitals to enquire whether drivers could park on the site. Details of drivers and vehicles were provided and it was agreed that they could park providing the drivers remain with the vehicle. Southmead in particular has been very cooperative and asked drivers to collect permits. Drivers' place cards in their windscreen and so far at the BRI and hospitals near to the BRI there have been no problems with parking. Taunton have a different scheme, all driver's names and vehicle registration numbers are submitted to car parking control.

Questions and comments from the public

"Hospital appointment makers should consider the distance people have to travel to an appointment as people will cancel appointments if they are unable to get there."

"Appointment makers should have a radius map to use when making appointments."

"Public transport in North Somerset is very expensive and there should be a special bus pass for hospital users."

Q. Motorised wheelchairs are becoming a problem for community transport due to their size and weight as many community transport vehicles cannot transport them. Where do people go for transport if they use a motorised wheelchair?

A. This is becoming a serious issue. Over the last 5 years the weight and size of wheelchairs has increased and enquiries have to be made when booking transport.

A. It is hard to find volunteers who drive bigger cars and buses to transport the wheelchairs.

A. If community transport can help people who don't have wheelchair needs, it frees up capacity in the hospital transport system.

Q. Is Weston Wheels is looking into have some cars adapted?

A. Weston Wheels is considering buying a vehicle but training will be needed for volunteer drivers to use the vehicle.

“Seat height is also an issue for some passengers.”

Q. Is the price charged by Weston Wheels for a return journey?

A. Yes, no matter how many people travel in the vehicle.

Feedback and comments received by members of the public unable to attend the meeting:

- More coordination of service and raising awareness will improve the system.
- An awareness of individual circumstances in the hospital booking system would help individuals when making their transport arrangements.
- I understand that hospital transport is available for the first appointment only. This doesn't seem sensible if people require ongoing treatment.
- Transport is often needed to attend community based services based in GP surgeries and transport is not available. This has a knock on effect in the demand for home visits which are time intensive.
- Park and ride doesn't stop near hospitals.
- You have to get one bus into Bristol bus station and another out to Southmead or Frenchay.
- Although the bus station is close to the Eye Hospital and the BRI, the streets are very steep for those unsteady on their feet.
- Parking at BRI is non-existent and the Park Row car park is a long steep walk. Southmead has a multi storey car park but this gets full very early. Frenchay has a car park but this gets full by the afternoon.
- Southmead's mega new hospital opens in May. I do hope they have made provision for community transport car parking and users and drop off points and disabled parking.
- It is important that you address the problem of transport to Southmead, Cossham, Frenchay and Weston Hospitals from Yatton, Clevedon, Portishead and Nailsea. A population of 100,000 have no provision for most consultancies since the arbitrary decision not to proceed with hospital provision in Clevedon, the centre of these communities.
- Barriers to using Community Transport include disability access, a lack of information, meeting the criteria and cost.
- Cohesive funding from North Somerset Council, North Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group and the Hospitals would create an organised and cohesive variety of transport options.

- Better joint working between statutory and voluntary providers and recognition of the need for funding.
- Hospitals need to improve 'meet and greet' to assist drivers and patients.

Recommendations

1. Providing patients with an indication of the time the appointment / treatment is likely to take would help the public when booking or making arrangements for transport to hospitals.
2. Inform patients that they may be eligible to claim transport costs back.
3. Hospital appointment makers should consider the distance people have to travel to an appointment as people will cancel appointments if they are unable to get there.
4. Providing information leaflets on community transport schemes with appointment letters would ensure all patients are aware they are available.
5. Information and posters about local Community Transport schemes and reclaiming transport costs displayed in GP surgeries would be of benefit for patients.



Appendix 1

Further Information:

- **North Somerset Directory of Community Transport** can be downloaded from <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/>
- **Weston Wheels** 01934 644 373
- **Clevedon Care** 01275 343 677 www.clevedoncare.org.
- **North Somerset Council** – information on community transport and contact details for North Somerset Community transport providers <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/> 01275 885 176
- **Community transport frequently asked questions:** <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Transport/travel/Pages/Community-transport-FAQs.aspx>

- Hospital Bus Services:** First Bus services go to all hospitals in North Somerset, Bristol, Bath and Taunton.
- Webber bus** routes to Weston General Hospital
www.webberbus.com/
- Crosville Bus** routes to Weston General Hospital
www.crosvillemotorservices.co.uk
- Weston Community Transport www.westoncommunitytransport.co.uk
- North Bristol Hospitals transport services**
<http://www.nbt.nhs.uk/transportservices>
- United Healthcare Bristol NHS Foundation Trust (UHB)** has a free hospital bus service which has pickups across the centre of Bristol including Cabot Circus car park and Bristol Temple Meads. This service stops at all hospitals and runs regularly throughout the day. A bus service also operates between North Bristol NHS trusts Southmead and Frenchay sites
- Healthcare Travel Cost Scheme (HTCS)**
 HTCS covers the cost of transport to hospital where the referral has been made by a healthcare professional (it does not cover visits to GP's or dental surgeries for primary care/primary dental care, or visits to A&E departments). For more information, see: NHS Choices website:
www.nhs.uk/nhsengland/Healthcosts/pages/Travelcosts.aspx

 - Information leaflet HC11 "Help with Health Costs":
 - www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/althcosts/Documents/2009/HC11Nov09.pdf
 - or download it from the Department of Health website www.dh.gov.uk
- North Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group has information about Patient Transport Services and eligibility on its website:**
www.northsomersetccg.nhs.uk/your-health-and-local-services/having-an-operation/patient-transport-services.aspx

Some people are eligible for the non-emergency patient transport service (PTS). It is available to if: your medical condition means you cannot use other forms for transport without damaging your health; or where your mobility means you would be unable to access healthcare by any other means; or where you need the skills or support of Patient Transport Service staff on or after the journey. Your GP, or the healthcare professional who referred you to hospital, can discuss with you whether you might be eligible for Patient Transport Service.

📞 Travel Line : www.travelinesw.com

Details about traveling to hospital for appointments, eligibility for ambulance transport and how to get help with travel costs can be found on local Hospital websites:

- 📞 Weston General Hospital: <http://www.waht.nhs.uk/>
- 📞 Southmead, Frenchay and Cossham Hospitals : <http://www.nbt.nhs.uk/>
- 📞 BRI : <http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/>
- 📞 Musgrove Park Hospital: www.musgroveparkhospital.nhs.uk

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