

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Health and Social care Trust Proposals for Efficiency Savings and Comprehensive Spending Review Investment 2008 – 2011 – Council Response

Summary of proposals being made

The NIAS is required to deliver an average 3% per annum cash releasing efficiency savings over the next three years. The service has developed a number of proposals which they feel will not represent a reduction in the service currently provided to patients and which are consistent with the delivery of a modern ambulance service. The proposals include:

- Application of absence management measures to reduce the spend on overtime
- Increase the number of patients carried per non emergency journey
- In-house servicing of the Trust's fleet where possible
- Reduce the spending on training and administration
- Reconfigure front line emergency responses by reducing the planned emergency ambulance hours cover. Investment would be used to increase the hours of paramedic cover provided by rapid response vehicles. Also introduce clinical triage into the NIAS control centres to offer clinically appropriate alternatives to ambulance attendance where the patient does not present with an immediate life threatening condition

Council response

Magherafelt District Council recently considered your consultation document on 'Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Health and Social care Trust Proposals for Efficiency Savings and Comprehensive Spending Review Investment 2008 – 2011' and recommended that the following points be raised in response to your proposals –

- Council understands the challenges that the NIAS faces in terms of making significant efficiency savings (3%) whilst continuing to improve service delivery. However as part of the efficiency savings you are proposing to remove ambulance crews and replace them in some places by single lone worker paramedics. The Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) are also currently considering proposals as part of their modernisation agenda that involves the reconfiguration of acute hospital services which will result on greater demands being placed on the ambulance service. It is unclear if the NIAS and the NHSCT have jointly considered the consequences of their proposals as the dual impact of these could be significant on the rural community within the district.
- The centralisation of hospital services will create longer distances for crews with the conditions in Northern Division (Coleraine, Ballymoney, Ballycastle, Cookstown, Magherafelt, Antrim, Ballymena, Larne, Carrickfergus and Whiteabbey) being such, that resources which are traditionally stretched are still not enough to meet the new emergency response standards which continually fail to be met. Northern Division cannot therefore afford the proposed cuts in emergency ambulance hours as this can only lead to the further deterioration of the service.

- Council considers that paramedic lone operators are something that should be additional to crews and not a replacement. Crews are still required to take people to hospital and under the proposals they will take longer to arrive at the incident.

Magherafelt District Council area is a rural community with a large hinterland. Accessibility to quality services is of high importance. The council feel that the proposals being made in the consultation put the delivery of these services and the health of the people who live in the area at risk. The council therefore requests that a review be undertaken of the impact of the proposals from both the NIAS and the NHSCT so that the consequences of their interaction can be fully identified.

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