

CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT - CLLR PHILIP WHITEHEAD

HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT SERVICE

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REFERENCE: HT-03-16

ROYAL UNITED HOSPITAL (RUH) HOPPER BUS SERVICE

Purpose of Report

To consider what action to take given the refusal of the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to joint fund the Hopper Service.

Consultation

See full consultation results under **Options Considered** in the main body of the report.

The Council consulted on:

- Scenario 1 - Changes to the service to reduce subsidy between £75k - £90k by:
 - (i) A reduction in the number of journeys to and from the hospital each day which will be achieved by removing a bus from the network.
 - (ii) Utilising one of the vehicles to replace a Council funded school transport contract, bringing in funding from the education transport budget to help support the cost of the service.
 - (iii) An increase in fares, by around 50%.
- Scenario 2 – Complete withdrawal of the service

During the period permitted for representation on my intention to make this decision, I have received six representations which are summarised in the main body of the report on page 9.

Options Considered

That:

- (i) The Council recognises that the service has performed an important function over the years, and is very popular with those who have used it. However, at a time when reductions in public spending are causing pressures on local authority budgets, all discretionary spending is being reviewed. The cost of supporting the RUH Hopper Service equates to a subsidy of around £10 per passenger trip, which is well in excess of the Council's guidelines for bus service support of £3.50 per trip, and in the circumstances it is considered that the Council can no longer continue to fund the service alone and at this level.
- (ii) Accordingly, the budget report approved by Full Council in February 2015 included, under the heading 'strategic savings', a proposal to achieve a saving of £130,000 by

“(removing) subsidy from the Royal United Hospital Hopper Bus Service; alternative provision will be discussed with the hospitals and CCG around better use of existing patient transport / bus services”.

- (iii) The cabinet member for transport wrote to the hospital and the CCG in February 2015 informing them of the proposal and inviting them to engage with the Council in investigating alternative means of transport to the hospitals.
- (iv) A meeting with the hospital and the CCG took place in March 2015. Options for the future of the service were discussed and Wiltshire Council Officers were tasked with developing those options, providing indicative savings and finding a solution on joint funding.
- (v) A further meeting was held in April 2015 with the hospitals and the CCG to discuss the detail around the options proposed. These options were taken forward and have been consulted upon.

At its meeting in June 2015 the Joint Commissioning Board (JCB) agreed to provide funding from the Better Care Fund in 2015/16 for the continued operation of the RUH Hopper Bus Service for the remainder of the financial year, subject to a review which would identify ways of reducing the cost of the service.

Reason for Decision

Wiltshire Council has approached the CCG to determine a suitable joint funding arrangement, but they have been unable to agree to this. The CCG has commented that it regrets it is unable to support the RUH Hopper Service, but that the NHS is under intense financial pressure and the CCG has no spare resource to be able to fund the Hopper Service as well as the Wiltshire-wide Non Urgent Patient Transport Service (NEPT), which also transports people to Salisbury District Hospital and Great Western Hospital. Indeed, finding the funds required for the Hopper Service would require the CCG to reduce clinical services currently provided for patients.

Even with a reduction in subsidy, as set out in scenario 1, Wiltshire Council cannot now resume funding this service. Therefore, the RUH Hopper Service will cease in May or early June 2016 (exact date to be determined), as per scenario 2, in light of the CCG not match funding the service.

DECISION MADE

I approve that even with a reduction in subsidy, as set out in scenario 1, Wiltshire Council cannot now resume funding this service. Therefore, the RUH Hopper Service will cease in May 2016, as per scenario 2, in light of the CCG not match funding the service.

This decision was published on 5 February 2016 and will come into force on 15 February 2016.

The following supporting documents are attached:

Report HT-03-16
HT-03-16 App1
HT-03-16 App2
HT-03-16 App3
HT-03-16 App4
HT-03-16 App5
HT-03-16 App6
HT-03-16 App7
HT-03-16 App8

Date:5 February 2016..... signed.....

Cllr Philip Whitehead
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport