

Home to Health: Report on hospital parking permits for community car drivers

May 2017

What was the project about?

We wanted to find out how to make it easier for volunteer drivers to take people without their own transport to hospital appointments in Buckinghamshire.

Why did we do the project?

Volunteer car schemes in Buckinghamshire told Healthwatch Bucks that parking difficulties were affecting their ability to take patients to hospital appointments. We wanted to see if we could improve the appointment experience by implementing a dedicated parking scheme for volunteer drivers. This would build on the voluntary permit scheme that Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust already has in place.

What did we do?

We did four things:

1. **Literature review** of published research into Community Hospital Transport
2. **Survey** of existing Volunteer Car Schemes in the county
3. **Best practice research** into car parking schemes for volunteer car drivers
4. **Pilot scheme** - we ran a Car Parking Permit scheme with Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust and Community Care North Bucks Hospital Car Service from 1 September to 30 November 2016

What did we discover?

These are the main findings:

1. Literature review (Appendix A)

- Transport difficulties can affect patients' response to treatment and facilitating transport could potentially reduce missed appointments
- There is no central guidance on how community transport schemes should be run

2. Survey (Appendix B)

- We estimate that there are about 835 volunteer drivers in the county, most of them 'regulars'
- We also estimate that between them they make 12,375 Volunteer Car Scheme hospital trips per year
- Responses to the survey confirmed the challenges around parking, drop offs and pick-ups at hospitals
- Volunteer drivers provide a valuable support to patients over and above driving them to hospital
- Comparison with Hampshire - who make 66000 trips a year to hospitals and other medical destinations a year- suggests the unmet demand in Buckinghamshire could be as many as 10,000 volunteer car trips each year

3. Best Practice

- We identified the Hampshire Hospital Parking Permit scheme, run by The Good Neighbours Support Service in Hampshire with input from Hampshire County Council, as an established model for Buckinghamshire to follow (see Appendix C for details)

4. Pilot Scheme

- The pilot ran from 1 September - 30 November 2016. Both the Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust and the Community Care North Bucks Hospital Car Service have reported that it was a success. A number of important learning points were identified, which have informed our recommendations (see Appendix D)

Our recommendations

To improve patient experience of getting to hospital using Community Transport, we recommend:

Now:

- Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust and Community Impact Bucks should explore setting up a hospital parking permit scheme for community car driver schemes within Buckinghamshire - Lead Community Impact Bucks
- Community Impact Bucks should explore with relevant stakeholders funding options to enable development and delivery of the above - Lead Community Impact Bucks
- Any scheme that is developed should be based on the Hampshire model, informed by the Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust and Community Care North Bucks Hospital Car Service pilot scheme, as the basis for the Buckinghamshire scheme. - Lead Community Impact Bucks

In the future:

- Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust should explore the feasibility of dedicated parking spaces at hospitals for volunteer drivers and investigate the possibility of commercial sponsorship for such dedicated parking spaces
- Community Impact Bucks should explore extending the scheme to hospitals and other health-related destinations outside the geographical county

What are we doing to ensure these are achieved?

1. We are discussing with the Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust, the community car schemes in Buckinghamshire, and Community Impact Bucks, how to implement a scheme as recommended in this report (see Appendix E for proposed outline of the scheme).
2. Community Impact Bucks have agreed in principle to act as Coordinator for the scheme, subject to finance being available.
- 3 - 5. Once the recommended scheme is up and running we will examine these options together with relevant parties.

Report prepared by Community Impact Bucks for Healthwatch Bucks, February 2017

Appendix A: Literature Review

- There is some evidence from research that transport difficulties can sometimes, but not always, be linked to failures to keep hospital appointments. Buckinghamshire hospitals may be able to reduce the cost of missed appointments if a parking permit scheme is introduced. We are not able to quantify the amount of the potential saving.
- Nationally, one in ten patients report dissatisfaction with [hospital] transport and parking.
- A bad experience of the non-medical aspects of a hospital appointment - including transport - can have an adverse effect on patients' response to treatment.
- Central government offers no guidance to hospitals on concessions for community transport drivers.
- Blue Badges can only be issued to disabled people themselves, not the people driving them. (There is an exception for care-giving organisations that provide transport as well, but that wouldn't apply here). It does not apply to off-street car parks such as those provided by hospitals. It is a national scheme and does not permit local variations.

Appendix B Survey Findings

We invited the 33 hospital transport schemes known to Community Impact Bucks. to take part in an online survey. Nine (27%) responded. The questionnaire asked about:

Numbers of drivers in the schemes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Car schemes range in size from 1 - 5 drivers to more than 40 drivers • The average Bucks car scheme has about 26 drivers, the majority of whom are “regulars”, i.e. make at least one hospital trip per month • We estimate that there are about 835 volunteer drivers in the county.
Numbers of hospital trips made	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The average scheme makes 31.25 trips per month. This equates to an estimated 12,375 trips per year across all 33 known schemes. • The average number of patients carried per scheme per month is 31.5 • The vast majority of patients use a community car scheme for just one hospital trip per month.
Which hospitals were visited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trips to Stoke Mandeville account for just over a quarter of all hospital car journeys • 66% of respondents cited parking and patient drop off/collection as a problem at hospitals, with 33% identifying Stoke Mandeville hospital.
Whether the schemes made trips to non-hospital appointments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both the data from the survey and information retained by the Community Transport Hub confirm that many schemes take patients to other health-related destinations as well as hospitals - including dental, optical and physiotherapy appointments.
Other comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The location of any concessionary parking should be as near as possible to the hospital entrance. • The volunteer drivers do more than provide a taxi service - they assist patients to find their way from car to clinic and vice versa. (One scheme has wheelchairs which can be borrowed by their drivers.) This extra dimension helps to improve the overall patient experience. • At present there is inconsistency both between and within hospitals in how voluntary car schemes are operated. • A comparison was also made between how the estimated number of trips in Buckinghamshire compares, on a per capita basis, with Hampshire’s current rate. Taking the difference between the two rates, and multiplying by the 65+ population of Buckinghamshire gives an estimated unmet demand of 10,285 trips in a year.

Appendix C: Best Practice

Key Features of the Hampshire Model:

- 29 hospitals in Hampshire and areas immediately adjoining Hampshire, participate in a parking permit scheme to facilitate parking by volunteer car drivers taking patients to hospital. Two thirds of these hospitals are within the county boundary but one third are over the border in adjoining counties.
- Possession of a valid permit does not entitle the volunteer driver to a parking space, nor to free parking. Some hospitals offer free parking to everyone, some to permit holders only, while some charge everyone.
- Even where there are no concessions, it is still helpful to volunteer drivers to have the parking information guides which are used in conjunction with the permit.
- In the financial year 2013/14, volunteer drivers taking Hampshire patients to hospital, GP or other medical appointments made more than 66,000 trips.
- Although the use of the permits is not formally policed by any organisation, after several years of operation in Hampshire there have been no reports of permits being abused.

Many thanks to the organisers of the Hampshire Hospital Parking Permit scheme and the Community Transport people at Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity for their input.

Appendix D: Pilot Scheme Findings from Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust

- The pilot has improved the experience of the voluntary drivers and decreased the risk of parking incorrectly therefore reducing the risk of any parking fines. Voluntary drivers have an improved understanding of where is acceptable to drop patients off and park etc., without charges and for how long.
- The pilot scheme confirmed that the amount of administration required to roll out the scheme across the whole county would be unsupportable by the Trust.
- A central coordinating hub is required to carry out the administration and to provide assurance to the Trust that permit holders have been properly checked and accredited.
- Having a system of clear registration which all voluntary groups wanting a hospital permit would have to undergo would be extremely beneficial to patient safety, volunteer clarity and good governance.
- A central registration hub for voluntary drivers and groups would provide them with formal recognition, which in turn would help to make them feel more valued for the great work and service they provide to so many patients.
- Such a hub could also help to develop a much better understanding of where voluntary transport groups are located, providing a really useful map of access for people across the county.
- Volunteer drivers need to be made aware that the Trust undertakes spot checks of use of any permits on site, and that using the permit at times for any other purpose other than bringing a patient into the Trust could result in the permit being withdrawn.

Feedback from the Chair of the scheme involved:

- Feedback from the Chair of the scheme was really positive: “The permit system worked beautifully and ran really smoothly”.
- The only slight issue at the beginning was that weekend carpark staff weren’t aware the pilot was in operation. This was quickly rectified.
- Going forward it would be useful if permit holders used a standard phrase for the car service to say via intercom at the exit barrier thus quickly identifying scheme.

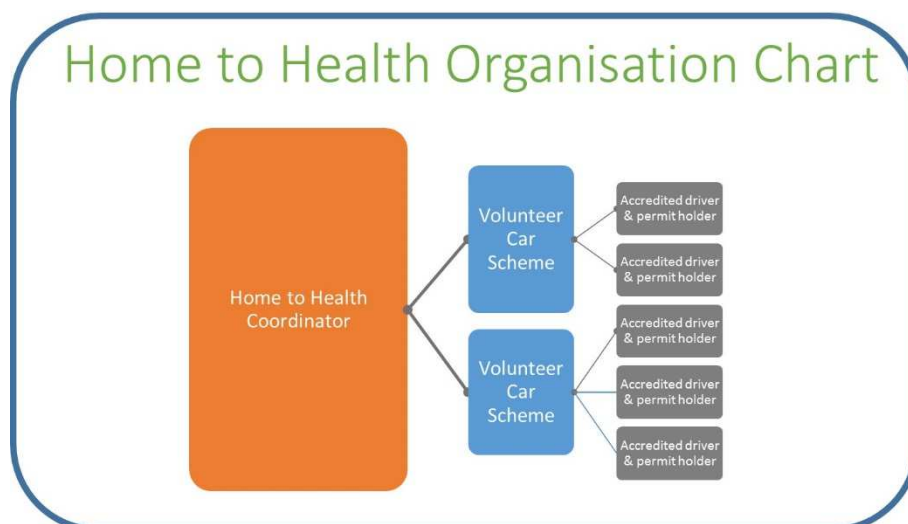
Background to the Pilot:

- The pilot ran from 1 September - 31 November 2016.
- Approximately 250 clients were transported to and from hospital appointments in Bucks, through 250 separate return journeys.
- 37 Volunteer Drivers were provided with permits.
- The geographical coverage of the The Community Care North Bucks Hospital Car Service is Buckingham, Winslow and surrounding villages.

Many thanks to Bucks Healthcare Trust for running this pilot in collaboration with Community Care North Bucks Hospital Car Service and providing these helpful findings that will help shape the way forward.

Appendix E - Proposals for a hospital parking permit scheme

- The scheme could be called “Home to Health” to indicate that it covers more than just hospital trips
- The scheme would allow volunteer drivers to park free of charge in the car parks of participating hospitals and other health destinations while displaying a valid Home to Health permit
- The structure of the scheme would be like this



Permits

- Coordinator issues blocks of numbered permits to Home to Health member car schemes
- Car schemes accredit their own drivers and issue individual permits
- New blocks of permits issued every 3 years
- Each permit to display the name of the car scheme, a contact number for that scheme, the driver's name, a unique permit number, the printing date and an expiry date. Appendix 3 shows what the Hampshire permits look like (the reverse side is left blank in Hampshire)
- The reverse side of the permit should carry a reminder that there are spot checks of use of any permits on site and that using the permit at times for any other purpose other than bringing a patient in could result in the permit being withdrawn
- It is good practice to display the permit even in car parks where there are no charges, as this publicises the scheme and may help recruitment.

Administration 1 (local)

- Car schemes make the bookings for all trips (as now) and handle the finances of their own scheme
- Car schemes ensure their drivers comply with relevant legislation and good practice for volunteer car schemes
- Car schemes pass on to individual driver's information they have received from the Coordinator about changes to parking arrangements

Administration 2 (central)

- Coordinator liaises with the hospitals and other destinations to maintain an up to date list of parking arrangements and any temporary or permanent changes to those arrangements
- Coordinator issues driver schemes with up to date details of parking arrangements at each hospital

- Coordinator keeps a central register of numbered permits, polling the car schemes regularly to keep the register up to date
- Coordinator to prepare and publish Good Practice Guidelines for Voluntary Car Schemes (the Hampshire County Council guidelines could provide a starting point)
- All schemes in membership of Home to Health required to follow the Good Practice Guidelines
- Coordinator offers member schemes some or all of the following:
 - advice on insurance
 - DBS checking
 - putting would-be volunteer car drivers in touch with their nearest voluntary car scheme
 - collecting usage statistics from individual local car schemes.

If you require this report in an alternative format, please contact us.

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