



## **Report**

Thames Ambulance Service

September 2019

# healthwatch

## North East Lincolnshire

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## What is Healthwatch?

Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire (HWNEL) is the independent champion for people who use health and social care services. HWNEL exist to make sure that people are at the heart of care. We listen to what people like about services and what could be improved. HWNEL share their views with those with the power to make change happen. Helping people find the information they need about services in their area is another of our priorities. HWNEL have the power to make sure that people's voices are heard by the government and those running services. As well as seeking the public's views ourselves, HWNEL also encourage local health and social care services to involve people in decisions that affect them. Our sole purpose is to help make care and services better for people.

In summary, Healthwatch's main aims are to:

- Help people find out about local care
- Listen to what people think of services
- Help improve the quality of services by letting those running services and the government know what people want from care
- Encourage people running services to involve people in changes to care

## Why this Subject?

Thames Ambulance Service Ltd (TASL) was commissioned in October 2016 to provide Non-Emergency Patient Transport for North East Lincolnshire. The Care Quality Commission (CQC) carried out an inspection on the 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2018 and their overall rating for the ambulance location and patient transport services was 'Inadequate'. NHS England and the CQC are undertaking enhanced monitoring of the service through local quality meetings, quality assurance visits and regional review meetings.

Over the period of the contract, Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire has received feedback from service users regarding waiting times, communication and eligibility. The eligibility criteria for TASL is patients who:

Have a medical condition that means they require the skills or support of Patient Transport Service (PTS) staff on/after the journey and/or where it would be detrimental to their condition or recovery if they were to travel by other means or have a medical condition

which impacts on their mobility to such an extent that they would be unable to access healthcare and/or it would be detrimental to the patient's condition or recovery to travel by other means or are recognised as a parent or guardian where children are being conveyed' Eligibility will be assessed at the point of booking transport, and the patient will be asked some questions to determine if they are eligible to use non-emergency medical transport services. If patients are eligible to use the service, they will be provided with a unique booking reference number and are contacted prior to their journey. TASL aim to collect patients no more than one hour prior to their appointment.

## Introduction

This report will examine feedback gathered by Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire, and identify the key issues patients are experiencing within the service. This report aims to discussed information gathered from patients who have a medical condition that would prevent travel by other means and their experiences of patient transport and TASL staff.

## Background

Thames Ambulance Service Limited (TASL) were inspected by the CQC in October 2018 and the service was rated as 'Inadequate'. Due to this and the comments that the Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire Team had received from patients using the service, Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire. Heathwatch North East Lincolnshire staff had spoken to managers at TASL about the difficulties some patients had had accessing hospital transport and the issues patients had encountered. TASL Managers changed and there was a delay in starting the project.

Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire staff met with the current Manager at TASL on several occasions to discuss the project and the issues patients had been experiencing. Since the CQC Inspection, NELCCG have been regularly meeting with TASL to ensure targets are met and so that NELCCG can offer support.

## Approach

Entitlement to transport depends on whether you meet the eligibility criteria set out by Clinical Commissioning Groups, in line with National Guidelines, and this is assessed by asking questions when a patient first books a journey.

Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire undertook a public survey to gather feedback and experiences from patients who have used the hospital transport service. The survey contained ten questions, and results were obtained in person at GP Practices, various information and engagement stands within North East Lincolnshire, Diana Princess of Wales Hospital's Discharge Lounge and TASL's Grimsby Location. Any completed surveys were then directly entered into our online survey application. The electronic version of the survey was also publicised on Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire's website and social media.

Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire also created a survey for Hospital transport staff, in order to gather their views and opinions, of which hard copies were delivered to the transport office in the local hospital for voluntary completion. Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire collected a total of six completed surveys from TASL Staff members, and 29 completed surveys from service users. Additionally, Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire obtained 7 of TASL's Patient Feedback forms which to our knowledge had been completed by service users. These results are displayed separately throughout the report.

## Experiences and Feedback

### Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire Patient Transport Feedback

#### **1. Did you book your own transport?**

64% of the people who answered booked their own transport, whilst the other 36% had their transport booked by a friend/family member or the hospital.

#### **2. Were you collected in a timely manner?**

90% of service users said that they were collected in a timely manner on their inbound journey. With one service user saying "sometimes you are not collected at

all, but the hospital do not penalise you when it is TASL's fault. You do still have to re-join the waiting list though."

### **3. How did you find the process of getting to and arriving at hospital?**

32% of service users said the process was excellent, whilst 50% said good and the other 18% said adequate. One service user commented, "it all depends on who the driver is, if I know them they are great, but if they do not know me it is not so good as they don't understand my needs."

### **4. How did you find the transport office?**

Whilst 36% rated the office as excellent, another 36% of service users rated the transport office as very bad-poor, and 29% rated it as adequate. The feedback we have received evidences that service users are experiencing challenges at this point in the process, with one service user commenting:

"Did not check on me, sat for 2 hours, couldn't move, had eye surgery so couldn't see, needed the toilet, and couldn't get to window of office to speak to anyone."

### **5. Were you given an indication of how long you would be waiting?**

82% of patients were not given an indication of how long they would be waiting for transport home, the remaining 18% told Healthwatch that they were told how long they could expect to be waiting by nurses in the discharge lounge.

### **6. How long were you waiting?**

Our feedback shows that 32% of patients we spoke to said that they were waiting between 15-30 minutes. However 19% stated that they had previously waited over two hours. A further 37% stated that they were waiting between 1-2 hours. With some comments including:

"I waited 3 hours once"

"It varies all the time, you just never know and there is no clear guidance."

“It all depends on who the driver is, who is at the office, and what my appointment is for.”

“3 hours and 30 minutes. I hope I never have to use TASL again.”

## 7. Whilst you were waiting, did anybody check on you?

**It is important to note that whilst a larger proportion of service users reported that they had to wait at least 15-30 minutes, only 32% said that they had been checked on or updated by a member of staff.** It is also important to note that there was no negative feedback about the staff members or the journeys specifically. The only feedback with a negative sentiment was regarding the time waiting for the outward journey. Some comments provided by patients include:

*“Staff in office on phones”*

*“Nobody checked on me but I could not get myself to the window to ask a staff member. I was left needing the toilet, a drink and not knowing if I had been forgotten.”*

*“I was being discharged so the nurses in the discharge lounge kept me updated.”*

*“Offered a cup of tea when I first arrived at the discharge lounge, but only got updated when I asked and I am disabled.”*

*“They are too busy in the office, but I am disabled so it would be good if they did check.”*

## 8. How did you find the process of getting back home?

The majority of service users, at 60%, rated their outward journeys as good, and a further 10% rated their journey as excellent. Only 5% rated their journeys as very bad. Those who responded negatively to this question commented:

*“Transport is fine, just the waiting that is the problem”*

*“I was waiting 45 minutes for my transport home”*

*“They didn’t pick me up at all”*

“It depends if the driver knows me and my needs”

Another service user commented:

*“Mainly found ok have had a few problems, the driver couldn’t use technology didn’t know the way. Had to log him in to the app and press relevant buttons. Then got us lost and took us 1.5 hours further away as we left the hospital. He went wrong around roundabouts and over the kerbs to switch lanes. Other than that not many have been late.”*

Although Healthwatch cannot accurately comment as to whether this issue was caused by a lack of training, it does suggest that the member of staff that this comment refers to is not able to safely and efficiently use the equipment provided.

## 9. Why did you have to use hospital transport?

Appointment: 71%

Discharge: 29%

Patients left the following comments:

*“Transfer”*

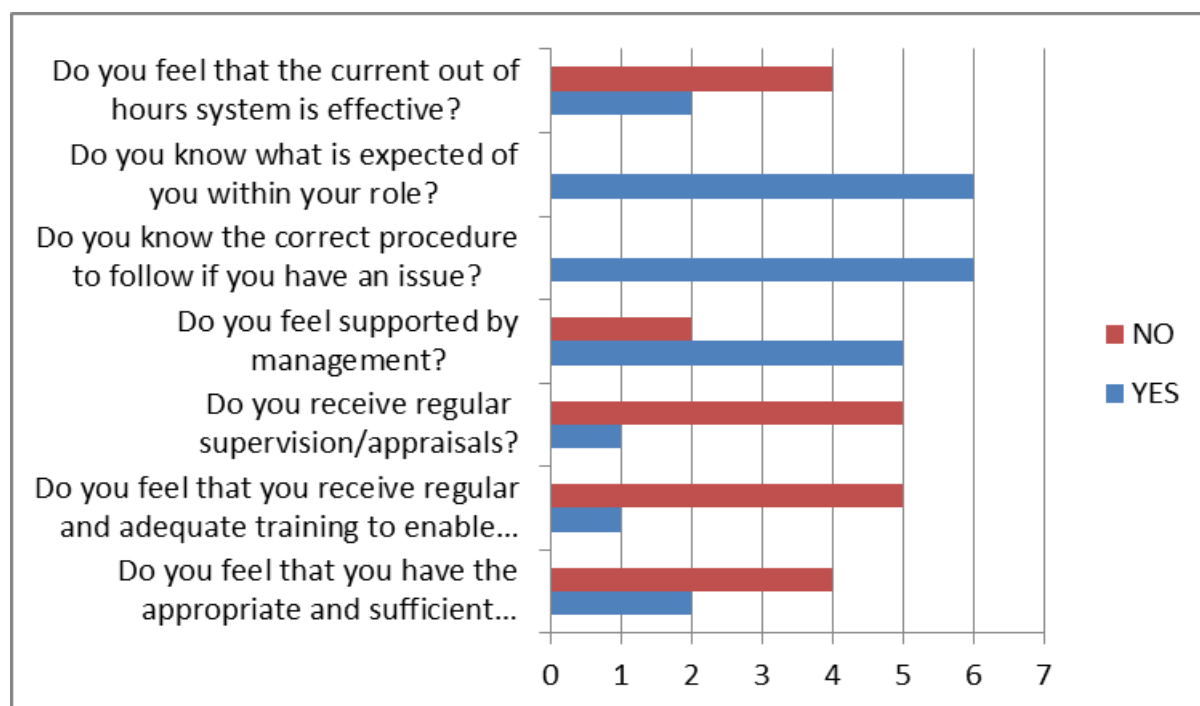
*“Admission”*

*“I have several long term conditions so I use hospital transport often for appointments.”*



## TASL Staff Questionnaires

Six members of the Thames Ambulance Service team completed our staff questionnaire.



### 1. Do you feel that the current Out of Hours system is effective?

Four of the six team members answered no to this question. Some further comments from staff members include:

“No because they do not answer the phone and allocate wrong jobs to crews and give incorrect information.”

“Not answering the phones when a crew is in need of help! More than 15 minutes waiting is unacceptable.”

### 2. Do you know what is expected of you within your role?

All staff members answered that they knew what is expected of them within their role.

### 3. Do you know the correct procedure to follow if you have an issue?

Again, all staff members answered that they knew the correct procedure to follow if they had an issue. However, according to the Quality Report written by the Care

Quality Commission (CQC), they found that staff at the Grimsby location had not received appropriate safeguarding training as there were no training records to view upon their inspection and managers were not aware of staff training compliance. However, one member of staff told Healthwatch that they cannot get through to the office when a crew is in need of help, and reported a fifteen minute wait time to report an issue.

#### **4. Do you feel supported by management?**

Four of the six staff members who completed the survey said that they felt supported by management. However, although only six staff members completed the surveys, seven answers were collected for this question. This is because one staff member answered both yes and no to this question as they wanted to clarify that they did feel supported by their Station manager, but not by others. Other comments which also reflected this include:

“Station manager yes, others no”

“Station manager only”

“Not above the station managers”

“Yes by station managers, not others”

This indicates that only two members of staff feel supported by management and the remaining four only feel supported by their station manager.

#### **5. Do you receive regular supervision/appraisals?**

Five staff members said they did not receive regular supervisions and appraisals. The CQC also found that staff had not received appraisals or supervision, and data supplied by the provider showed appraisal rates below the provider’s compliance target. This is reflected within the findings of the CQC’s Quality Report, which states that the provider was achieving below 17% compliance. However this data represents all locations.

**6. Do you feel that you have received regular and adequate training to enable you to complete your role safely and effectively?**

Five of the six staff members who completed the surveys said that they did not receive regular and adequate training to enable them to complete their role safely and effectively. The CQC also found that the provider did not ensure that staff achieved the required levels of mandatory training to support the safe delivery of the service. Mandatory training included first aid, basic life support, manual handling, health and safety, infection prevention, whistleblowing, dementia awareness, equality and diversity, mental capacity, do not attempt cardiopulmonary resuscitation (DNACPR), end of life, information governance, PREVENT and conflict resolution. They also found that a manager at the time of the inspection had not completed mandatory training since July 2017, and the manager was unable to tell the CQC about staff training compliance and did not have oversight of the training process.

Comments include:

“No. Given promises about training that never happen.”

“No. But always best to keep up to date.”

**7. Do you feel that you have the appropriate and sufficient equipment to complete your role safely?**

Four members of the team answered no, with some comments including:

“Some of the vehicles are unsuitable for the purpose they are utilised for e.g.: Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle.”

“If the correct info was put onto healthcab then yes but bariatric are always booked wrong.”

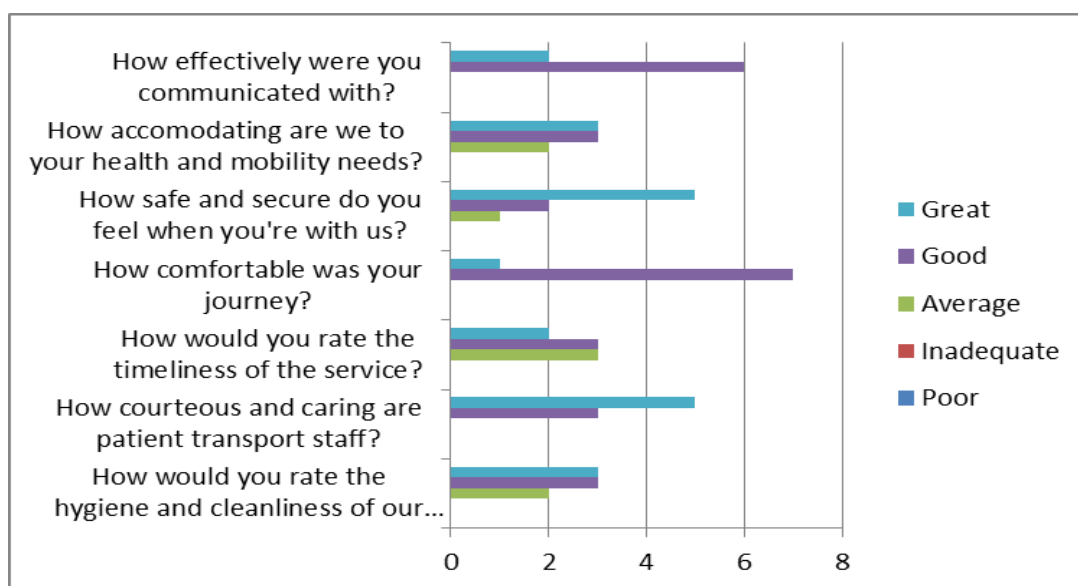
“Control and planning bad. PDA (Personal Digital Assistant) is rubbish.”

This is also evidenced in the Quality Report written by the CQC as a result of the last inspection, where nine out of twenty PDA's were out of use, meaning that staff had

to use their personal mobile telephones to contact the control centre and receive patient information. This is reported to cause confusion over journeys and significantly affect patient waiting times.

### TASL Patient Experience Survey Feedback Forms

Healthwatch have also received feedback from TASL’s customer satisfaction surveys, which is shown in the graph below.



## Emerging Themes

After analysing the feedback received from patients, Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire identified some key trends within the experiences patients had shared.

### Communication

Patients are experiencing a lack of communication regarding pick up times. This is particularly an issue for out of area patients. An issue occurred when Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire were gathering feedback at the Grimsby office in Diana Princess of Wales Hospital. A staff member from TASL informed us that an out of area patient had been allocated a driver from the out of area control. However, they continued to explain that staff at the Grimsby office are not updated and so cannot keep the patient informed with approximate waiting times.

## Assistance

Some patients Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire spoke to found this to be a particular issue as they required support and assistance during the time they were waiting for their transport home. A service user told Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire:

*“I was not told how long I would have to wait and got left at the office. I needed the toilet but couldn’t go myself.”*

When Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire staff were at the Grimsby Office in Diana Princess of Wales, it was observed that some patients were left unassisted for long periods of time whilst waiting for their transport home. As above, some patients who spoke to Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire stated that they required assistance to go to the toilet or get a drink; some also reported that they were concerned they may miss their transport home if they left the waiting area to go to the toilet or café area. TASL do clearly state that service users may bring one escort with them if:

- They need support on a regular basis
- They need their carer/assistant to support them
- They have communicative or sensory difficulty, such as visual impairment, hearing loss or speech difficulties
- They are under 16 years of age

However, one patient stated:

*“On one occasion no family/carer was allowed to ‘escort’ me and I cannot go to the toilet or do anything by myself.”*

This patient informed Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire that they had waited for approximately two hours, and were still unsure as to when they would be picked up for their transport home. Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire did not receive further information as to why this patient had allegedly been denied an escort.

## Waiting times

It was identified through feedback received from patients that there are often delays when waiting to be picked up for their journey home. Some feedback Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire received from patients regarding this issue were:

*“The actual transport is not a problem however it is the time you spend waiting in between for example after my appointment I was waiting for 3 and a half hours”*

*“The transport is fine, but the waiting in between is terrible. No compassion from staff in the transport office. Nobody thought to ask me if I was ok, or tell me how long I would be there. I thought they had forgotten me.”*

The CQC’s Quality Report highlighted some key issues, which are reported to directly affect patient waiting times. One of those issues not previously mentioned within this report is that there were significant staff shortages at the time of the CQC inspection, meaning the existing staff reportedly often had to work extra shifts to cover transport.

Some further comments received by service users are as follows:

*“Would only use again if I absolutely had to.”*

*“I think they could make better use of resources. I maybe could have got the bus with my wife, or used a volunteer car service. But an ambulance was booked for me, and I don’t think that was the best use of that vehicle at the time.”*

Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire spoke to this patient in the discharge lounge, and the patient explained to Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire staff that their spouse had come to visit them in hospital without knowledge that they would be discharged that day. The patient was from out of area, and so upon being told that they would be discharged, they were informed that transport home had been booked. The patient asked if their spouse would be able to be transported home with them, and this was refused. However, the patient explained that they felt able to utilise public transport with their spouse to travel home.

Another comment Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire received from a patient included:

*“If you are given a last minute appointment, transport is not always available and that means you are unable to attend your appointment which means you are back on the waiting list.”*

This particular patient had explained to Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire staff that they have experienced delays in treatment due to this issue, which they stated has significantly affected their physical health. Due to receiving ‘short-notice’ appointments, and being unable to book transport to attend the appointments, the patient has had to cancel their appointments and re-join the waiting list, which they told Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire often resulted in waiting a further three weeks.

## Staff

Although Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire received a large amount of negative feedback in relation to patient waiting times, Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire did receive comments with a positive sentiment in regards to staff attitudes. This is also reflected within the CQC Quality report, as Caring was rated as ‘Good’. Comments made included:

*“Friendly and polite staff who got me home safely with no issues”*

*“I had a lovely young man. He was very caring. He went beyond the call of duty to ensure I felt comfortable and safe.”*

*“Treated in correct manner, everything is ok”*

It is important to highlight that a number of patients who provided feedback on the service had stated that although they had waited for a long period of time, , they still feel they had a positive experience with the service, particularly when they had been updated regularly by TASL staff. For example:

*“Varies greatly- on the whole very good. The waiting is a problem but staff are very good.”*

*“Very good on the whole no issues- waiting approximately 2 hours but was kept updated and checked on.”*

This suggests that when TASL staff communicate and show compassion towards patients, the delayed waiting times do not equate as much to a negative experience.

## Limitations

Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire began gathering feedback in May 2019 and set a four month period, bringing the research to an end in August 2019. The Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire team asked approximately 450 members of the public whether or not they had used TASL's Non-emergency Transport Services. Of those, 22 individuals had used the service and was able to complete our survey, with 428 individuals we engaged with never having used the service.

Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire tried to overcome the challenges of finding patients who were using or had previously used the Patient Transport Service, which included visiting Diana Princess of Wales Hospital Discharge Lounge, TASL's Grimsby location within Diana Princess of Wales Hospital, various GP surgeries around the North East Lincolnshire area, and asking members of the public during numerous Information and Engagement stands. Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire also requested that TASL staff distribute the questionnaires, however none were received.

Although Healthwatch received feedback from a limited sample of patients, the qualitative data has provided information regarding some key issues that have been discussed throughout this report.

## Conclusion

Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire found that the majority of patients who use Non-Emergency Transport Services are experiencing a good level of care from TASL staff members. However, they are also experiencing delayed waiting times for transport home. These waiting times appear to be as a result of various issues identified by the CQC in their most recent Quality Report, such as insufficient equipment for staff and staff shortages. Based on these findings, Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire will offer recommendations to the service provider to highlight both good practice and areas for improvement.



TASL's recent Patient Experience survey results, indicated that 90% rated the timeliness of the service to be 'average', 'good' and 'great'. These results were a significant increase on their previous patient experience survey, which revealed that 48% rated the timeliness of the survey to be 'poor' and 'very poor'. However the results of the feedback collected by Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire did not reflect experiences of waiting times so positively, and instead emerged as the primary area for improvement.

## Recommendations

Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire make the following recommendations for improvement within the Patient Transport Service:

- TASL to implement a procedure that ensures patients and also hospital staff receive up to date information of expected arrival and departure times.
- TASL to ensure that upon booking, patients are reminded that they are able to have a carer or escort with them for their journey.
- North East Lincolnshire CCG to review with TASL, how many patients have had their treatment delayed as a result of delayed/no show transport or short notice requirements for transport not being met.
- North East Lincolnshire CCG to review with Diana Princess of Wales Hospital and TASL how tending to patients needs whilst awaiting transport is currently enacted and to determine how clear it is as to where this responsibility lies.
- TASL to advise what mechanisms are being put in to place to improve transport waiting times.

## Acknowledgements

Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire would like to thank the following people for making this report possible:

- All patients who shared their experiences
- All Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire volunteers who helped to gather feedback

- Thames Ambulance Service for supporting Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire representatives in conducting the research

## Distribution

This report has been distributed to the following:

- Healthwatch England
- Caroline Barley (**Contracts manager for HWNEL**)
- Brett Brown (CCG Contract Officer Lead)
- Marie Oxley (CQC Inspector North East Coast Hub)
- Jan Haxby (Director of Quality and Nursing at NEL CCG)
- Lydia Golby (**Lead nurse-quality at the CCG**)
- Thames Ambulance Service Ltd