

For issue: Monday 16th October 2017

NHS and travel and transport organisations vow to work together to respond to public concerns raised around future NHS changes

There has been universal agreement from bodies representing health, travel and transport organisations and interest groups in South Tyneside and Sunderland to work together and resolve issues raised during the 'Path to Excellence public consultation.

The consultation, which ended at midnight on Sunday 15th October, is around options to change key vulnerable NHS hospital services which are delivered at South Tyneside District Hospital and Sunderland Royal Hospital including:

- **Three options to improve** stroke services, specifically hospital (acute) care and hospital-based rehabilitation services
- **Two options to improve** maternity services (obstetrics), covering hospital-based birthing facilities i.e. where you would give birth to your baby and special care baby units and women's services (gynaecology), covering inpatient surgery where you would need an overnight hospital stay
- **Two options to improve** children and young people's (paediatrics, urgent and emergency) services

During the 18 public events held since the beginning of July, a major concern raised by local people is around travel and transport issues to access these services in the future.

Matt Brown, Director of Operations, of NHS South Tyneside Clinical Commissioning, said he was pleased people took the time to consider the consultation issues and feedback their views.

He said: "Through the consultation to date the public have helped us understand the risks in relation to travel and transport and what might be needed to mitigate some of these risks

Matt continue: "As a result, we've been able to collate their issues and concerns as well as comments and ideas for solutions, and this has been extremely helpful to start the wider discussion with those organisations directly involved in travel and transport."

At a dedicated travel and transport stakeholder event attended by 28 people, there was universal support on the need to establish new partnerships to tackle these issues together. People attending agreed to create two new working groups – one to specifically around NHS issues such as clinical transport, ambulances, car parking and a second group to focus on public transport such as bus, metro, interchanges and ticketing.

Attendees included:

- NHS organisations
- North East Ambulance Service
- Nexus
- Sunderland City Council
- South Tyneside Council
- Elected members
- Health Watch Sunderland and South Tyneside
- Tyne and Wear public transport service users group
- Bus operators – Go North East, Stagecoach

Issues raised by the public include concern about travel costs, access to parking on hospital sites, additional pressure on ambulance services. Ideas to help include better information about what help with travel and transport is already available, improving bus connections and introducing direct bus routes between sites.

All issues and ideas to date have been collated and are published on the programme website, along with the presentation from the event in the dedicated travel and transport area of the website: <https://pathtoexcellence.org.uk/travel-and-transport/>

Matt continued: “On behalf of the NHS organisations I would like to thank everyone who attended the event, there was a real positive feeling in the room and a clear willingness from everyone to work together in the best interests of the local communities we serve.”

Attendees also had the opportunity to film a short video at the event with contributions from the North East Ambulance Service, Health Watch South Tyneside, Go North East, Stage Coach and Nexus.

The public consultation is being led by the commissioners of local health services – NHS South Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and NHS Sunderland CCG – who are responsible for planning and buying healthcare services on behalf of patients.

Working in partnership with South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust, who formed a strategic alliance in March 2016 known as ‘South Tyneside and Sunderland Healthcare Group’, all four NHS organisations are committed to delivering the best possible NHS services for the future through the Path to Excellence programme.

All feedback from the public consultation will be analysed into themes and published in early December in order to ensure the public have an opportunity to hear it before it is used to inform the final decisions.

The final decision will be made by the two clinical commissioning groups at their governing bodies held in public in early 2018.

ENDS