

March 11th 2014

Amber Light For Bus Firm

The performance of privatised patient transport was strongly criticised in the February meeting of NHS Stockport's Clinical Commissioning Group board. Members were told that patients' experience of the non-emergency service, run by Arriva, was very poor.

Stockport CCG is joint commissioner of the patient transport service for Greater Manchester alongside the other CCGs in the area. Bizarrely, Blackpool CCG holds the leading responsibility. The bus company took over the contract last April after undercutting the previous contractors, NHS North-West Ambulance Service, in a competitive tender.

The Manchester Evening News reported in January that Arriva had missed key performance targets every month during the contract. Transport is provided for sick and immobile patients to take them to and from hospital appointments. Long waits and delays are being experienced in both directions.

At the Stockport CCG meeting on February 12, the poor work of Arriva was raised by a lay member of the board, John Greenough. He said that the company's performance was so poor that the board needed to keep sight of the issue.

A GP and clinical director of the CCG, Viren Mehta, added that some patients at his practice had been raising the issue. The CCG's chair, Jane Crombleholme, and chief officer, Dr Ranjit Gill, joined in the criticism of the bus company.

The CCG's officer responsible for quality and procurement, Mark Chidgey, confirmed that patient experience of Arriva was very poor. He said that Blackpool CCG had acknowledged the performance issues.

In reply to a question Mr Chidgey said the situation was being experienced not only in Stockport but across the whole of Greater Manchester. He said the company's record appeared to be worse than its predecessor, although Arriva had argued that the statistics for the two service providers were not comparable.

Concern about Arriva's work led volunteers from the official patient watchdog, Healthwatch, to conduct a survey of users of patient transport during February across Greater Manchester, with assistance provided by the company. The results are being collated during March. Healthwatch hopes that the findings will give it ammunition to propose changes to the service.