

# Arriva GOOD RIDDANCE

## **Greater Manchester will see the back of Arriva's much condemned non-emergency ambulance service in July. Falsely claimed performance bonuses scuppered the transport company's bid to have its contract renewed.**

The previous contractor, NHS's North West Ambulance Service, will be returning to run the service. Arriva won the contract three years ago by underbidding North West Ambulance Service by £3.5 million.

The Arriva-run service was a shambles from day one with frail and sick patients compelled to wait hours for their transport. Undemanding performance targets were repeatedly missed by the company whose bid was too low to pay for adequate staffing rosters. An apparent improvement in Arriva's service during 2014 may have been due to incorrect data. The revelation that the company was filing false performance figures came last autumn during the bidding competition for a new five-year contract.

Arriva volunteered that it had wrongly claimed £1.5 million in performance bonuses. It withdrew from the competition and repaid the money. Arriva's use of false data was referred to NHS Protect, which investigates fraud and other crime within the health service. No action has been reported against Arriva and no details of the case have been disclosed – such as how wrong data came to be submitted, by design or negligence. The bidding competition for the new non-emergency contract took place entirely behind closed doors.

Attempts by Stockport NHS Watch to access information last spring were repulsed. As is usual in NHS tendering, secrecy was said to be required to protect commercial interests; it also serves to protect commissioners from scrutiny.

## **Blackpool Donkey Rides**

Commissioning of Greater Manchester ambulance contracts is run by Blackpool Clinical Commissioning Group, acting for all CCGs in the

north-west. Until 2013 a single non-emergency ambulance contract covered the whole region, but was then split into five.

In 2013 North West Ambulance Service won four of the five contracts. In the latest competition NWAS regained Greater Manchester but lost Cheshire to West Midlands Ambulance Service, another NHS Trust. Unison, the union representing ambulance staff, responded that the change "causes unnecessary upheaval and uncertainty."

West Midlands Ambulance Service runs an emergency service across a swathe of the Midlands from Herefordshire to Staffordshire. Private provider NSL holds some of the non-emergency contracts in the region. In North Staffordshire NSL tried to re-negotiate its contract after 11 months in 2014 because it had underbid.

Arriva is believed to have competed alongside other private providers for the four other non-emergency contracts in the north-west apart from Greater Manchester's, though a list of bidders has not been published.

In Leicestershire, Arriva has triggered contract penalties for three years running because of missed performance targets for the county's patient transport service.

In Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and North-East Somerset, Arriva took on the patient transport contract in December 2013. In the first months of the contract patients complained of waiting for hours for transport. Arriva said it had underestimated the volume of work.

Although Arriva is considered a private provider, it is owned by Deutsche Bahn, Germany's nationalised railway service.

(Source: newspaper reports)

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