

Report to: **East Sussex Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC)**

Date: **24th September 2009**

By: **Director of Law and Personnel**

Title of report: **South East Coast Ambulance Service NHS Trust (SECAMB) – key developments**

Purpose of report: **To brief HOSC on SECAMB's application for Foundation Trust status and its strategy for the ambulance station network.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

HOSC is recommended:

- 1. To agree any key points in relation to SECAMB's Foundation Trust application for inclusion in HOSC's response to the Trust's consultation.**
 - 2. To consider and comment on SECAMB's strategy for the ambulance station network, particularly the development of 'make ready' depots.**
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1. Background

1.1 South East Coast Ambulance Service NHS Trust (SECAMB) provides emergency and urgent care to residents across a large area encompassing Kent, Surrey and the whole of Sussex. In Kent and Sussex the Trust also provides non-emergency patient transport services (pre-booked journeys to and from healthcare facilities). The Trust was formed on 1 July 2006 from the merger of the three previous ambulance trusts in Surrey, Sussex and Kent and still retains emergency dispatch centres and offices in each of these three areas, as well as a network of 63 ambulance stations across its area.

1.2 The role of ambulance trusts goes well beyond simply responding to calls and transporting patients to hospital. Increasingly, ambulance staff 'take healthcare to the patient', providing treatment at the scene, then ensuring patients access appropriate follow-up care. This may involve taking a patient to hospital, but could also involve linking in with community services which can provide follow-up care at home or in a local facility, thus avoiding a hospital admission. For the most seriously ill or injured patients, the ambulance service has a key role in determining the best place to take the patient – this may be to a specialist centre, rather than the local general hospital.

1.3 This report encompasses two current areas of development for the Trust: its application for Foundation Trust status and its strategy for the ambulance station network, including the development of 'make ready' depots.

2. Foundation Trust application

2.1 Foundation Trusts represent a key part of the Government's reform programme for the NHS. They are a new type of NHS organisation, established as independent public benefit corporations and are intended to be free from central government control and strategic health authority performance management. However, they remain providers of NHS healthcare which is free at the point of delivery and are expected to conform to the same national standards in relation to clinical quality and safety.

2.2 The key features of Foundation Trusts relate to their governance arrangements and their financial regime. In terms of governance, Foundation Trusts are accountable to local people who

form a membership. From this, public Governors are elected to form part of a Council of Governors which works alongside the Trust Board. In terms of finance, Foundation Trusts are free to retain any surpluses they generate for reinvestment, to borrow in order to support this investment, and to make their own decisions about what capital investment is needed to improve services. These freedoms and increased local accountability are designed to encourage innovation in local service delivery.

2.3 Foundation Trusts are regulated by an organisation called Monitor. In order to become a Foundation Trust an NHS Trust must be approved by the Department of Health to apply to Monitor and must then meet a range of criteria, particularly relating to their financial stability, governance arrangements and plans for the future. There is an expectation that all Trusts will eventually become Foundation Trusts.

2.4 SECAMB is currently going through the process of Foundation Trust application and is currently in a consultation period. It is important to note that the consultation is not about whether or not the Trust should become a Foundation Trust. Instead, the consultation relates to how the governance arrangements of the proposed Foundation Trust should work and the Trust's future plans. HOSC is invited to comment on the proposals and agree key points for inclusion in a letter to the Trust in response to the consultation.

2.5 SECAMB is committed to holding Board meetings in public once authorised as a Foundation Trust whilst recognising that some Board meetings will need to be held in private.

3. Development of 'make ready' depots

3.1 Since 2008, SECAMB has been developing a new arrangement for cleaning, restocking and maintaining ambulance vehicles. 'Make ready' depots provide a central point with a dedicated team responsible for cleaning used vehicles, checking and restocking equipment and drugs and ensuring the vehicle is in full working order. In the past, the ambulance crews themselves carried out cleaning and restocking.

3.2 The scheme aims to improve infection control, reduce instances of faulty or missing equipment and free up ambulance crews so they have more time to treat patients. Overall, the aim is to improve patient safety and keep ambulances on the road for longer.

3.3 There is already one make ready depot in East Sussex, in Hastings, as well as one in Surrey. Having evaluated the success of these two depots, the Trust plans to extend the model to the rest of its area over the coming years. The depots tend to be larger than many ambulance stations and require certain facilities which are not available at all existing ambulance stations. This means that there will be fewer depots than the current number of ambulance stations and they may be in different locations.

4. Issues to consider

4.1 The Trust has provided a presentation (appendix 1) which gives an overview of both the Foundation Trust proposals and the plans for make ready depots. Geraint Davies, Director of Corporate Affairs and Geoff Catling, Head of Estates will attend HOSC to present and take questions.

4.2 HOSC may wish to explore the following issues:

Foundation Trust

- Whether the Committee endorses SECAMB's vision
- How the Trust will ensure representation from across its large geographical area in its Foundation Trust governance arrangements and whether the Committee agrees with SECAMB's proposed public constituencies and staff constituencies.

- Whether the proposed governance arrangements promote openness and transparency as recommended by national guidance.
- Whether the Committee agrees that there should not be a minimum age of membership
- Whether the Committee agrees that the minimum age of a governor should be 16.
- How the Trust can effectively communicate and engage with its membership.

Make ready depots:

- How local ambulance stations will be affected by the development of make ready depots.
- What benefits there are likely to be for East Sussex residents from the development of further depots in the county.
- Impact of make ready arrangements on response times – particularly in rural areas
- Impact on Patient Transport Service

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