

Public Questions

Question from Tina Foster of Swanage

The withdrawal of the Swanage Paramedic Car

The Town Council was very shocked to hear this year that the Ambulance Trust are considering withdrawing the Swanage Paramedic Car, meaning that, contrary to the commitments made by Dorset CCG to Dorset Health Scrutiny Committee, Swanage would lose half of its allocated ambulance vehicles, and a third of ambulance staff.

Due to my recent experience of having to use the service, I am deeply concerned that this must not happen. I had to call 999 when I discovered my husband collapsed and apparently not breathing. The paramedic car was with me within minutes giving me reassurance, with the ambulance following soon afterwards. The crew checked my husband before taking him to Poole hospital. The paramedic was able to ring the local Doctors surgery to obtain useful information on my husband.

This meant that with the ambulance away for at least an hour and a half, the paramedic car was still available for other emergencies. Under the Clinical Services Review, the ambulance would be out for longer still, due to the distance to Dorset County or Bournemouth.

Swanage is at the end of a ten-mile corridor. An ambulance coming from the next Town, Wareham, cannot possibly get here within the 7 minute response time recommended for category 1, imminent danger of death, emergencies.

A Freedom of Information Act request raised by Langton Matravers Parish Council to the Ambulance Trust showed that, over a 13 month period, the average time between receipt of a category 1 call from Swanage and villages, to arrival of the patient at Poole, the nearest Hospital, was 1 hour 43 minutes.

A further request showed that the average blue light journey time from all BH19 postcodes, to Poole Hospital, is 41 minutes. Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group's Consultants cited expert opinion that 30-45 minutes is the maximum 'safe' journey time in an emergency. Under the Clinical Services Review, Swanage and villages will no longer be able to access care within these 'safe' times. The Ambulance Trust state it will take 8 minutes longer to get to Dorchester, and 19 minutes longer to get to Bournemouth, giving total journey times of around 50 and 60 minutes respectively once the ambulance has come.

At the Dorset Health Scrutiny Committee on 17 October 2018, Cllr Ray Bryan reported that the Clinical Commissioning Group had promised that the Swanage ambulance station would remain open 24/7, fully manned with ambulances. Major road improvements around RBH were offered to reduce journey times but have failed to be implemented.

Would the Committee please ask Dorset CCG to come to their next meeting to assure the Committee that the promise to at least maintain existing Ambulance resources allocated to Swanage will be honoured?

Question from Carol Finch of Swanage

The withdrawal of the Swanage Paramedic Car

In 2018 the Dorset Health Scrutiny Committee considered whether to refer the Clinical Services Review plans to the Secretary of State. Cllr Bryan reported that he had been assured by Dorset CCG that ambulance resources would be increased to more remote areas.

Under the CSR plans, Swanage and villages face the longest journeys in an emergency, due to the loss of A&E, Maternity, & emergency Paediatric care from Poole. Currently, Swanage has an Ambulance, and a Paramedic Car. The Car was allocated to Swanage in 2008 when the Cottage Hospital Minor Injuries Unit closed overnight, to increase emergency cover, given the distance to Poole. Thus, it is a matter of life and death that Swanage at least retains our existing ambulance resources.

The Paramedic Car is a fast vehicle, which stays in Purbeck, as it does not take patients to hospital. It fulfils a number of functions including:

- Preserving life until the Ambulance arrives
- Treating the 50% of patients who do not need to go to hospital
- Covering overnight while the Swanage MIU is closed
- Supporting Purbeck GP visits during the day

After hearing that the car was going to be withdrawn, the Chair of Swanage Area Forum started a petition. It has, to date, 3,807 signatures.

Thanks in part to support from this Committee, the Car has not yet been withdrawn. However the threat of withdrawal hangs over us from month to month, and Swanage Town Council has had no assurance of its retention.

The 5th March Health Scrutiny Meeting notes state that:

"The Chairman confirmed that assurance had been given previously that the Swanage Ambulance Car would not be removed, that 6 new ambulances would be activated in Dorset and that there was no intention to remove cover from the Swanage area. Members were concerned about the withdrawal of the promised level of cover in Swanage as timely treatment could be crucial.

The Chairman would formally write to the Chief Executive of SWAST to ask him to account for this change and copy this to the CCG Chief Executive. She would circulate any response received. If the response was not adequate, she would invite the Chief Officers to come to a future meeting."

On 9th March Swanage Councillors met Senior Officers of the Ambulance Trust, who said that the Paramedic Car would only be maintained if Dorset CCG allocated additional funding for it.

As Dorset CCG promised Dorset Health Scrutiny Committee that ambulance resources to remote areas would be increased, could the Committee please ask Dorset CCG to account for the threatened loss of half the ambulance vehicles allocated to Swanage, and a third of the staff?

Question from Avril Harris of Swanage

Matters raised by Parish and Town Councillors to Health Scrutiny

The withdrawal of the Swanage Paramedic Car

The future of the Paramedic Car based in Swanage remains uncertain from month to month. Swanage Town Council has been unable to secure any assurance from Dorset CCG that the Paramedic Car will be maintained or that there will be public consultation prior to a decision being taken about it.

At the meeting of Dorset Health Scrutiny Committee on 5th March it was confirmed that the Committee had been told by Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group that Ambulance Resources allocated to Swanage would be fully maintained and this is recorded in the minutes of the Committee of 17.10.2018, at point 38.

The then Chair committed to contact the CCG and SWAST, and to call the Chief Officers to the Committee, if a satisfactory response was not received. SWAST has confirmed that it is willing to maintain the Paramedic Car if a funding solution is found.

Would this Committee, as a matter of urgency, please honour the promise of holding Dorset CCG to account, because the Swanage Paramedic Car could be removed before this Committee meets again, and discuss this matter at your next meeting?

A&E Local

Swanage is a popular but remote holiday resort at the end of the Purbeck peninsula, 20 miles from Poole Hospital, 26 miles from Dorset County, and 28 miles from Royal Bournemouth. The average blue light time to Poole is 41 minutes, and the average time from an imminent danger-of-death call to the Ambulance Trust to arrival at Poole Hospital is 1 hour and 43 minutes.

Under Dorset CCG's Clinical Service Review plans, Swanage's local accident and emergency department will be relocated from Poole to the Royal Bournemouth. Longer journey times will increase risk for seriously ill patients. There are 1,400 emergency admissions annually to Poole from Swanage and villages.

To mitigate this increased risk, and to reduce increased pressure on Dorset County A&E, four Town Councils (Swanage, Weymouth, Portland, and Bridport) and four Parish Councils (Langton, Worth, Corfe and Arne), wrote to Dorset Health Scrutiny early this year to request support for an "A&E Local" at Poole Hospital.

From the Independent Reconfiguration Panel's report, this is a "model between the standard urgent treatment centre and a conventional district general hospital A&E", most likely operational for 16 hours a day. This would address the issue of chronic daytime traffic congestion in the conurbation which inhibits access to RBH from most of rural Dorset.

The former Chair committed to discuss this matter in November, but it is not on the Agenda. Could the Committee please give a date when this matter will be discussed?