

Consultation on permanent increase in car parking charges at the Antrim Area and Causeway Hospitals

Consultation Feedback Report
For consideration by Trust Board
August 2018

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Alternative formats

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Acknowledgement

The Trust wishes to extend its thanks and appreciation to all who responded to the consultation process.

Introduction

During 2017 the Trust publicly consulted on a range of ‘temporary’ proposals required to support the delivery of a balanced financial position at the end of the financial year, this included the temporary proposal to ‘increase car park charges at acute hospital sites’. This was subsequently approved by Trust Board on 13 October 2017 and received further endorsement from the regional Health and Social Care Board and also from the Department of Health.

The approvals currently in place are temporary in nature and as the financial climate has not altered, the Trust has consulted from 30 March 2018 until 22 June 2018 on a proposal to maintain the current increased car park charges at its two acute hospital sites on a permanent basis.

This report gives a summary of the feedback we received and our response to this feedback. This report should be read in conjunction with the associated consultation document available at www.northerntrust.hscni.net or by contacting the Trust’s Equality Unit on 028 2766 1377 or at equality.unit@northerntrust.hscni.net .

Our consultation process

To raise awareness of the consultation process over 1500 groups, organisations and individuals listed in the Trust’s Consultation Database received an email or letter informing them of the consultation arrangements. Consultation documents were made available on the Trust’s website (i.e. available to the public) and intranet (i.e. available to Trust staff).

Consultees had the opportunity to respond by a variety of means including in writing, email, telephoning and face to face meetings.

A total of 9 written responses (see appendix 1) were received during the formal consultation.

Promoting equality and good relations

The Trust is committed to promoting equality of opportunity, good relations and human rights in all aspects of our work. An equality screening of this proposal was carried out. As an outcome of the screening, the Trust considers that there will be sufficient mitigation to alleviate potential adverse impact as there are exemptions in place. A copy of the equality screening template can be found on our website www.northerntrust.hscni.net. The screening outcome was consulted on at the same time as the Trust consulted on its proposal.

What we heard during consultation

Below is a summary of the feedback to the consultation process.

The nine respondents indicated they were opposed to the permanent increase in car parking charges at Antrim Area and Causeway Hospitals.

It was suggested that the initial public consultation on the Northern Trust Savings Plan in Sept/Oct 2017-which proposed the temporary increase in car parking charges was a 'flawed process' as the consultation period was shortened to 6 weeks and there was 'little or no serious consideration' given to the consultation feedback.

Trust response

The timeframe of the Trust's public consultation on its savings plan in 2017 was shortened as the Trust received a directive from the Department of Health (DoH) to consult for 6 weeks in order to satisfy a legislative obligation.

The Consultation Outcome Report, detailing the feedback received from the consultation on the Trust's savings plan was fully considered by Trust Board and discussed at a public Trust Board meeting on 13 October 2017.

The Trust is committed to ensuring that those patients who really need to access hospital by car are able to do so. Space on our acute hospital sites is constrained and charging patients and visitors to park can manage demand for space whilst ensuring that those who need to park are able to access services. With this in mind there are exemptions for certain categories of patient and carer, which have been determined by the DoH.

Running a car park is expensive and we are committed to ensuring that the maintenance of our car parks does not adversely impact on the provision of health and social care services. Where parking charges make a surplus, this is invested in frontline services.

The Trust aims to be as open as possible to stakeholders and the public and to involve patients and communities in decision-making about car parking charges. The Trust is establishing Locality Engagement Forums to ensure open and transparent decision making and effective involvement. For further information please contact the Personal and Public Involvement Co-ordinator PPI.Coordinator@northerntrust.hscni.net or telephone 028 2766 1453.

It was felt that the consultation document does not provide enough detail on the cost of providing and maintaining car parks. There was concern that increased charges are being used as a 'revenue raising mechanism' and are a 'tax on the sick'. One response asked the Trust to clarify if the temporary increase in parking charges had resulted in a profit.

It was queried why a permanent increase in parking is required following the release of additional funding. The 'continuing financial strain' on health and social care services was recognised but it was felt that other options should be 'explored'.

Trust response

The Trust is accountable to the public and must demonstrate that it is managing its services efficiently and fairly. The income raised from car parking charges will be a standard component of annual reporting. The Trust will publish the costs of car park management and the investments made using car parking income. We are committed to ongoing communication with local communities on car parking at our sites.

Additional funding was made available in 2017, resulting in the Trust not having to implement a number of the proposals in its savings plan. Trust Board did however approve the temporary increase in car parking charges. The cost of providing services continues to increase, with estimates suggesting 6% annually. It is important to note that unless there is a significant increase in the funding, at the current spending levels the Trust would continue to spend more than the funding allocated.

Consideration of options for breaking even is an ongoing process within the Trust. The proposal was made to increase car parking charges permanently given the ongoing financial climate as this will have no direct impact on front line services.

The view was expressed that hospital car parks should not have a parking charge as it is an 'unwarranted' cost and many patients or their drivers have to park urgently. The comparison was made to Laurel House on the Antrim Area Hospital site where there are no car parking charges.

One respondent described how the cost of parking was substantial both when they had to spend some time at the hospital with a relative who was 'dying' and as a result of attending the Antrim Assessment Unit on two occasions. It was also suggested that delays in discharge which can take 'several hours' and can result in substantial costs.

The exemptions were acknowledged but it was felt that further consideration should be given to those able to demonstrate 'genuine hardship' in payment and the exemptions should include the parents/carers of young adults with learning disabilities. It was also suggested that ward sisters and nursing staff are 'too

busy' to issue vouchers to patients who are exempt from parking charges and this is often not done.

It was felt that 'charging for a hospital car park is at the expense of those who are sick' and there was a call to 'abolish' the current charges. It was suggested that car parking charges will 'disproportionately impact' on the 'vulnerable' such as the Section 75 groups, carers, those with low-incomes and rural communities and that the 'Hospital Travel Costs Scheme' is not a suitable solution as applicants have to claim back the expense, which may not be possible or some.

Trust response

It is important to note that all Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland currently charge for car parking at their acute hospital sites. The consultation document detailed a number of exemptions to car park charges including cancer patients, subsequently there are no car parking charges at Laurel House on the Antrim site.

Ward sisters and nursing staff have discretion to issue vouchers for free parking in certain and agreed circumstances, including families and carers who are sitting with very ill patients.

The Trust is committed to ensuring the discharge process is as efficient as possible. If the process has been delayed and a relative has already travelled to collect the patient, a voucher for free parking can be provided.

The Trust will ensure that all nursing staff are fully aware of the exemptions from car parking charges and issue vouchers to patients and carers when appropriate.

There was concern that rural communities are particularly isolated with regard to access to services and public transport which results in patients and families from rural areas using private transport when attending both Antrim Area Hospital and Causeway Hospital. One respondent queried how the Trust had taken the Rural Needs Act into consideration to ensure the 'equal treatment of rural communities'.

Trust response

The Trust is committed to ensuring that its services are accessible to everyone living across the Trust area, including those who live in more rural areas. We are mindful that for patients and carers travelling from rural areas, car parking becomes increasingly important as the public transport infrastructure can be less convenient. We are also aware that for specialist treatments, some patients need to travel greater distances.

The Trust's Reform and Modernisation Programme (RAMP) is a programme of transformation that will enable the Trust to deliver a service model that has a strong emphasis on integrated, locality-based community services which will reduce the need to travel to an acute hospital site. For example Ballymena Health and Care Centre provides a range of services including GP surgeries, community nurses, mental health workers, health screening, vaccinations and family planning advice, as well as a range of outpatient clinics. In addition our partial bookings process enables many patients to choose and book their appointments at a time and location that is convenient to them.

The Trust is committed to engaging with rural communities through its Locality Engagement Forums.

It was suggested that an increase in car parking charges may result in inappropriate parking around the hospital grounds.

There was concern that wheelchair users are 'seriously disadvantaged' as they have to 'unload and load' when visiting the hospital either as a patient or a visitor and it takes on average 10 minutes at the beginning and end of each visit. The comment was made that only 5% of the total spaces are allocated for persons with a "blue parking permit" and the location of the 19 "free of charge" spaces was queried. It was suggested that BS 8300 recommends that there should be 1 space allocated for each disabled employee, 6 % reserved for those with the "blue permit" and a further 4% enlarged spaces with the proper cross hatching for wheelchair users.

One respondent stated that staff should not be required to pay for parking as this would amount to a 'cut in wages'.

One respondent felt that a full Equality Impact Assessment should be carried out on the proposal as it is 'not sufficient to rely on an EQIA' carried out in January 2009.

Trust response

It is important to emphasise that staff do not pay car parking charges at Causeway and Antrim Area Hospitals.

The Trust is mindful of the feedback in respect of disabled patients and carers. The Trust has located a number of disabled spaces at strategic locations to meet the needs of people with disabilities and on each site there are a number of drop-off/pickup locations.

Within Causeway and Antrim Area Hospitals the allocation of parking spaces for people with a disability are 33 (4.24%) and 92 (5.26%) respectively.

There are also a number of free parking spaces on each of the acute sites. The "free of charge" spaces referred to in the feedback are at the old emergency department at Antrim Area Hospital and at the emergency department at Causeway Hospital.

The Trust is committed to ongoing engagement with people with disabilities when planning new services including car parking. The Trust will continue to monitor and manage inappropriate parking on hospital grounds.

In keeping with the commitments in the Trust's Equality Scheme the Trust has carried out and consulted on an equality screening of its proposal. The Trust completed the Section 75 screening of its proposal in line with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland Section 75 Guidelines. Consultation on the screening outcome enabled consultees to identify any adverse impact in relation to the 9 equality categories and allows the Trust to make a judgement on the extent of the impact on Section 75 groups. While one respondent felt that a full Equality Impact Assessment was required the Trust does not believe that the feedback received identified an adverse impact in relation to the 9 equality categories. The Trust is committed to ongoing monitoring for any future adverse impact.

Next steps

Trust Board considered the feedback received during the consultation process on 30 August 2018 and after careful consideration the decision was made to permanently increase the car parking charges at Antrim Area Hospital and Causeway Hospital. All those who participated in the consultation will receive a copy of the consultation feedback report which includes a detailed response from the Trust.

Written responses were received from the following.

The Trust received 9 written responses in total. One response was anonymous.

David Barbour	
Elizabeth Black	
Jacqui Dixon	Antrim and Newtownabbey Council
Anne OKane	Garvagh Health Centre
Sean Searle	Sinn Fein
Alan Tweed	Patient
Lauren Walls	Parenting NI
Lesley Kerr	Mid and East Antrim Council
Anon	

We want to thank everyone who took the time to be part of this consultation.

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