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By email

Victoria Ward

London Ambulance Service NHS Trust

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30 January 2023

Re: Feedback on LAS Strategy from Healthwatch Haringey

Dear London Ambulance Service NHS Trust,

Below is a summary of themes and issues emerging from our engagement. Accordingly, Healthwatch Haringey would recommend the following key priorities for LAS over the period 2023 - 26.

Key priorities recommended by Healthwatch Haringey following engagement.

1. Invest in staff – addressing pay, training, equalities, recruitment, and retention.
2. Invest in equipment including ambulances, medical equipment, and IT equipment. Ensure it is well maintained and technologically advanced.
3. Ensure the patient records system is as joined up as possible with hospitals, GPs, mental health services.
4. Make sure patients are given access to their own records.
5. Ensure disabled people are accommodated and services are adjusted to meet their needs.

Engagement methods

We used a range of engagement methods to obtain feedback from the community.

Survey

- We received 30 responses to an online survey and one hard copy response.

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- Only three responders had never used a London ambulance. All the remaining responders had used an ambulance or were a parent / carer of someone who had used an ambulance.
- Five responders were from an ethnic minority background, three preferred not to say and the rest were White British.
- Only four people who completed the survey were under 45.

Workshop

We ran an online workshop with two participants.

Joint Partnership Board (JPB)

We spoke to the JPB. The JPB is a Board / group of Haringey residents who use adult social care services or care for someone using adult social care services. As such they are some of the most vulnerable residents in our borough. The JPB includes senior staff in Haringey social services and a representative from the Integrated Care Board. It hears the views of residents in the Reference Groups on key issues relating to service delivery, including gaps in services.

Reference Group

We organise and run nine adult social care service user and carer groups, called Reference Groups, which meet every two months, and their work is fed into a Joint Partnership Board (JPB). The Reference Groups are open to anyone who uses Haringey adult social care services or cares for someone who does.

We spoke to the Physical Disability Reference Group and gathered its feedback.

Experts by Experience

We spoke to the Experts by Experience Board (E by E). Board members are mental health service users or carers who have lived experience of accessing and using mental health services in our local area.

The following themes are derived from the survey and the online workshop and include main themes from the groups above.

What is London Ambulance Service getting right?

Three key themes emerged from the responses:

- The staff are LAS's greatest asset. Staff were seen as caring and compassionate and committed to their roles.
- Staff were felt to be highly trained.

- There was a strong sense that staff were doing their best under difficult circumstances – underfunding, understaffing and low wages were mentioned as constraints.
- Some patients and carers did experience quick response times.

“Please let LAS know how grateful we are. They have done a minimum of two full on resuscitations for us.” Online Workshop Participant (Parent)

How can the London Ambulance Service improve emergency care?

The most frequently used term in these responses was “quickly”. People felt that the biggest improvement that could be made was responding to emergencies more quickly. People identified a number of factors affecting response times:

- Not enough staff and ambulances
- Pay too low to attract and retain staff
- Not enough hospital beds
- Not enough social care leading to slow discharge from hospital

Improvements could also be made through obtaining better, more up to date equipment for the ambulances.

“Lobby for increased funding and staff salaries to improve so that there are enough staff to cope with the burn out that will no doubt occur considering the toll an underfunded service will have on its workers.” Survey Respondent

How can the London Ambulance Service improve urgent care?

There was no overarching theme to the responses on urgent care although it emerged that the people’s use of 111 instead of 999 was experienced in various ways.

- Some people felt 111 was helpful for getting dentist and GP appointments
- 111 can be improved by better triage, providing doctors for outreach visits, transferring 999 calls to 111, having more skilled and trained operators.

“When I have needed urgent care for my daughter who broke her arm and dislocated her arm badly, the ambulance couldn’t come for hours as it wasn’t priority but we weren’t given advice on what to do instead. I just took her to A&E myself but it was v difficult to keep her arm still etc” Survey Respondent (Carer)

How should the London Ambulance Service work better with other parts of the healthcare system to improve care?

- It was felt that paramedics should have access to the patient records to enable them to look for particular issues where patients have long term health conditions. This would help patients and carers as they find they often have to repeat information.
- It would be useful to know if ambulance reports go to the GP
- LAS should be clear if there is a central record of a patient's medical history to which they have access.
- The right kind of technology could smooth the handover process from ambulance to hospital. Instead of using handwritten forms, paramedics could use an online standard electronic form which could be linked to the patient's hospital records.
- It was recognised that hospitals should receive patients much more quickly, and this was out of the control of ambulance staff.
- Patients' problems accessing a GP were thought to be contributing to the workload of ambulance staff.
- There should be clear guidelines on what is an emergency.

"Sometimes the paramedics give the patient the paperwork, a report or the ECG tracking, or a glucose test following a seizure. But sometimes they do not receive these records. Because the patient sees the paramedics regularly, it would be useful to receive the final paperwork in all events. The GP might want this information." Online Workshop Participant (Parent)

What more can the London Ambulance Service do to contribute in a positive way to life in London?

- Good staff training including anti-racism training was mentioned as an important way to contribute positively to life in London,
- Staff pay and conditions were considered important to enable recruitment and retention. Management should listen to front line staff and offer attractive shift patterns and career progression.
- People thought LAS could expand education within schools and the wider community through events and courses to raise awareness of the role of LAS and to improve the population's understanding of first aid.
- Resuscitation training is currently done by organisations like St John's Ambulance. Could the LAS do more of this?
- Wheelchair users should be able to take their wheelchair with them into the ambulance to improve the independence of disabled people.
- The LAS needs to fight harder to make sure they are not restricted by Low Traffic Neighbourhoods. The Enfield Independent showed that 14 ambulances had been delayed.

"You could work more with local councils and media to explain these issues and get information out to the public about your service. Massively unclear to most people where the service now is apart from disaster stories." Survey Respondent

Further comments

The key themes emerging from our open call for comments were:

- There should be a strategy for staff retention which includes ensuring there is good employer support and programmes for improving staff wellbeing and paying at a decent salary.
- Staff should not have to go on strike to receive decent pay and conditions.
- All staff should have equal opportunities to progress in the service and feel valued.
- The LAS should advocate and lobby government for greater resources.
- Too many people are dying or getting sicker because they have to wait too long for an ambulance.
- There is an urgent need for increased transport and paramedics.
- The service is being undermined by political decisions, cuts and lack of investment.
- For improvements to happen there should be a valuing of the high skills of staff including acquired knowledge and experience.
- More ambulances are needed for London.

Specific themes from the groups we spoke to:

Experts by Experience Board (mental health group)

Comments focussed on the need for **specialist services and dedicated staff** to deal with **mental health crises**:

- Given the large and increasing number of calls to LAS to do with mental health issues, could the LAS have a separate / dedicated mental health crisis ambulance service? This would be specialist staff, who have particular expertise and training around mental health, and specialist vehicles - less clinical.
- If people call 999, and it's a mental health issue, could the call be put through to staff specialising in mental health and expert in dealing with mental health crises?
- We want a very different outcome from the LAS for mental health when compared to physical health. In an ideal world, we want to avoid being taken to A&E. We would like ambulances to take people to a specialist mental health crisis assessment centre or a service more appropriate than A&E.

Joint Partnership Board

The themes emerging from the Joint Partnership Board were about the **quality of the consultation** and the perceived **bullying culture in LAS**.

- The survey is very crude, and you can't really engage with it unless you have experienced the ambulance service. Ordinary people might not know what life is threatening or life changing, so this needs to be explained in the survey. It's not fair to ask people to decide that.
- There are some settings where there are people who are high risk e.g. residential settings or people who might use day centres - Some places where there is not necessarily a recognition of the higher risk. It's important to hear from these people.
- The LAS was well known until recently for high levels of bullying of staff and paramedics. A Board Member's partner got through to be accepted onto the paramedic training but didn't take up the offer as there was an expectation that staff would bully him about his autism. The LAS can't respond appropriately to disabled people, and particularly those with autism if they continue to bully disabled people in the organisation.

Physical Disability Reference Group

Themes emerging from the reference group included **waiting times, disability inclusion** and the better use of **medical records**:

- Ambulance response times were variable. People experiencing falls were having to wait too long
- People felt it would be helpful for paramedics to have full access to patient records.
- Waiting times for patient transport from the hospital to home could be too long.
- Members of the group wanted to be able to bring their wheelchair to hospital in the ambulance to enable independence.
- More information about the full range of services would be useful, including patient transport.

If you have any further queries or comments, please don't hesitate to contact Tanya Murat on tanya@healthwatchharingey.org.uk

Best wishes,

Dan Rogers, CEO Public Voice CIC

Tanya Murat, Engagement and Communications Officer, Healthwatch Haringey

Appendix

Healthwatch Haringey survey



Tell us what you think of the London Ambulance Service

Introduction

The London Ambulance Service NHS Trust (LAS) wants to hear from Haringey residents to help shape a new strategy for London for 2023-2028. This new strategy will describe the organisation's vision and goals for the next 5 years, including how they will improve urgent and emergency care and tackle health inequalities.

You can share your views by completing this survey.

You do not have to have used the London Ambulance Service to give us your views.

You can answer as many or as few questions as you want.

The London Ambulance Service are very keen to get feedback on five key questions, which are the ones in our survey. But they would also like to receive feedback on any issue people wish to raise, so we have included an extra question for this.

At the end there is a free text box so you can tell us anything you want in relation to the London Ambulance Service. So if there are particular experiences you want to share, or specific issues you want to raise, this will be the place to do it.

1. What is the London Ambulance Service getting right?

2. How can the London Ambulance Service improve emergency care?

Emergency care means a life-changing event. For example, a serious road traffic accident, a fall from a height, or a serious head injury. Emergency care is usually provided following a 999 call.

3. How can the London Ambulance Service improve urgent care?

Urgent care requires an assessment but is not a life-threatening situation. Urgent care services include a phone consultation through the 111 number. Patients could be booked in to see a doctor or sent to another healthcare provider, for example a dentist, a pharmacist, or mental health services.

4. How should the London Ambulance Service work better with other parts of the healthcare system to improve care?

A patient's journey can begin with the London Ambulance Service but will not end there. They need to understand where they can work best with other parts of the health and care system to make sure patients get the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

5. What more can the London Ambulance Service do to contribute in a positive way to life in London?

This could be through staff employment and training, buildings and vehicles, in the way they spend public money, or in other ways.

6. Please tell us anything more you would like about the London Ambulance Service.

If there are particular experiences you want to share, or specific issues you want to raise, or things you think the London Ambulance Service should be making a priority, please write them here.

7. Have you, or someone you care for, used the London Ambulance service?

(please tick the most recent time you, or someone you care for, has used the London Ambulance Service)

In the last year?

In the last 2 years?

Over 2 years ago?

Never

