



Kirsty Williams AM
National Assembly for Wales
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

24 March 2015

Dear Kirsty

I gave a commitment to write to you in respect of the information I provided in the Chamber about the use of taxis by the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust (WAST). This related to your question regarding the use of taxis to transport patients by the Welsh Ambulance Service Trust.

The context of my answer was, of course, the figures that had been quoted in the media following information released by WAST in response to a Freedom of Information (Fol) request for expenditure on taxis to transport patients.

The media coverage of the information released in response to the Fol request had intimated the expenditure related entirely to the cost of the alternative transport pilot scheme - which was incorrect. My response to you sought to clarify that the figures released by WAST in the Fol covered much more than just the alternative transport scheme (the initiative to allow low acuity patients to be transferred in a taxi rather than an emergency vehicle where it is deemed clinically safe to do so).

To be precise, the figures released by WAST included all taxi costs classified as Patient Care Services – for example, it also covered the cost of transporting patients by taxi to planned outpatient appointments, routine elective procedures, transfers home following discharge or attendance at dialysis clinics and, occasionally, to transfer WAST staff. WAST do also incur expenditure on taxis transferring specimens etc. but have now confirmed these costs were not included in the information released. WAST have apologised that this was not made clear in their Fol response.

It is important to recognise that taxis are only provided by WAST (other than part of the alternative transport scheme pilot) when their fleet of non-emergency ambulances or the Ambulance Car Service, which is supported by volunteers, is not available or suitable.

For the record, I think it is important I point out that only 0.7% of the £269,000 quoted in the Fol answer was spent on transferring 83 patients under the alternative transport pilot scheme between August and November 2014. WAST have, therefore, confirmed that the average cost of a taxi used as part of the scheme for the period covered by the FOI was around £22 i.e. around 12% of the approximate cost of £183 for transporting a patient by emergency ambulance to an Emergency Department. This means that the Trust saved an

estimated £13,000 as an alternative to an emergency journey in the four months referred to in the specific FoI response.

The development of the alternative transport scheme is widely supported by paramedics who see it as a prudent use of resources. Paramedics and emergency ambulances are highly skilled and expensive resources that must be used appropriately to ensure those who need them can access them in a timely manner. NHS Wales has to make sure that specialist emergency response vehicles and highly-trained paramedics are conserved where possible to respond to those who are in immediate danger of death.

For completeness, up to last week, the alternative transport scheme had directed 188 patients in total to use of taxi services and the scheme is being extended across Wales. These numbers remain small in the context of over 432,000 calls received in 2014. As you can see from the numbers they are not an automatic default and reflect professional judgement by paramedics, notably in more deprived communities. I would hope that the full evaluation of the scheme will provide assurance that the scheme is not being misused.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carwyn Jones', written in a cursive style.

CARWYN JONES