

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Watford Borough Council

Councillor Karen Collett .	Chair of the Task Group and Councillor for Woodside Ward
Councillor Ken Brodhurst .	Councillor for Callowland Ward
Councillor Kareen Hastrick .	Councillor for Meriden Ward
Councillor Peter Jeffree .	Councillor for Park Ward
Councillor Malcolm Meerabux	Councillor for Park Ward

External Support and Information

Watford General Hospital

Eric Fehily . . .	Associate Director of Infrastructure
Kyle McClelland . . .	Associate Director of Strategic Development

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Hamed Zarin	PALS Co-ordinator
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Officer Support

Watford Borough Council

Sandra Hancock	Committee and Scrutiny Officer
Rosy Wassell	Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer

RECOMMENDATIONS

Proposed Recommendations:

1. Information on concessions to be made clearer and available in an information booklet.
2. Parking charges to start at £2.50 for a two hour stay.
3. Stakeholders to be surveyed prior to increases in parking charges.
4. Vouchers to be offered in the event that visitors park for longer than their anticipated stay.
5. Pay on exit system to be introduced
6. Signage and information on the free '30 minute' bays to be improved.
7. Signage and information on parking areas for visitors to be improved.
8. Signs informing on slippery roads to be installed.
9. Signs to indicate distance to hospital reception to be installed.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 23 June 2011 Members discussed the formation of Task Groups.

Following a proposal by Councillor Karen Collett, it was decided that a Task Group would be established to review "Hospital parking and its high charges" and that the scope be presented at the following meeting.

The scope for the review was approved at the meeting on 26 July 2011.

It was anticipated that the review would establish:

- The basis for the current charges
- The range of parking options and charges for patients, members of patients' families and visitors.
- How parking costs compared with other Trusts locally
- Whether charges were 'reasonable'
- Whether any available options were known and understood by visitors.

At the close of the review, were it to be felt appropriate, recommendations to improve the parking and charging policy could then be forwarded to the Trust.

Prior to the meeting on 26 July 2011, five Councillors had expressed an interest in working on this review; it was agreed that these Councillors would form the membership of the Task Group.

The Task Group would comprise:

Councillor Karen Collett (Proposer) – Councillor for Woodside Ward
Councillor Ken Brodhurst – Councillor for Callowland Ward
Councillor Kareen Hastrick – Councillor for Meriden Ward
Councillor Peter Jeffree – Councillor for Park Ward
Councillor Malcolm Meerabux – Councillor for Park Ward

First Meeting - 31 August 2011

For information, the Task Group had received the Watford General Hospital Transport and Parking Strategy and the Department of Health's 'Best Practice for the Implementation of Car Parking Charges'. They had also received a list comparing parking charges for hospitals within a 30 mile radius.

It was agreed that the Task Group produce a list of questions for the Associate Director of Infrastructure at Watford Hospital who had advised that he would be willing to attend a meeting in order to answer the group's questions.

Second Meeting - 5 October 2011

Both the Associate Director of Infrastructure and Associate Director of Strategic Development had been able to attend this meeting. They had previously submitted answers to questions from the group and expanded on these during the meeting. The document from the Directors is included within the appendices.

Members agreed that the representative from the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) be contacted to discover whether any feedback had been received with regard to parking at the hospital.

Third Meeting - 2 November 2011

The Group had received a letter from the PALS representative which had advised feedback and enquiries on parking provisions and charges at the hospital.

Members discussed:

- parking areas for visitors and staff
- signage
- concessions and information available on the subject
- the starting cost for parking charges
- methods of paying for parking and
- consultation with stakeholders.

Members then compiled a list of Recommendations for consideration.

Fourth Meeting - 1 December 2011

Members had further discussions on the Recommendations decided at the previous meeting.

Members agreed that the Recommendations should form the basis of the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be presented at the February 2012 meeting.

Final Meeting - 4 January 2012

Members discussed the draft report and made their final amendments prior to it being presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Recommendation 1 ~ Information on concessions to be made clearer and available in an information booklet.

Members had discussed the issue of concessions and had concluded that information on concessions was not readily available for patients and visitors and that the details that were provided were difficult to understand.

The Hospital Directors had replied that the availability of concessions was advised on:

- each pay and display machine,
- the hospital's website,
- on display boards in each ward,
- adjacent to lifts,
- in posters situated in well used public areas and
- on the concession application form.

Members had agreed that at times of stress, patients and visitors would be unlikely to notice the signs.

With regard to Members' concern that the details on concessions were difficult to understand, the Directors advised that the categories had recently been simplified and consequently more user-friendly and that the website included a simple table including permit types. .

Members noted that the status of 'Active Carer', for whom concessions were available, would be determined by ward staff. It was assumed that visitors would ask whether they could have a concession under this category. Members considered, however, that it would not occur to most visitors that they would have such an entitlement.

Members suggested that an information booklet be provided offering all necessary information and that one such booklet be placed at each bedside and at a stand at the entrance to wards. Topics covered in the booklet could include a definition of who would be entitled to concessions in addition to the website table which explained permit types. Members asked that the term 'active carer' should be clarified in order to make the classification clear.

Members concluded that communication of information on concessions should be more pro-active and recommended that since staff in ward had little or no time to note which users might require this information, the information should be contained in a booklet available to all visitors.

Recommendation 2 ~ Parking charges to start at £2.50 for a two hour stay.

Members had considered the table of charges at other hospitals in the vicinity. They had noticed that charges at Watford General Hospital were the highest in the area at a starting payment of £4.00 for three hours; the daily rate was also considerably higher than at other hospital trusts. Members also compared charges for public car parks in Watford.

The Hospital Directors had advised that the charges reflected demand for parking in the area, the cost for providing parking facilities and the security and management's assessment of the average duration of visits to the site. It was noted that income was balanced against expenditure costs. He added that charges were consistent across the three sites at Hemel Hempstead, St. Albans and Watford.

With regard to the high cost of the first level of payment, the director advised that this cost had been chosen because most patients attended for a typical time span of over two hours. He added that a daily rate would tend to attract commuters and shoppers who would not be visiting the hospital.

Members considered that a parking charge starting at £4.00 for a three hour stay was too high. They decided that a two hour charge would be more reasonable and recommended £2.50 as a sensible fee.

Members also discussed the practice amongst car park users of passing on tickets which had time remaining on them.

Members determined that to start payment for a two hour time span would result in extra revenue for the car park as a lower charge for less time would be more acceptable for visitors. There would also be less time left on a ticket making it less likely that this would be passed on to other users.

Members agreed that they recommend that the parking charges start at £2.50 for two hours.

Recommendation 3 ~ Stakeholders to be surveyed prior to increases in parking charges.

At the meeting on 2 November 2011, Members noted that there had been no involvement in policy making and no survey on the raising of charges for parking.

The Task Group agreed that stakeholders should be consulted and that survey forms should be handed to patients whilst they waited for their appointments.

Recommendation 4 ~ Vouchers to be offered in the event that visitors park for longer than their anticipated stay.

Members discussed problems for visitors paying for parking at times of high emotion. The Task Group acknowledged that there would be situations when it was inevitable that visitors were obliged to stay later than they had intended frequently through circumstances beyond their control. Whilst a 'Pay on Exit' scheme would obviate there being any difficulty of exceeding time paid for, it was decided that, under the current system it should be possible to obtain a 'free' card which would enable parking for longer than had been anticipated.

In discussion, one Member advised that the voucher scheme would have inherent problems in that, whilst this was a good idea, it would be difficult to operate as claims would not always be justifiable. Members agreed that information on the voucher scheme should be included in the booklet as recommended in Recommendation 5 above and that vouchers should be offered at the discretion of nursing staff.

Members recommended that a voucher for unexpected car park use should be offered in order to alleviate patient and visitor stress.

Recommendation 5 ~ Pay on Exit system to be introduced

Members discussed the method of collecting parking charges and referred to the practice referred to in Recommendation 6 above whereby unexpired tickets were 'donated' to new arrivals.

A 'Pay on Exit' scheme would be a fairer method of payment and would result in a 100% collection rate. It was noted that in the event of an appointment or visit extending for longer than anticipated, the 'Pay on Exit' system would cause less worry to users concerned that their tickets had expired.

The Directors explained that a 'Pay on Exit' system would not be easy to install at Watford due to the location of the various car parks on the site.

In reply to the suggestion that a 'change station' be re-instated, the Directors advised that in the past the change station had been a regular target for vandalism and theft. The Directors added that a 'Pay by Phone' system had been installed.

The Chair commented that the overwhelming response from users had been that a 'Pay on Exit' system would be the best option for payment.

Members agreed that they would recommend that a 'Pay on Exit' system be installed.

Recommendation 6 ~ Signage and information on the free '30 minute' bays be improved.

During discussions on charges for parking, the Directors advised that '30 minute' parking bays were provided free of charge. They had advised that the Trust was attempting to improve the locations and signage of these bays.

Members agreed that signs to indicate where these bays were located were poorly situated and needed to be improved.

Recommendation 7 ~ Signage and information on parking areas for visitors could be improved.

Members discussed the parking areas for visitors and staff, several Members noting that it was unclear which parts of the car park were for staff and which for visitors.

Members agreed that signage was required to explain where visitors were allowed to park. Clear signs to indicate where the 63 'free' spaces for disabled users were located would also be wise.

Recommendation 8 ~ Signs informing on slippery roads to be installed.

Members noted the steep slope in the car park which could be hazardous in bad weather.

Members recommended that signs be installed to warn of slippery roads.

Recommendation 9 ~ Signs to indicate distance to hospital reception to be installed

Following the recommendation on signs to warn of hazardous conditions, Members considered that signs to indicate distance to the main hospital entrance would be wise.

Other matters of concern to the Group

- Parking Charges for Staff

Members discussed parking charges for staff working at the hospital which were relatively low. The Directors had explained charging policy for staff and had demonstrated how these fees were calculated. Directors had added that parking costs were calculated in order to balance expenditure against income.

Members agreed that revenue was required but questioned whether it was fair that the charge to the public was high compared to that of the staff and agreed that it would be wise to balance the relative costs of staff and visitors to the hospital in a fairer way. One Member advocated a 'progressive' charging system for staff in order to protect lower paid staff.

The Task Group noted that the Directors had advised that Hospital Management intended to review charges for staff.

Members wished to record their support for this review which would hopefully ensure overall balance in charges for all users. They also asked that the review considers ensuring that charges for staff should be progressive.

- Availability of Information

Members suggested that information and help should be available at the hospital reception desk.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND APPENDICES

Bibliography

The following two documents were found to be useful

1. Department of Health Income Generation Car Parking charges ~ Best Practice for Implementation:

http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_062854.pdf

2. West Herts Hospitals' Transport and Parking Strategy:

http://www.westhertshospitals.nhs.uk/about/documents/WHHT_Transport_parking_strategy_version1.pdf

Appendices:

- Appendix 1: Scrutiny Review final Scope
- Appendix 2: Site map of Watford Hospital
- Appendix 3: Other Hospital Car Parking Charges
- Appendix 4: 'Harlequin' car park charges
- Appendix 5: Town centre car park charges
- Appendix 6: Letter from Patient Advice Liaison Service
- Appendix 7: Minutes 31.08.2011
- Appendix 8: Minutes 05.10.2011
- Appendix 9: Minutes 02.11.2011
- Appendix 10: Minutes 01.12.2011
- Appendix 11: Minutes 04.01.2012