

East Midlands Ambulance Service Quality Account 2021/22

Comment from Nottingham City Council Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee

The Nottingham City Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee welcomed the opportunity to discuss its Quality Account 2021/22 with colleagues from East Midlands Ambulance Service Trust (EMAS) and is pleased to be able to comment on it.

As the Committee has not undertaken any scrutiny of EMAS during 2021/22, its comments are restricted to planned priorities for 2022/23.

The Committee welcomes the Trust's stated approach of using the information that it collects to inform commissioners of gaps, issues to consider in commissioning decisions and areas that would benefit from future investment. The Committee considers this to be particularly important in relation to mental health where an Emergency Department is clearly not the appropriate place for an individual in mental health crisis. The Committee continues to encourage commissioners to ensure that there are appropriate services in place to prevent a mental health crisis in the first place and ensure that there are more suitable alternatives to the Emergency Department for people who do reach a mental health crisis point, for example the newly established crisis sanctuaries in Nottingham City. The Committee is pleased that this is a priority for EMAS and welcomes initiatives such as the recently approved mental health strategy, recruitment of more mental health clinicians in control rooms and its mature approach to using money from the mental health investment fund to support improvement of services for people in mental health crisis across the system.

Historically, delays in hospital handovers have not been a significant issue at the acute hospital site in Nottingham City but the Committee understands that this is now starting to become an issue with knock-on impacts for EMAS and delays in response. While it is important that EMAS does all that it can to maximise efficient use of its own resources, the Committee agrees with statements in the Quality Account that delayed response is a system-wide issue that requires a system-wide response. It is positive that EMAS has reported to the Committee that there is now greater system engagement and ownership of these issues than in the past. The Committee supports EMAS' continued approach of engaging with partners across the health and social care system, and beyond to develop solutions to these challenges, and will play its part by raising these issues with health and social care partners when it engages with them on related matters.

The Committee notes the increase in Serious Incidents reported during 2021/22 compared with the previous year. While noting that the previous year was atypical, and that high levels of reporting of patient safety incidents can be reflective of a healthy and mature reporting culture, this significant rise, and the associated harm, is nevertheless concerning. That 58 of the 74 Serious Incidents relate to delayed response supports the appropriateness of EMAS' focus on addressing this issue. The Committee welcomes the Trust's stated approach of being committed to learning and improving and being open and transparent. The Quality Account includes a significant amount and detail of information in this regard, which is positive.

Finally, the Committee would like to thank all staff at the Trust who have worked on the frontline throughout an incredibly difficult year and welcomes the Trust's focus on staff wellbeing issues.

