



# Partnership Working

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Issue 3

## Introduction of new 'active area cover' arrangements

The Staff Council has today (17 July) formally accepted a policy that will see the introduction of new arrangements to help reduce the length of time patients wait for an ambulance response.

The modified policy was agreed earlier this week by the Operational Consultation Forum and only after an extensive period of consultation between management and staffside representatives. During the consultation period many changes were made to the initial proposals to ensure they addressed concerns raised by staffside and the unions on behalf of staff.

The active area cover policy is to be introduced under which staff on ambulances will be placed in demand hotspots where technology shows the next emergency calls are highly likely to come from. A location will be predicted through new technology that analyses our historical patient and call demand data, and staff will be expected to cover within a half-mile radius of that point.

This new arrangement will replace the existing standby agreement under which crews have been sent to fixed points away from ambulance stations during certain hours of the day.

It is aimed at improving patient care and clinical outcomes and is based on three key principles:

- Evidence of demand based on historical demand data
- Reasonableness of arrangements
- Staff health and safety

As well as helping to further reduce the length of time patients will wait for us to arrive, active area cover will also help to spread the emergency workload more evenly among staff, and allow for better management of rest breaks.

Other ambulance services already operate similar computer-based deployment systems, and so we will be implementing a well-established way of improving patient care.

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Under the agreement that has been reached, active area cover will run from 0800 hrs to 2200 hours, and when deployed by the Emergency Operations Centre, staff will be given discretion to decide where within a certain area they feel most comfortable to wait for a call; alternatively they can remain mobile if they wish.

During periods when active area cover is in operation, ambulance crew staff will be required to provide cover from points within their own complex catchment area, or within the neighbouring complex area only.

Outside of these times – between 2200 and 0800 hours – and where there are no other vehicles immediately available, crews may also be asked to provide cover from another local ambulance station or, if needed, a local hospital with an A&E department.

Separate arrangements will apply for both the start and end of shifts, with no staff to be tasked to active area cover in either the first or last 30 minutes of their shifts.

The date for the introduction of the new arrangements will be confirmed shortly, but full implementation will take place over a number of months and will be closely monitored by management and staffside to ensure that it is delivering the anticipated benefits.

The arrangements will be subject to joint review; and an initial review will be carried out within six months of the changes being implemented.

More information will be made available over the next few weeks following briefings with managers, staffside representatives and staff themselves.

**Caron Hitchen**  
Joint Chair

**Eddie Brand**  
Joint Chair