

Halton Health and Social Care Policy and Performance Board

Hospital shuttle bus

10/02/2026



Background

- Warrington and Halton Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (WHH) has run a shuttle bus service between its Halton and Warrington hospital sites since 2002.
- The service has been free to use for patients, hospital visitors and staff and has historically run seven days a week between the hours of 6.35am and 21:40pm.
- The Trust is not commissioned to provide the service and has fully covered the running costs, contracting with transport provider Anthony's Travel.
- Public transport options to travel between the two sites are limited.



Regional financial position

- The NHS across Cheshire and Merseyside is extremely challenged financially, with a number of organisations placed in formal undertakings by NHS England, reflective of the level of concern.
- Across the region, there was a planned deficit for 2025/26 of £178m.
- However, as at Month 7 (October 2025), the forecast year-end deficit ranged from a £243m deficit (best case forecast) to a £349m deficit (mid-case forecast)
- In May 2025, as part of NHS Cheshire and Merseyside's Financial Control Oversight Group, patient transport provision was highlighted for review to develop a consistent approach.
- Where NHS Trusts were offering a free transport service, they were requested to review the provision and where possible draw up plans to cease those services or to consider alternative arrangements that might be more cost effective.



WHH financial position

- Like many other NHS providers, WHH has a significant financial deficit, with a planned deficit for 2025/26 of £28.7m.
- This will be extremely challenging to achieve and requires the delivery of £34.6m savings this financial year.
- As at Month 9 (December 2025), the Trust is forecasting a deficit of £41.6m.
- It is expected that upcoming financial years will be equally challenging, as we work towards a three-year plan to become financially sustainable and achieve a breakeven position.
- Throughout this period, we are committed to prioritising the delivery of safe clinical services for our patients and communities.



Shuttle bus service review

- WHH's Executive Management Team (EMT) discussed the regional requirements in June 2025, and an internal review commenced to better understand the current provision and to inform decision-making.
- The review examined data detailing passenger numbers for each of the 22 service runs a day (11 round trips between the two sites).
- Recognising that any changes to the shuttle bus would be a difficult decision to take, an appropriate due diligence exercise was also undertaken to understand the impact.
- This included the completion of a full Equality and Health Inequalities Impact Assessment (EHIA) and a Quality Impact Assessment (QIA), which were reviewed by patient experience, HR and staff side colleagues.
- Findings were presented and discussed at length at EMT in October 2025 and were also discussed with trade union colleagues at the Trust's Joint Negotiating Consultative Committee (JNCC).



Utilisation data (1)

- A review of several months worth of utilisation data showed consistently that the shuttle bus was running with very low numbers in the evenings and at weekends (frequently with less than five passengers and at times with zero passengers).
- The below snapshot, taken from a week in October 2025, shows the significant variation in passengers at the weekend compared to weekdays:

	Mon 6 Oct 6:35 - 21:40	Tues 7 Oct 6:35 - 21:40	Weds 8 Oct 6:35 - 21:40	Thurs 9 Oct 6:35 - 21:40	Fri 10 Oct 6:35 - 21:40	Sat 11 Oct 6:35 - 21:40	Sun 12 Oct 6:35 - 21:40
Total no. of passengers (patients, visitors and staff)	192 (139 patients and visitors, 53 staff)	221 (157 patients and visitors, 64 staff)	198 (150 patients and visitors, 48 staff)	212 (164 patients and visitors, 48 staff)	190 (123 patients and visitors, 67 staff)	70 (56 patients and visitors, 14 staff)	52 (30 patients and visitors, 22 staff)

Utilisation data (2)

- Looking at the data for weekdays, there was found to be a consistent and significant reduction in the number of people using the service in the evenings.
- During the same week in October 2025, between the hours of 5.50pm and 9.40pm, on average only 19 people used the service each day:

	Mon 6 Oct 17:50 - 21:40	Tues 7 Oct 17:50 - 21:40	Weds 8 Oct 17:50 - 21:40	Thurs 9 Oct 17:50 - 21:40	Fri 10 Oct 17:50 - 21:40
Total no. of passengers (patients, visitors and staff)	19 (10 patients and visitors, 9 staff)	20 (10 patients and visitors, 10 staff)	17 (11 patients and visitors, 6 staff)	21 (10 patients and visitors, 11 staff)	18 (14 patients and visitors, 5 staff)

Revised service

- The Trust's EMT agreed in October 2025 to continue running the service with a reduced timetable from 1 December 2025, reflecting the significant variation in utilisation.
- This saw the number of service runs each weekday reduce from 22 (11 round trips) to 16 (8 round trips), and the service removed at weekends.
- It ensured that the service could continue running for the duration of the contract and represented better value for NHS money.
- A month's notice was given, informing shuttle bus users of the changes coming into effect. This was communicated via the Trust's website, internal communications and notices on the hospital bus stops.
- No formal public consultation was undertaken as this was not a change to frontline NHS services.
- We have received no complaints from patients or hospital visitors about the revised timetable, and the small number of staff impacted (less than 20 out of 5,500 staff) are being supported by their line managers and HR colleagues.
- The longer-term future of the hospital shuttle bus will be determined in the coming months as the current contract is due to expire in summer 2026.

Current timetable

- Weekday hospital shuttle bus timetable as of 1 December 2025:

Departs Halton Hospital, Nightingale Building	Departs Halton Hospital, Captain Sir Tom Moore Building (CSTM)	Departs Warrington Hospital (on-site bus stop)
6.35am (direct to Warrington)		7am (direct to CSTM)
8.10am	8.15am	8.40am
9.10am	9.15am	10.30am
11.15am	11.20am	12pm
12.55pm	1pm	1.45pm
2.20pm	2.25pm	3pm
3.30pm	3.35pm	4.10pm
4.35pm	4.40pm	5.10pm



In summary

- Changing the hospital shuttle bus timetable was not a decision that was taken lightly.
- The current financial landscape means that it is essential for the Trust to prioritise safe clinical care.
- The variation in usage of the shuttle bus in the evenings and weekends means the previous service was not delivering value for money.
- Due consideration was given to the impact of the changes on our communities, including those with protected characteristics.
- The main users of the shuttle bus are patients and hospital visitors, who used the service minimally in the evenings and weekends. This is reflective of all hospital outpatient appointments taking place during weekdays and WHH's flexible approach to visiting times (e.g. all carers have open visiting times).
- We will continue to monitor usage of the shuttle bus to inform longer-term provision.