

Do you find it difficult attending surgery appointments?

Responding to growing concerns about the difficulties some patients have in attending surgeries in Uckfield and the surrounding area, local Wealden district councillors have approached the Wealden Bus Alliance to look at the possibility of setting up a volunteer transport scheme to help patients.

“I have been approached on a number of occasions about the problems experienced by some residents who can’t get to the surgeries in and around Uckfield because they lack their own transport, and I know a number of my fellow councillors have as well,” said Councillor Claire Dowling, Cabinet member for Public Health and Community Safety on Wealden District Council.

“There are a few independent schemes already providing lifts to some surgeries but it appears the problem is widespread across the four surgeries in the area: Bird in Eye Surgery and Meads Medical Centres in Uckfield and the Medical Centres in Buxted and East Hoathly. I hope that by working together with the Wealden Bus Alliance, we can find a solution to help local people who have difficulty accessing healthcare in the area – a solution that works with those existing volunteer schemes to provide comprehensive coverage.”

The first step will be an Access to Healthcare survey of patients at the four Uckfield surgeries to find out how transport difficulties are affecting patients’ ability to attend appointments.

“Insufficient local bus services mean some patients have difficulty attending their local surgery in the Uckfield area, and are either dependent on relatives or friends or have to wait a long time to catch a return bus,” said Councillor Barry Marlowe, chairman of the Wealden Bus Alliance. “We will be working with the four local surgeries in the coming weeks to carry out the survey of patients.

“Wealden is one of the most rural districts in the south east of England. Despite a general appearance of prosperity, not everyone owns or has access to their own transport. This is particularly a problem for older people who may feel it is no longer safe to drive. We want to make sure their health care doesn't suffer at the expense of rural isolation.”

“As well as surveying residents in the Uckfield area, the Wealden Bus Alliance would like to hear from drivers who may be interested in volunteering to provide lifts to patients. More information is available on the Wealden Bus Alliance website, www.wealdenbus.org.uk.”

The Access to Healthcare survey will involve the following surgeries:

- Bird in Eye Surgery, Uckfield
- Meads Medical Centre, Uckfield
- Buxted Medical Centre
- East Hoathly Medical Centre.

Survey forms will be available at the surgeries, or will be available online on the Wealden Bus Alliance website, www.wealdenbus.org.uk. The survey will be attempting to identify what patients' needs are and how these could be met through a service provided by volunteer drivers.

The Access to Healthcare initiative is being funded through a grant from East Sussex County Council with help from Wealden District Council.

Similar schemes in other rural areas, use volunteer drivers to take patients to their surgery appointments. They are operated through a telephone/internet booking service which links a patient to a volunteer driver once a surgery booking has been confirmed. Volunteer drivers undergo a driving assessment and receive mileage payments.

Notes for editors

The Wealden Bus Alliance is a Community Interest Company. Its aims are:

- To promote the greater use of sustainable public transport, through the existing routes.

- Encourage the introduction of new routes and services, throughout the Wealden District and the surrounding area.

For further information:

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