

Press Reports – January 2011

1 January 2011 Last updated at 14:52

London Ambulance Service has 'busiest ever night'



The service was receiving 800 calls an hour at one point

London Ambulance Service (LAS) says New Year's Eve was the busiest night in its history.

Staff in the control room were taking an average of 11 emergency calls every minute between midnight and 0400 GMT.

They answered a total of 2,639 emergency calls - some 800 an hour at the peak.

An LAS spokesman said it had expected a high number of alcohol-related incidents and had to prioritise very ill patients.

On an average night the service takes 180 calls an hour.

Deputy director of operations Jason Killens, who led the service's response on New Year's Eve, said: "Demand in the early hours was extremely high.

"A lot of that extra demand was because of alcohol-related calls and inappropriate use of the service - people shouldn't be calling 999 simply because they're drunk.

"Start Quote

Everybody was up all night and a lot of people were worse for wear"

End Quote LAS spokesman

"We had to prioritise calls to make sure seriously ill patients got help - that meant more patients than normal with minor illnesses were given advice over the telephone."

The number of 999 calls exceeded the previous record, set on the eve of the year 2000.

Explaining the high number of callouts, an LAS spokesman said: "Everybody was up all night and a lot of people were worse for wear.

"A lot of calls were for someone who had drunk too much and passed out on the street.

"We have to judge every case on its own merit."

A temporary "alcohol recovery centre " was set up in the West End.

So-called "booze buses" then ferried drunken revellers to the centre where they were kept warm until sober enough to make their way home.

LAS is meeting later in the month to begin planning for New Year's Eve 2011.

There were 77 arrests during the night, mostly for public order offences.

Others were held for assault, drug offences and robberies.

There were a number of shootings and stabbings, though none were fatal.

News Shopper

Patient transport workers to take company to tribunal

12:20pm Wednesday 5th January 2011

JUST one month into their new jobs, unhappy former London Ambulance Service staff look set to take their new employer to an industrial tribunal.

Despite protests by the GMB union, South London Healthcare Trust (SLHT) signed a contract with private company Savoy Ventures Ltd to take over non-urgent patient transport from the London Ambulance Service (LAS) from December 1 last year.

At the time, the union warned Savoy Ventures was threatening to withdraw London weighting from the transferring LAS staff, had threatened not to recognise the union nor to abide by the TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings, Protection of Employment) regulations.

Now the GMB claims all its warnings have proved true.

Union organiser Rob Macey says the GMB will be filing tribunal claims against Savoy Ventures this month.

He says the former LAS workers have lost 15 per cent of their former pay as Savoy Ventures claims they are no longer entitled to London weighting because the company is based in Stone near Dartford.

The GMB also claims the non-urgent patient transport system is in disarray since it was privatised, with SLHT having to hire taxis and other transport to rescue stranded patients left without any transport by Savoy Ventures.

Mr Macey claimed the company's computer system was not able to adequately schedule the journeys.

But his claims were denied by SLHT which said it had received only seven complaints.

The aphasia unit at Queen Mary's Hospital, Sidcup, which caters for people with a limited ability to communicate due to brain damage, says its patients have suffered "appalling" service since Savoy Ventures took on the contract.

It says it is no longer able to plan therapy because staff have no idea when or if patients will arrive.

The unit, run by volunteers cites the case of a patient who was eating his breakfast at 7.30am when his transport turned up.

He was left behind and waited all day for it to return.

Another patient, due to be picked up at noon was collected at 3pm.

It also cites the case of a man with mobility problems and severe speech difficulties who was abandoned in a corridor in a closed part of the hospital and was only discovered by staff half-an-hour later.

The unit says some of Savoy Ventures' staff have had no training on dealing with vulnerable people and offer them no assistance.

It has told the authorities: "We are extremely concerned about the psychological effect on these vulnerable people."

A spokesman for SLHT said the service was what it would have expected during such a run of bad weather and denied it had been forced to bring in alternative transport for patients.

He added: "This is a large and complex contract and the teething problems have been minimal."

Savoy Ventures declined to comment.

'Forgotten' ambulance crews watched 7/7 on TV

(UKPA) – Dec 15, 2010

Ambulance crews "sat watching" the London 7/7 atrocity unfold on TV for more than an hour before they were dispatched to one of the bomb sites, an inquest has heard.

Frustrated medical staff at Camden Ambulance Station witnessed the worst single terrorist attack on British soil breaking on Sky News. But they were not deployed as they hoped and later asked: "Why were we forgotten?"

The inquests into the deaths of the 52 people killed by suicide bombers heard rescue workers arriving at King's Cross lacked medical equipment and were forced to create make-shift stretchers from clothing.

In dire circumstances, they battled to help the living who they lay among "mounds" of dead bodies.

Meanwhile, at least four crews could do no more than watch the disaster unfurl on television, the inquest heard.

A statement by London Ambulance Service paramedic Rachel Harris alluded to a lack of resources on site and questioned the initial failure to deploy some teams.

"We watched it on TV at Camden for over an hour," she said. "We cover King's Cross, West End and Paddington regularly. At least four Camden crews sat on station watching it on TV ... Why were we forgotten?" She was eventually dispatched to Tavistock Square.

Teenage suicide bomber Jermaine Lindsay killed himself and 26 others when he blew himself up on a Piccadilly Line train between King's Cross and Russell Square stations.

The bombing, at 8.50am on July 7 2005, was the deadliest of the four attacks on London's public transport network that day.

Copyright © 2011 The Press Association. All rights reserved.

