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**Media release**

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Wednesday 24 August, 2011

**GWAS TO EXPLORE PARTNER ORGANISATION FOR THE FUTURE**

Great Western Ambulance Service (GWAS) is exploring the possibility of partnering with another organisation as the best way of continuing to improve patient care for the future.

With the support of NHS South West and lead commissioner NHS Gloucestershire, the GWAS Trust Board has decided that it is not viable to continue to pursue an independent application to become an NHS Foundation Trust, and the right course of action is to seek to link with a partner organisation for the future.

Chief Executive, Martin Flaherty, explained:

“All NHS trusts are required to become NHS Foundation Trusts and are

 facing financial challenges, needing to become more efficient whilst at the same time improving patient care. At GWAS we are absolutely committed to clinical excellence and have decided that the best way to deliver on this commitment is to become part of a larger organisation where the benefits of combined resources will give us more capacity to improve and innovate at the pace our patients deserve.

“This is the beginning of a process and clearly we will need to follow the rules that govern co-operation and competition in the NHS in deciding the best way forward. But our preference is for a partnership with another ambulance trust.”

Mr Flaherty continued:

“I am confident that this decision is the right thing for our staff and our patients and offers the best future for GWAS. By finding a trust that shares our values and our strategic agenda we will ensure that patients can continue to rely on our services in the future. It will also allow us to develop those services more quickly than we can do on our own.

“I know that our staff will continue to provide the very best possible care for patients. We will keep them fully informed and involved in the process going forward.”

The work to establish a suitable partnership will be led by Peter Carr, the Chair of GWAS, supported by NHS Gloucestershire.

We will be working initially with NHS South West to determine the range of potential partners. Once we have identified a preferred partner we will work closely with NHS South of England (which will be our new SHA cluster) to complete the process by October 2012.

Chief Executive of NHS Gloucestershire (the lead commissioner for ambulance services in the area), Jan Stubbings, said:

“We fully support Great Western Ambulance Service’s decision to explore this option and ensure they have the strength, stability and resilience to succeed in the future. We believe that this can only benefit the organisation and there will be a continuing emphasis on making sure that as many resources as possible are freed up to support frontline ambulance services and that performance continues to improve for the benefit of patients.”

ENDS

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**Notes to editors**

1. Great Western Ambulance Service NHS Trust provides emergency and urgent care, and patient transport services across Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and the former Avon. The trust employs more than 1,680 staff across 33 operational sites – 30 ambulance stations and three emergency operations centres – and in its headquarters. Last year (2009-10), GWAS responded to more than 256,000 emergency calls. The trust covers an area of 3,000 square miles with a population of over 2.3 million people.