



Mr Steve Shrubb
Chief Executive
West London Mental Health NHS Trust
1 Armstrong Way
Southall
UB2 4SA

Date: 22/07/2014

Dear Mr Shrubb

BROADMOOR HOSPITAL SIRENS

I am writing to convey the concerns of Bracknell Forest Council's Overview and Scrutiny Commission regarding the West London Mental Health Trust's proposal to decommission and not replace some of the sirens in the vicinity of Broadmoor Hospital, and to ask you to reconsider the proposal.

John Hourihan, Director of Security at Broadmoor kindly attended the Commission's meeting on 10 July to explain the basis of the proposals, and to answer our questions. I am writing to you rather than John because our concerns go beyond the direct security arrangements at Broadmoor.

Before stating our concerns, I would say that we welcome the redevelopment of Broadmoor Hospital and we are reassured with the greatly improved security arrangements there. We also recognise that the sirens are well past their design life, with increasing unreliability, so they cannot be left as they are, and we suggest replacement is the way forward.

Viewed solely from a security and cost saving standpoint, we can see that the proposal to decommission the outlying sirens has some merit. However, we have serious concerns from the wider and very important viewpoint of community confidence in Broadmoor, and of local residents feeling safe. The importance of this is reflected in the published vision of the Borough's Community Safety Partnership, which includes, '*Everyone has the right to feel safe*' (<http://www.bracknellforestpartnership.org.uk/360>). We would point out that other members of the Community Safety Partnership who have signed up to that vision include: Thames Valley Police; local NHS representatives; Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue; and the Probation Service. This 'feel safe' commitment is also emphasised in one of this Council's top six priorities: '*Create a Borough where people are, and feel, safe.*'

One of our councillors at the meeting, who has been resident here for 50 years, said it was hard to describe the fear which spread across the borough when the earlier escapes happened. Members also commented that the sirens have been in place around Broadmoor for many years and in our view most residents derived comfort and reassurance from knowing that there is a network of sirens to alert everyone of an escape - definitely helping to make them feel safe. John Hourihan expressed confidence that an escape would not happen, but accepted that no-one could be 100% confident that an escape could not occur.

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We have some other concerns about the Trust's proposals and the handling of its consultation:

- If you take a universal and high profile means of reassurance away from the community they want to see that it is replaced by something equally good. If not, they will be fearful for their safety and wellbeing, however good the security is at Broadmoor.
- We are not convinced that the social media and other devices would remotely fill the gap left if the sirens were turned off. They might help, but they are not anywhere near as instant and universal as a siren.
- It would be very divisive to retain sirens in part of our borough but not all parts, neither does this recognise the speed of most forms of travel for an escapee. We fear that such an approach would lead to the residents of Winkfield, for example, feeling that they were not worth protecting as much as the residents of Sandhurst. Such callous inequality in treatment would be indefensible, in our opinion.
- We are particularly concerned for the safety of school children. We are not convinced of reliance on the cascading system. For example, the complication caused when some schools are closed has evidently not been thought through. Our Parent Governor representative has commented: *'I have been in touch with my school to ask about the cascade system in place if there was a break-out from Broadmoor. I have been told that yes there is a test call that comes through (but new staff don't always know what is going on) then the school phone the next school on the list. If the next school does not answer within a time frame then they would phone the next school on the list. My school is not aware how the mopping up process works for schools that do not answer. It was then explained to me that the school has its own lock down procedure which involves available teachers monitoring walkways etc, gates being locked and added security to monitor CCTV. We discussed that should the siren be decommissioned, they would then have to inform parents by text and or e-mail.'*
- Mr Hourihan appeared reassured that the parish councils consulted by the Trust had not objected to the proposals. We would observe that the Trust was bound to get a neutral or positive response from those parish councils of areas where sirens are to be replaced. The councils which would be most concerned are those which will no longer be able to hear a siren, like Binfield, whose Parish Council was not consulted. We understand that consultation has only taken place with Parish councils which have sirens located in their area, but not other Parishes where the sirens can be heard. This makes the consultation unbalanced and flawed, in our view.

We therefore think that this comes down to a matter of cost, versus the need to maintain a feeling of safety by the public and to avert the (admittedly very small) risk of a tragedy. We were told that it would cost some £384,000 to replace all 13 sirens, which is £201,000 more than the £183,000 the Trust already plans to spend in replacing the 6 sirens in the immediate vicinity of Broadmoor. Considering what is at stake here, we as the democratically elected representatives of over 110,000 local residents have no hesitation in saying that the £201,000 would be well spent. We also note that £201,000 is fairly insignificant in the wider context of the Trust spending £252 Million on redeveloping the Broadmoor hospital site.

In conclusion, I hope you accept that our role as democratically elected members is to know and represent the interests of residents of our Borough. We think we have been here long enough to have a pretty thorough understanding of their concerns and wishes. Whilst some residents are probably unconcerned about half the sirens being decommissioned, we believe that the majority would be very unhappy about that and would not feel safe. The cost of maintaining that feeling of safety and wellbeing by replacing all (instead of half) the sirens is negligible in the overall scheme of things.

We think our community generally sees Broadmoor as a safe and well run establishment, though this would have had a setback from the recent revelations about Saville. We would not want to see public confidence put further at risk for what would be seen to be the sole motivation to save a small amount

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of money. Consequently, we would urge the Trust to withdraw the proposal, and instead replace all the sirens with modern sirens.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Ian Leake
Chairman, Overview & Scrutiny Commission

PS On a related point, we were concerned at the Trust's handling of what turned out to be a false alarm during a thunderstorm, when the Bracknell siren was heard at around 4.30am on 18 July . That caused understandable concern over whether there had been an escape, yet it seems that the Trust did not issue a message until 8.54am, to the effect that it was a false alarm. To quote one of the Tweets from a local resident '*You need to be quicker and better at telling public it's false alarm, we need to know it's safe for kids to walk to school*'.

Copies to: Mr Hourihan; Chief Inspector Gilbert; Councillor McCracken, Executive Member for Public Protection; Chief Executive

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