

Councillor Ian Leake
Chairman
Overview and Scrutiny Commission
Bracknell Forest Council
Easthampstead House
Town Square
Bracknell, Berkshire
RG12 1AQ

Chief Executive's Office
Trust Headquarters
1 Armstrong Way
Southall
UB2 4SA

Tel: 020 8354 8067
Email: jacky.vincent@wlmht.nhs.uk

28 July 2014

Dear Mr Leake

Thank you for your letter regarding the decommissioning of some of the sirens at Broadmoor Hospital. I appreciate your taking the time to write to me and express your views about the proposals.

As you know, John Hourihan, Director of Security at Broadmoor Hospital, presented the proposals to the Bracknell Forest Council's Overview and Scrutiny Commission on 10 July as part of a wider public engagement exercise. John has given evidence to the council meetings of all the affected parish councils, not just those that are to retain their sirens. I understand that John was advised by Councillor Ian McCracken on 9 December 2013 that the most appropriate forum for public consultation was through the elected officials of the parish and town councils.

The public engagement that has taken place so far has provided rich feedback on how the general public feel about these proposals via their elected local representatives. The overwhelming message has been one of support. Only Surrey Heath Council had just one councillor that has shown concern – no other parish councils have written to express objection.

I am pleased to know that you support the redevelopment of Broadmoor Hospital and are reassured by the improvements to our security arrangements. It is equally true that the sirens, which are 60 years old, are no longer fit for purpose and are increasingly unreliable, witness the recent failure due to the thunderstorm which resulted in the alarm being raised and causing distress to local residents.

You will know from the discussions you had with John at the Commission that Broadmoor Hospital today is very different from 1952 when the first siren was installed. We have invested many £millions in our security to prevent an escape from happening.

The public information video on our trust website provides appropriate reassurance about why we intend to decommission a number of the sirens and just how secure Broadmoor is. See the link below

<http://www.wlmht.nhs.uk/bm/broadmoor-hospital/the-broadmoor-siren/>

Despite central government approval to redevelop Broadmoor Hospital, the financial constraints upon the trust are significant. I am sure you will appreciate that as a public sector healthcare provider we must spend taxpayers' money wisely and maximise the benefit to patients and those needing our care. The cost to replace all of the sirens is approximately £400k, the cost to retain sirens locally is approximately £183k. The trust which is responsible for Broadmoor Hospital also deals with much broader mental health issues. Were we to invest money unnecessarily in new sirens at Broadmoor Hospital, we would have less to spend on dementia care or local services for those experiencing mental illness in the community.

I am sure you will understand that the trust must make funding decisions objectively rather than allocate resources to retain outdated technology that no longer does the job for which it was intended.

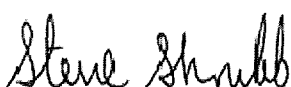
You raised concerns in your letter about the use of social media and other communications techniques. The emergency services all use these forms of communication to alert local residents to incidents and the media monitors twitter constantly for alerts of this kind.

We used twitter last week to tell the public the siren was a false alarm and apologise for any distress caused. Thames Valley Police retweeted our message which was very helpful. The media were instantly alerted to the situation and included our public messages in their news bulletins.

As far as school safety is concerned the cascading system is tested at least once each term and twice randomly through the year – in the event that a school could not inform another school on the cascade system, they would inform their local authority emergency planning team, who in turn would contact the police. Thames Valley Police, Hampshire Police and Surrey Police have agreed as a part of the cascade protocol to visit all schools that are not contacted.

I do hope you are reassured that the safety of the local communities is foremost in our minds and that we have considered the decommissioning of the sirens with the utmost caution and care.

Yours sincerely



Steve Shrubbs
Chief Executive