

Councillor Mel Shepherd MBE
Chairman of the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee
Nottinghamshire County Council
County Hall
West Bridgford,
Nottingham,
NG2 7QP

21st February 2012

Dear Councillor Shepherd,

I am looking forward to briefing the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee on the revised proposals to improve response times and patient care at EMAS. Before Christmas Chief Executive, Phil Milligan, briefed you on the 'Being the Best' proposals. I was pleased to subsequently see broad agreement from the committee on the hub-and-spoke model that remains the basis of the change programme.

To address the most important points you make in your letter of 12th December 2012 I can firstly confirm that EMAS is proposing to strengthen the provision of station hubs in the North of the County to cover the Bassetlaw and Newark areas. I'm also pleased to say that discussions are underway about co-siting with other emergency services in this, and other areas. Secondly, on the provision of maintenance resources we have listened to both your recommendations and the public's – you will find more detail on both these issues in the attached document, 'East Midlands Ambulance Service (EMAS) Stakeholder Workshops – Information Pack.' You will also see there's a proposal to increase the number of hubs across the East-Midlands to some 27 (the original suggestion was 13). Furthermore it's proposed there are 108 Community Ambulance Posts (the original suggestion was 118).

On the other issues you raise in your letter – such as rural vs. local coverage and night cover - I will be more than happy to cover them, in as much detail as required, at the meeting on 12th March. I hope you will appreciate that the proposals are subject to further refinements as we continue to listen to feedback from key stakeholders such as yourself and the committee before EMAS's board meeting on 25th March.

To make a broader point, I am confident that the revised proposals have greatly benefitted from your committee's input, as well as the representations from other stakeholders, staff, and the general public during the consultation. We tried to involve as many people as possible in helping to form the improvement plans. Our activities were wide-ranging and comprised: distribution of over 37,000 consultation documents, 5000 leaflets and posters; 4500 page views on dedicated web pages; Facebook and Twitter presence; 42 public meetings and; attendance at 76 existing stakeholder meetings/forums as well as 33 staff meetings. More than 3.5 million people across the region read, listened-to or watched media coverage about the consultation.

Information was also included in the monthly EMAS 'Aspect' stakeholder newsletter which is stored on the EMAS website and emailed to over 700 stakeholders including councillors, MPs and healthcare providers. 'Being the Best' proposals were included in the April, June, July, September, October, November and December 2012 issues. The attached document details further events we are holding before our board meeting on the 25th March.

I was sorry to hear that some councillors felt left out during the process – and perhaps didn't hear about it or were not invited to participate. Perhaps at the meeting we could discuss how the Committee and EMAS might form a closer working partnership from now on. As for myself, I am relatively new in post and keen to ensure a 'no-surprises' relationship going forward.

Can I thank you for highlighting the issue of 'fines' to the Secretary of State. EMAS is very grateful for the committee's support throughout this change programme during some particularly hostile media coverage as well as the heightened political atmosphere in the run-up to the County Council Elections this May. I know EMAS and the committee are determined to see through long-overdue improvements in performance. The recalibration of our resources through 'Being the Best' will help us do just that. For fines to be imposed, as a change programme is ongoing, is less than helpful – something EMAS is very keen to stress and will continue to do so while the prospect of being penalised in this way remains.

I'd like to raise a further, related, point with you if I may. There is some evidence to suggest that EMAS has been historically underfunded. The National Audit Office report of 10 June 2011, 'Transforming NHS Ambulance Services', shows that we receive less funding for our services than similar Trusts. Similarly, the latest NHS 'reference costs' (a comparative measure that indicates efficiency against a standardised rate of 100) suggests we are funded some £4m-£5m less than other like-for-like ambulance services (see <http://www.dh.gov.uk/health/2012/11/2011-12-reference-costs>). Of course all public sector organisations are under financial pressure at the moment. But the combination of fines and years of underfunding makes it extraordinarily difficult to bring about the improvements at EMAS that the people of Nottinghamshire require and deserve. Perhaps this is something we might also discuss at the forthcoming meeting.

In the meantime please do not hesitate to contact me if you, or any member of the committee, require any more information before the 12th March.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Alan Schofield', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Alan Schofield
Director, Corporate Affairs

Cc Phil Milligan