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Date: 28 May 2010

Dear Steve

Paediatric Audiology Services

I am writing to you to see if there is any manner in which the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee can contribute to finding a way to ensure paediatric hearing assessments will be able to continue in the Maidstone area until such time as a permanent, fit for purpose, facility is available to ensure there are no gaps in the service.

This matter was brought to my attention by fellow Committee Member Dan Daley and the two of us have had the chance to gain a fuller understanding of the issues through talking to Jane O'Rourke and Helen West in a meeting kindly and speedily arranged through ~~Matt Willis and Paul Wickenden~~. We would both like to extend our thanks to both Jane and Helen for their time and assistance. The people of Kent are fortunate to have such dedicated individuals working in the health service.

More broadly, we are pleased at the way this service has been improved and developed in recent years. It is a truism that health services need to be provided in facilities which are appropriate for the task at hand, and this is even more so the case of children's health services. The case for discontinuing paediatric hearing testing as it is currently undertaken at Preston Hall is unarguable, and the rationale for having satellite clinics in three community hospitals around the region is clear. However, we are very concerned at what the impact will be on children and their families following closure of the Preston Hall facility and the uncertain length of time before a new permanent home for the planned centre of excellence is found. Travelling to Hawkhurst, Sevenoaks or Gravesham is not a realistic option for many people in the greater Maidstone area, particularly if it involves travelling with children and babies. This can only have a negative impact on health inequalities.

Geoff Wild LL.B, Dip.LG, Solicitor
Director of Law & Governance

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DEPARTMENT



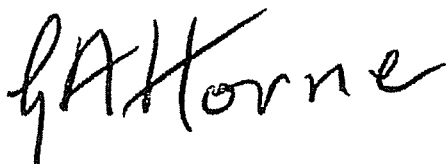
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Given how long the closure of Preston Hall has been anticipated, it would have been appreciated if the proposed closure of this service in Maidstone had been brought to the HOSC's attention at a much earlier date. This would have allowed more time to see if there is any way in which we could have supported your aim of finding a permanent home in the County Town. That said, given that the closure of the Preston Hall service has just been postponed, I am writing to enquire as to what work is being undertaken by NHS West Kent and West Kent Community Health, possibly in discussion with other organisations such as Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust, to find a temporary home or homes and to ask for further information as to what barriers need to be overcome before a permanent solution can be found. We would like to offer the weight of our support to achieving this.

My thought is to add this subject on to the Agenda for the HOSC meeting of 11 June. Due to the short notice of the Agenda being published next week, I am not asking for anything written, or for anyone to attend on this item, but I will provide a verbal update to the Committee and if I have received further communication from you prior to the meeting, I will also be able to report on this. If not, this may be something the Committee will wish to pick up more formally at a later meeting. We do already have diagnostic waiting times on the forward work programme for 23 July and this would fit in with this subject.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Godfrey Horne". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Godfrey Horne MBE
Chairman
Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee