



Trust Headquarters

Beechdale Road
Nottingham
NG8 3LL

Telephone: 0115 929 6151

Fax: 0115 919 3460

Website: www.emas.nhs.uk

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Cllr Jack Allen
Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Leicester City Council
New Walk Centre
Welford Place
Leicester
LE1 6ZG

Dear Councillor Allen

Air Ambulance at East Midlands Airport

I am writing to provide you with information on the air ambulance currently based at East Midlands Airport, as this has been the subject of considerable media coverage over recent weeks.

All air ambulances in England are provided by registered charities, and NHS ambulance services have a close working relationship with the charities. This working relationship extends to dispatching in response to appropriate 999 calls, supplying the paramedic crew for the aircraft, and supplying certain items of equipment.

The air ambulance at East Midlands Airport is provided by two charities: West Midlands Air Ambulance Appeal and the County Air Ambulance Trust. The helicopter covers Leicestershire and Rutland, Derbyshire, Staffordshire and parts of the West Midlands. (County Air Ambulance has two further helicopters at other locations in the West Midlands.)

Earlier this year West Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust reviewed its air ambulance operations and determined that it would no longer provide coverage to Leicestershire, Rutland and Derbyshire.

We were subsequently advised that fundraising in the West Midlands provides a considerable subsidy towards activity in Leicestershire, Rutland and Derbyshire and that the helicopter's annual running costs are £1.2m.

It was suggested to us that we establish a brand new charity to fundraise for a helicopter and to operate an air ambulance service from East Midlands Airport. Given the many uncertainties and risks inherent within that approach, we decided to see whether we could create an improved service at no risk by working with established air ambulance charities already experienced in operating in and around the East Midlands. West Midlands Ambulance Service advised us of its intention to relocate the helicopter currently based at East Midlands Airport to a location in Staffordshire.

Our approach quickly identified a range of potential benefits were we to use one established provider for Leicestershire and Rutland and another established provider for Derbyshire. These benefits included:

Chief Executive: Mr Paul Phillips **Chairman:** Mr Chris Faircliffe



- Faster response, with the aircraft of one charity able to become air-borne in 1 minute
- Extended flying hours (including the possibility of night-time flying in the longer term)
- Increased clinical skills on aircraft, achieved by having doctors as crew members
- A new approach to dispatching the helicopter which reduces aborted journeys from 40% to 10%
- One aircraft with winching facilities, especially useful in difficult terrain
- One aircraft with the capability to transport more than one patient at a time.

In addition, successful track records in fundraising were articulated to us in our discussions. All in all, our discussions have revealed many positive benefits.

We are now close to being advised of the decisions of the trustees of the two air ambulance charities with which we have been in negotiations. We have not made public the names of those charities as we felt it important that the charities' trustees be able to make their decision without the pressure of media attention.

I am hoping that we shall shortly be able to make a single announcement on the successful resolution to this matter, taking in both of the charities concerned plus EMAS, and covering Leicestershire, Rutland and Derbyshire.

This will deliver an improved level of service, with no gaps in service provision between the introduction of the new arrangements and the cessation of the current service provided from East Midlands Airport.

'Improvement with no reduction' was the key message we put out when approached by the media when this story broke last month. We have been consistent in holding to this message when approached subsequently by the media, and it continues to be our message. We regret that so many members of the public, including fundraising supporters of the air ambulance, have been caused concern. For our part, we have been reasonable and consistent throughout in responding to the media interest, making it clear that there would be no loss of service – I enclose for information a copy of our press release issued at the time (we have also had detailed individual discussions with local media organisations throughout this period reinforcing our message).

For completeness, I would like to add that residents of the East Midlands receive air ambulance services from the Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire air ambulance charity and the Warwickshire & Northamptonshire air ambulance charity in addition to the County air ambulance based at East Midlands Airport. Whilst each is deployed within its 'own' county, they do cross boundaries when required and they do provide a mutual back-up service when required; this will continue to be the case into the future.

I shall contact you again with the outcome of our negotiations. I am optimistic that this will be before of the end of this month.

Yours sincerely

PAUL PHILLIPS
Chief Executive