

MRI Unit
Radiology Department
Wexham Park Hospital
Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust
Wexham Street
Slough.
SL2 4HL
25th June 2024.

The Board Chairman and The Chief Executive Officer
Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust
Portsmouth Road
Frimley
Camberley
GU16 7UJ

Dear Bryan and Caroline,

MRI services at the Slough Community Diagnostic Centre (Slough CDC)

The MRI team based at Wexham/Heatherwood site is delighted with the Slough Community Diagnostic Centre (Slough CDC) which we noted is due to commence in the spring of 2025. As widely expected, it will help reduce the pressure we experience with the provision of MRI services at the Wexham site and indeed improve the provision of diagnostic services across the communities and towns that make up the Frimley North catchment area.

On realization that the trust is seriously considering subcontracting the provision of the MRI services at the Slough CDC to a profit oriented private enterprise, we wrote to our Radiology department management expressing our viewpoints and stating our opposition to the proposal. This prompted their meeting with us on 25/01/2024 where

they informed us that the trust was exploring different options highlighting that no decision had been made. In our response, we informed the managers that we will be writing to the top management of the trust to make our own case for the services to be retained inhouse which they did not object to. To help us with this, we started gathering some data regarding our services. We felt that since within the trust, the provisions of MRI services are done by both in-house and by a private enterprise, the best approach will be to present a comparison of the two models based on the services visa-a-vis the costs involved. The table below shows the information we obtained across the two models using the records in our systems and freedom of information requests.

S/N	Requests	Response	
		Wexham/Heatherwood site (Inhouse/NHS)	Frimley (Private)
1	Total number of MRI examinations performed in the last one year (January 2023 to December2023)	19,553	21,885
2	Number of inpatients MRI examinations done in the last one year (January 2023 to December 2023)	2,785	2,508
3	Number of Cardiac MRI scans performed at WX/HW in the last one year (January 2023 to December 2023)	308	None; services not offered at the site
4	Number of patients residing at Frimley catchment area scanned at WX/HW in the last one year (January 2023 to December 2023)	438	N/A
5	Number and age of MRI scanners	Three (3):10,3, and 2 years old	Three (3): approximately 10 years for two of the scanners and approximately 15 years for the third one
6	Operational hours	7.30 am to 7.30pm (12 hours)	7.00am to 9.00pm (14 hours)
7	The total number of private MRI examinations performed in	1596 (as per CC8, awaiting CC7 access)	11,006

	the last five years (April 2019 to March 2024)		
8	The total amount of money charged for performing the above private MRI examinations in the last five years (April 2019 to March 2024)	The Trust has looked at your request. and after review is unable to answer this part of the request as if this information is disclosed it could potentially have a negative impact on any future tenders or contract negotiations by the Trust so therefore, this part of the request is going to be exempted under section 43 commercial interest	The Trust has looked at your request. and after review is unable to answer this part of the request as if this information is disclosed it could potentially have a negative impact on any future tenders or contract negotiations by the Trust so therefore, this part of the request is going to be exempted under section 43 commercial interest
9	The total amount of money the trust spent for the provision of MRI services at the Frimley Park Hospital site in the last five years (April 2019 to March 2024)	N/A	£14,232k (£14.232 Million)
10	The total amount of money spent by the trust for the provision of MRI services (excluding equipment) at the Wexham and Heatherwood hospital sites in the last five years (April 2019 to March 2024)	£2,513k (£2.513 Million)	N/A
11	The total amount of money the trust spent for the provision MRI services at the Heatherwood and Wexham Park Hospital sites in the last five years (April 2019 to March 2024) Please	The Trust has looked at your request and after review is unable to answer this part of the request as if this information is disclosed it could potentially have a negative impact on any future tenders or contract negotiations by the Trust so	N/A

	include costs of MRI examinations, equipment (MRI scanners, monitors, injectors etc.), consumables and staffing.	therefore, this part of the request is going to be exempted under section 43 commercial interest	
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Based on the information on the table above, we can make the following observations:

- (a) The activities in terms of the number of MRI examinations performed in both sites are comparable. However, the number at Wexham/Heatherwood sites were slightly lower due to more inpatients as well as cardiac scans. These categories of scans are more challenging and as such takes more time thereby reducing the overall number of examinations that can be performed at a given period. Besides, the operational hours at the privately run Frimley site is two hours longer than the In-house run sites at Heatherwood and Wexham sites and if the latter is to extend its opening hours to 14, the number of MRI examinations will be far greater than what it is currently because the sites have newer and faster scanners. It is also worth mentioning here that with the training of more MRI radiographers in cardiac scans and with the availabilities of MR cardiac reporting radiologists and imaging cardiologists, the MRI cardiac sessions at the Wexham and Heatherwood sites have more than tripled recently and the number presented above will be more than tripled by next year. The provision of MRI cardiac scans by the hardworking and highly experience MRI team at the Wexham and Heatherwood sites has immensely helped to save the trust a lot of money that was hitherto outsourced and more importantly saved our patients the stress and inconvenience of having to travel outside the trust for such very important diagnostic examinations.
- (b) In the last one year, we scanned a total of 438 of our patients residing within the Frimley South catchment area and this number continues to increase. The main reason for this is that the patients themselves are choosing to have their scans at our sites which is a great testament to the high quality of services we offer.
- (c) One of the main reasons normally put forward for subcontracting MRI services to the private sector is access to capital to be able to continually upgrade and acquire new scanners for better image quality with reduced scanning times. Apparently, this is not the case for our trust because the scanners used by the private company providing the MRI services for the trust at the Frimley site are in the range of 10 to 15 years. The scanners used for the in-house (NHS) services at the Wexham/Heatherwood sites are within the range of 2 to 3 years with only

one at ten years. All the scanners including the ten years old one incorporate new artificial intelligence reconstruction systems that enable high image quality with substantially reduced scan times.

- (d) It is not surprising that the number of private MRI examinations performed at the privately run site is substantially higher than that of the in-house site with vast portion of the revenue going to the private enterprise. We discovered that only about 10% of such revenue is paid back to the trust and when compared to the whole revenue from the in-house that is wholly retained within the trust, it seems there is no overall financial benefit the trust gets from a private company that operates within its premises undertaking these high number of MRI examinations and making huge revenue. This arrangement is certainly not for the benefit of our taxpayers' funded trust but rather filling the pocket of the private company.
- (e) In the last five years (April 2019 to March 2024), the trust paid the private company at the Frimley site £14.232 Million for the provision of MRI services while the trust spent £2.513 Million for the provision of similar services at the Wexham/Heatherwood sites though we suspected that not all the expenses were included. When we requested for the total amount of money the trust spent at the Wexham/Heatherwood sites to include MRI examinations, equipment (MRI scanners, monitors, injectors etc.), consumables and staffing, it was declined by the Freedom of Information Unit of the trust citing exemptions under section 43 commercial interest though we don't agree that our request is covered by the exemptions quoted. Nevertheless, we strongly believe that the total amount the trust spent in every aspect of providing MRI services at the Wexham and Heatherwood sites (in-house) in the last five years stated will not be anywhere near the amount the trust paid to a private company to provide similar services at our Frimley site and we wonder how this can be a better outcome for the taxpayer.

In one of the recent Radiology department staff meetings, we were informed that tenders have gone out for the provision of MRI services at the Slough CDC which makes us to believe that the trust is going ahead with the plan to subcontract the MRI services at the CDC to a private company. We are aware that the Slough CDC will involve a good number of diagnostic services that include MRI, CT, Ultrasound and X rays and wondering why MRI has been singled out to be subcontracted to the private enterprise while the rest of the services remain in-house.

The MRI team at the Wexham/Heatherwood site is made up of very dedicated, hardworking, and highly skilled staff working for the Frimley Health and provide MRI services to the Slough community and surrounding towns; the same communities the

Slough CDC project will serve. The services we provide are to ourselves, to our family members and relatives, to our friends, neighbors and to the wider communities where we live and thrive. We therefore have strong confidence that we will provide better and more efficient services that will be of greater benefit to the taxpayers much more than a private enterprise whose sole aim is to make profit.

It is pertinent to state here that over 50% of the MRI team also perform CT scans as we are trying to build a formidable cross sectional imaging team that will continue to provide round the clock highly efficient and effective cross sectional diagnostic imaging services across Frimley North sites. If the trust goes ahead with subcontracting the MRI services at the Slough CDC to a private company, one of the resultant effects is the creation of a two tier system within the team of colleagues at the Diagnostic Centre. The team working in CT are for NHS while that of MRI will be for private with each of the team operating under different management, different policies, different approach, different values, and different goal. This sort of arrangement can bring friction and an unhealthy working environment that will end in lack of motivation and poor productivity. This is the current situation at our Frimley Park Hospital site where the acrimony between the team working for the trust and that working for the private company is so intense that they don't communicate to each other, they don't even help each other to cannulate or transfer patients. We are sure the trust management will not want this sort of unfriendly working environment replicated in other sites of the trust as the trust encourages and promotes different teams working together for the good of our patients in line with one of our values-"working together".

You are aware that we do bring in these private companies to help reduce our waiting list. Over the past ten years, we have had to change these companies several times because the standard of services they provide does not match or even come close to the standard we offer in terms of quality of scans and most importantly care for our patients. We certainly do not want such private companies taking over the provision of part of our services. We have hoped and eagerly looked forward to the commencement of the Slough CDC so we will not have any need for these private companies. It was very depressing and demoralising for us to note that the trust is planning to engage the services of such private companies in the Slough CDC project.

Another negative impact we felt subcontracting MRI services at the Slough CDC will have on our workforce is low recruitment and retention. As stated above, a good number of the MRI team rotate through CT and MRI, and others in the queue waiting to be trained in MRI and this arrangement has helped the department retain their experienced staff because most of us started with X ray, then to CT and finally trained in MRI. A radiographer is more likely to remain within the trust if he/she has the prospect of advancing in his/her career through training and rotation in specialist modalities like CT and MRI. If the trust goes ahead with the plan of subcontracting the MRI services at

the Slough CDC to a private company, it means that the cross sectional imaging team (Radiographers) at the Wexham/Heatherwood sites will have a total of six CT scanners and three MRI scanners to rotate through to which means that a good number of colleagues will never be trained in MRI and even those that currently rotate through to MRI will have the frequency of rotation drastically reduced. This will result in affected colleagues considering leaving the trust and going to places where they will have the opportunity of training and/or getting more exposures in MRI.

We are therefore requesting the management to reconsider their plan and bring the provision of MRI services at the Slough CDC in-house just like other diagnostic modalities in the project seriously and objectively. The evidence highlighted above strongly suggest that provision of the MRI services by the staff employed by the trust will deliver a more efficient and effective services that will yield better outcome for our patients and better value for money for the taxpayer. Colleagues that are proposing and supporting subcontracting part of our services to a profit driven private enterprises with no obvious benefit to the trust (as far as we know) makes us wonder if these colleagues have any personal interest in these private companies thus raising questions of potential conflict of interest. Conversely, advocating for a private company to offer MRI services for the trust especially among colleagues from the Frimley South sites could be from the model they are used to and are reluctant to change. Historically, private companies have been providing the MRI services for the trust at the Frimley Park Hospital and most colleagues become so used to the model but that doesn't mean it is the best. Almost all if not all the referral, high performing and highly reputable trust throughout the country have their MRI services provided in-house and our trust is most likely an outlier regarding this.

We want to assure you that the MRI team based at the Wexham/Heatherwood sites is very much committed to working with both the departmental and wider trust management to ensure the realisation of the trust's ambition with respect to the provision of diagnostic services. This we believe will be easier if we are given the opportunity to express our views and thoughts not only on the CDC project but on subsequent matters and projects that involve the diagnostic services which we provide on behalf of the trust.

Yours sincerely,

The MRI Team (Heatherwood/Wexham site)

CC:

Tim Ho-Medical Director, Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust

Nigel Foster-Slough CDC Project Lead, Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust

Sangeeta Saran-Director of Operations, Slough NHS Frimley ICB

Naomi Garnett-Frimley ICS Diagnostics Programme Director