

Thames hits the buffers

A TRAIN operator which has carried passengers throughout the Thames Valley since 1996 has been refused an extension of its contract.

The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) said this week that Thames Trains' franchise, set to expire on March 31, would not be renewed and from April 1 the service would be operated by the FirstGroup for two years.

The new franchise was awarded after a bidding process between the two groups earlier this year. Details of FirstGroup's proposals for the franchise are expected to be revealed in December by the SRA.

Thames Trains managing director Michael Hodson said the company was disappointed it had been unsuccessful in its bid to continue to run the franchise.

Nigel Hunt, chairman of the Marlow and Maidenhead Passengers' Association, said the majority of passengers did not care who operated their services, as long as they served their needs, ran punctually, met their connections on time and were clean and properly staffed.

He said the Thames Trains service had been 'mostly favourable' but he looked forward to continuing discussion with the First Group.

Social care boss looks to future

'Hands-on' management approach in meeting challenges

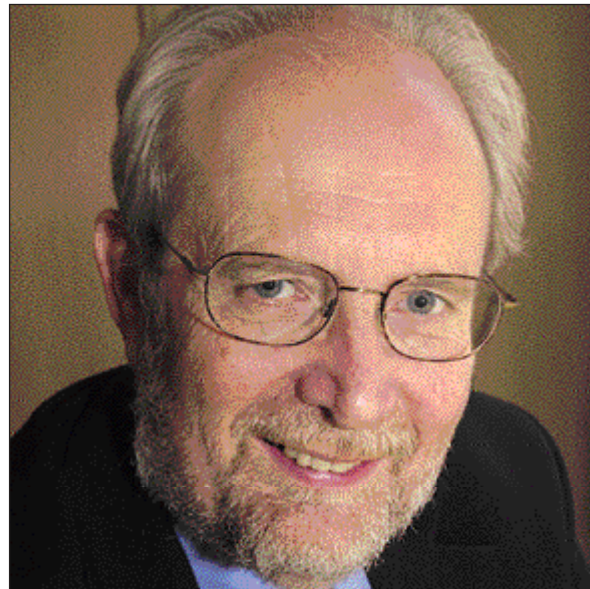
By Olly Hemans

AFTER 24 years with one of the best social services units in the country, Jim Gould is taking a big step in leaving his home county of Cornwall to take up the helm at the Royal Borough's department.

As deputy director in Cornwall Mr Gould, 55, was part of a team serving over half a million people spread over 1,370 square miles - including the Scilly Isles, compared with the Royal Borough's 76 square miles, which contain just 133,000 people.

His previous budget, at £145.4 million, is nearly £20 million more than the entire borough's annual spending and dwarfs his new total of £27.7 million for Windsor and Maidenhead's social services.

And as if that were not enough, Cornwall had a much-lauded, three-star performing social service, whereas only last year the borough's was condemned as poorly serving its people.



MEETING CHALLENGES: The Royal Borough's new social services chief Jim Gould. Ref:83574/5

Mr Gould said: "You have got these differences but people have the same needs wherever they live. They are in need of help and social care.

"We have an increasingly

ageing population, which is the same in Cornwall as it is here.

"There are more similarities than dissimilarities.

"I have quite a breadth of experience in social services across the board, in social care, mental health, children's services, elderly services, mostly in Cornwall but also in Devon and Derbyshire," he said.

"I'm very hands-on." He anticipates his time in Maidenhead will be spent finding ways to meet the challenges laid down by Government, particularly in the areas of children's and elderly services.

"I feel very strongly that we need to work very, very closely with our health partners, with carers and the voluntary sector, for the benefit of the people in the borough.

"We also need to use the advice we are getting from the Government action team and use it to move forward. They have identified areas of real strength and not just areas we need to improve on, and we want to build on those."

And after his time working in children's services he said recent reports of recovery in that area of the borough are encouraging.

"It's very important for staff on the front line to hear that. Obviously there are areas where progress needs to be made.

"My impression of staff so far is they have been very resilient through what has happened. We want to help them to move on and look forward. I want to concentrate on the future."

ollyh@maidenads.co.uk

More delays at gateway offices

THE COMPLETION of Maidenhead's prestigious new office development Braywick Gate has been delayed again.

It was hoped work on the £8million project in Braywick Road would be finished by September. Its original completion date was June 8, but it now will not be until the end of the year or the beginning of next, developers Castlemore Securities said.

Work on the outside of the development is finished and builders have now started structural and wiring work inside.

Mike Jones of Castlemore said: "The project time has slipped, we are only talking a few months. It is due to a natural delay in the construction process."

He added Castlemore was in discussions with possible tenants, but as yet nothing had been confirmed.



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Wamdsad's Ascot event nets £30,000



TAKE ME TO THE BALL: Guests enjoy the Wamdsad fundraiser at Ascot Racecourse.

Having a ball for charity

A MASSIVE £30,000 was raised at for disabled sports at Wamdsad's grand charity ball on Saturday.

Celebrities, including Sir Steve and Lady Ann Redgrave, Clare Balding and Tony Garrett joined more than 300 guests for the event at Ascot Racecourse. Guests enjoyed a three-course dinner, auction and danced till 2am.

Mike Davies, of Wamdsad's ball sub-committee, said: "Everyone enjoyed it and we had some great entertainment."

Liz Hornby, administrator at the Braywick club, added: "We've received dozens of emails congratulating us and asking for the date of next year's ball."

"We owe a huge vote of thanks to all those who came and the individuals and businesses that supported us."

Proceeds will be split between the British Paralympic Association and Wamdsad.

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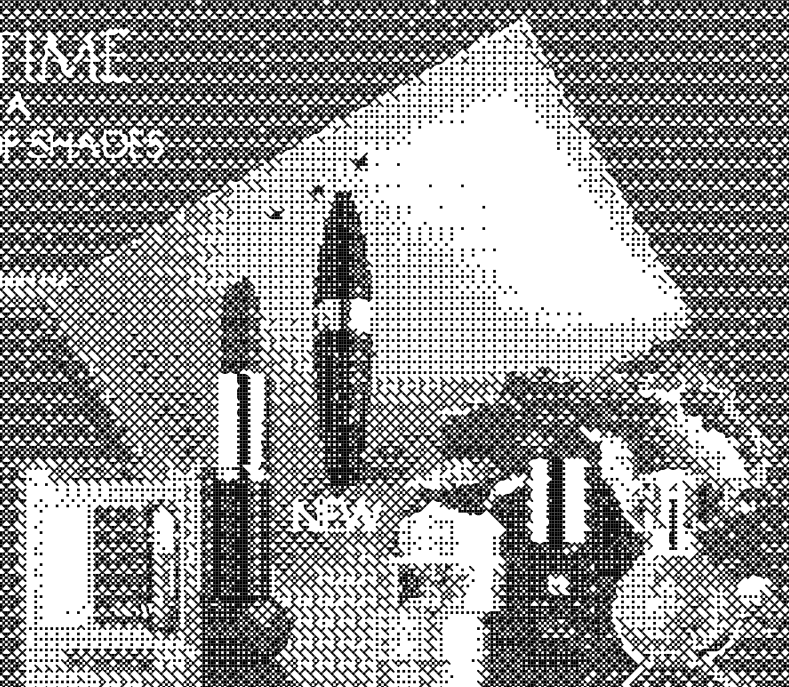
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