

Log on to pay tax and rates

A COUNCIL has set up a system allowing people to receive and pay their council tax and business rates bills online.

Fareham Borough Council has introduced its Citizen's Account free e-billing service.

Executive leader Councillor Seán Woodward said: 'We are delighted to be able to offer local businesses and residents the option of e-billing.'

'Not only does the Citizen's Account make your bills more accessible, it's also interactive, allowing you to access more information on discounts, exemptions or even payments you have made and the instalments that remain for the year.'

To ensure the service is secure and personal data protected, the Citizen's Account uses government-standard authentication when registering for the service, passwords and encrypted data transmission via a secure internet connection.

To register online for the account, visit www.fareham.gov.uk/ebilling or for more information call the taxation team on (01329) 824651.

PROBE: Bereaved relatives hit out at latest developments in hospital deaths saga



Gosport War Memorial Hospital has been at the centre of an inquiry following deaths of elderly patients

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Families' anger at inquiry twist

by Nicholas Brooks
Health reporter

RELATIVES of patients who died at Gosport War Memorial Hospital have been stunned to learn that the police officer who headed a controversial investigation into the deaths has left the force.

The inquiry led by Chief Superintendent John James, who now works for a private sector computer company, has been described as unsatisfactory by a complaints body.

The Independent Police Complaints Commission, which has apologised to families for delaying its final findings, says its inquiry will be completed but any recommendations cannot extend to officers who have left the force.

Complaints were first raised back in April 2002 that Mr James, then a detective superintendent, had ended his probe into the deaths without even interviewing the families of those involved.

Three and a half years later, families are still waiting for a final finding.

They have received a draft report which exonerated Mr James of any failure of duty but agreed with police bosses that James should receive 'operational advice' as punishment for a failure to communicate well with relatives.

But whatever the final verdict of the IPCC, he will face no sanction.

Meanwhile, the latest police probe into the deaths is al-

INVESTIGATION TIMELINE

- **October 1998:** First complaint to police over treatment of elderly patients
- **May 2001:** John James takes on investigation after previous police probes found no criminal wrongdoing
- **January 2002:** Mr James declares the investigation over after Crown Prosecution Service lawyers said there was insufficient evidence for a prosecution
- **April 2002:** Complaints to the Police Complaints Authority from families that Mr James's investigation had been almost non-existent
- **October 2002:** Latest police probe, Operation Rochester, launched, which is nearing its end now
- **March 2004:** Police Complaints Authority disbanded and replaced by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC)
- **June 2005:** Families are written to with draft IPCC judgment saying that Mr James should be given 'operational advice'
- **October 2005:** Final report still unpublished, and families apologised to



John James



Gill MacKenzie

most three years old, and files have been passed to the Crown Prosecution Service to decide whether cases will finally go to court.

Prosecutors must decide whether elderly patients were given excessive doses of pain-killing drugs.

At its peak, the investigation, codenamed Operation Rochester, examined 90 deaths but that number is now believed to be below 15.

Gill MacKenzie, from Eastbourne, whose family was the first to come forward following the death of her mother, Gladys Richards, in October 1998, said: 'I'm delighted Mr James has left the police force but incensed if he has left on an increased pension because he was promoted after the first complaints came in.'

A spokesman for the IPCC said the investigation was

originally begun by its predecessor, the Police Complaints Authority. 'The files were originally to the PCA who were dissatisfied with the original police inquiry,' said a spokesman.

He adds the IPCC had taken over the investigation, which it had still to complete, but confirmed: 'If any officer has left the police service they are beyond the disciplinary system.'

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