

Children's speech and language therapy

Suggested approach by Maureen Orr, Democratic Support and Scrutiny Team Manager

An update report from commissioners on access to and waiting times for children's integrated speech and language therapy (SLT) in central and west Norfolk.

1. Purpose of today's meeting

1.1 The focus areas for today's meeting are:-

- (a) To follow up on progress with the action plan from the 2018 independent review of the integrated service in central and west Norfolk.
- (b) To follow up on issues raised by parents regarding access to speech and language therapy, particularly for children with learning disabilities, Downs Syndrome or autism.

1.2 The Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and Norfolk County Council Children's Services have provided the progress report at **Appendix A** and representatives from the commissioners and the service provider, East Coast Community Healthcare, will attend to answer Members' questions.

1.3 A member of SENSational Families Group spoke to NHOSC when Children's SLT was on the agenda in July 2018. SENSational Families is a small Norfolk based charity offering advice and support to local families who have a child with a disability or special education need (SEN). The Group has provided an information paper for today's meeting, which is attached at **Appendix B** and representatives will attend.

Following a meeting between Members of NHOSC and the SENSational Families Group in Norwich on 20 September 2018 questions regarding provision of SLT for children with certain conditions and the situation regarding tribunals for access to SLT were directed to the commissioners for both SLT and autism in the local NHS and the County Council. The questions and answers were included in the NHOSC Briefing in December 2018 and are attached as Appendix 1 to Appendix B.

One additional question posed to the commissioners in September 2018 about provision of a single point of contact that parents could go to for all the services required by their child with special needs has been addressed in their paper for today's meeting (Appendix A).

- 1.4 Family Voice, a local voluntary organisation which aims to improve the lives of disabled and SEN children and their families, was involved with the commissioning of the central and west Norfolk integrated SLT service and in the 2018 independent review. Family Voice has provided information on families' experience of children's SLT to NHOSC on previous occasions and has been invited to attend today's meeting.

2. Background

- 2.1 The last report to NHOSC on 'Children's Speech and Language Therapy' was on 12 July 2018. The report and minutes of the meeting are available on the County Council website via the following link, [NHOSC 12 July 2018](#)

The committee originally added Children's SLT to its forward work programme in February 2017 following concerns about waiting times. The figures received by NHOSC in July 2018 showed that the service was improving in this respect, with 93% of children and young people receiving their first intervention within 18 weeks of referral in the year to March 2018. However, the commissioners acknowledged that the service was struggling to keep pace with demand and that they needed to very carefully consider the outcome of the independent review of the service, the level of resources that could be provided for SLT against other priorities and find new ways of working.

Family Voice and SENSational Families group representatives told the committee of their concerns about a lack of SLT resources and their lack of assurance that the service was fit for purpose.

- 2.2 During its research for the 'Access to health and social care services for Norfolk families with Autism', published in October 2018, Healthwatch Norfolk gathered information about families' experience of accessing SLT. For the NHOSC Briefing The Healthwatch Norfolk Project Manager summarised their observations as follows (as reported in the NHOSC Briefing, December 2018):-

Speech and language therapy (SALT) services were often alluded to as vital support that was lacking across Norfolk and possibly overstretched. Some parents highlighted that too frequently children were quickly discharged without the understanding of how to work with children with possible social communication difficulties. This often resulted in children being re-referred causing further delays in accessing help and support. Some families emphasised the lack of contact and involvement they had from SALT services, which was further complicated by the long waiting lists in the service.

Parents believed that these services needed to have a more timely impact on the child which just wasn't currently happening with the present provision across Norfolk. They felt more services were needed for SALT and some families highlighted having to pay for services privately. They also recalled the lack of ongoing consistency of staff working in SALT services which proved problematic for some families with autistic children.

Some felt there were too many people involved, which led to poor communication between professionals resulting in a lack of awareness of what each other had done.'

The Healthwatch report is available on its website:-

<https://www.healthwatchnorfolk.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/HWN-Final-Full-report-Autism.pdf>

- 2.2 In the October and December 2018 NHOSC Briefings, Members received updates on the outcome of the Better Communication CIC independent review of the integrated service and the action plan around the 10 recommendations arising from it. Copies of the Briefings are available from the Democratic Support and Scrutiny Team Manager maureen.orr@norfolk.gov.uk on request but the latest progress update is at Appendix A attached. The full report of the independent review report is available on the County Council website:- <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/children-and-families/send-local-offer/about-the-local-offer/norfolks-local-offer-in-development> (click on Speech and Language Service Review).
- 2.3 Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) services in Norfolk are commissioned under two separate contracts:-
- An integrated speech and language therapy service commissioned jointly by 4 of the 5 CCGs in Norfolk (all except for Great Yarmouth and Waveney Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)) and Norfolk County Council Children's Services. The commissioners have a Section 75 agreement pooled fund which covers the contract from 4 April 2016 to 31 May 2020. The service area for the Norfolk County Council educational element of the contract is Norfolk-wide, including Great Yarmouth, but the health element is for central and west Norfolk only.
(This service is the subject of today's meeting)
 - A speech and language therapy service commissioned by Great Yarmouth and Waveney CCG for its own area under a contract running from 2011 to 2019 and providing the health element of the service for Great Yarmouth and Waveney.
(Not the subject of today's meeting)

The contract holder in both cases is East Coast Community Healthcare (ECCH).

3. Suggested approach

- 3.1 After the commissioning representatives have presented their report, Members may wish to discuss the following areas:-
- (a) The independent review made recommendations about improving communication and engagement with children, young people and their families. The update at Appendix A shows actions in relation to communication to be 'complete' or 'on track'. To what extent has this action reassured service user families?

- (b) The service will receive a 30% (£510,093) uplift in funding effective from April 2019. Some of the extra funding will be invested in additional SLT workforce capacity. Based on recent recruitment experience, does ECCH expect to be able to source additional Speech and Language Therapists or are there other plans for increasing the overall capacity workforce?
- (c) Waiting times for SLT were reducing at the time of the last report to NHOSC in July 2018 but are gradually increasing again. The report at Appendix A describes the action taken to reverse this trend. When do ECCH and the commissioners expect the service will meet its agreed waiting time standard (i.e. 95% of children and young people receiving their first SLT intervention within 18 weeks of referral)?
- (d) The action plan at Appendix A confirms that the remodelling of the SLT complex and special school offer (within existing resources) is progressing as expected. How has the service changed so far?
- (e) How much extra resource is being made available for the service provided for schools and what difference will it make?
- (f) Appendix A says that the SLT drop-in sessions have had enough capacity to meet demand since April 2018 and that this has been achieved by restructuring the sessions. Are the families who use the sessions content with the new structure?

4. Action

- 4.1 Following the discussions with representatives at today's meeting, Members may wish to consider whether:-
 - (a) There is further information or progress updates that the committee wishes to receive at a future meeting.
 - (b) There are comments or recommendations that the committee wishes to make as a result of today's discussions.



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