

**Children's autism services (central & west Norfolk) – assessment and diagnosis**

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

An update from NHS commissioners and providers on action to reduce waiting times.

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 On 7 September 2017 Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (NHOSC) received a report on 'Children's autism and sensory processing assessment / sensory integration therapy' in central and west Norfolk and met with representatives from the provider, Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust, and the Clinical Commissioning Groups.
- 1.2 The local NHS is responsible for the assessment and diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorders (ASDs) and local authorities are the lead agencies for the provision of any support that comes after diagnosis.
- 1.3 One of NHOSC's main concerns was that waiting times for assessment and diagnosis of children's ASD's was too long. The commissioners acknowledged that there had been a significant increase in demand in the last five years and that not enough service capacity had been commissioned to keep up with demand. NHOSC was assured that there would be significant additional investment to address this situation. The details were still under discussion between the commissioners and the provider at the time of 7th September meeting. Potential for adding expertise for specialist sensory assessments to the assessment team was part of the discussion.
- 1.4 NHOSC asked the commissioners and provider attend a future meeting to report on progress with the commissioning of additional capacity and the situation in terms of reducing waiting times for assessment and diagnosis of children's ASD in central and west Norfolk.
- 1.5 The Great Yarmouth area was not included in the original report to NHOSC because the Great Yarmouth and Waveney Joint Health Scrutiny Committee (GY&W JHSC) was already looking at children's ASD in its area. This continues to be the case, with the GY&W JHSC expecting its next update on 2 February 2018.
- 1.6 Other on-going, wider work around children's autism includes:-

**Healthwatch Norfolk** – Autism is one of Healthwatch Norfolk's three key priorities this year which has led to a defined focus upon families and their access to services. Healthwatch Norfolk are looking to understand more about families experiences of health and social care services supporting their child's/children's needs. Healthwatch Norfolk are gathering experiences from parents/carers of children/young people (18 and under) with ASD (or possible ASD) when trying to access help and support from health and social care services. This also includes the diagnostic services and post diagnostic support across the county. Healthwatch Norfolk are enabling feedback from parents and carers in a variety of methods; by working in partnership with local organisations supporting families with children with ASD, attending parent support groups and information sessions, listening to parents stories on a 1 to 1 basis and using a survey to gather parents views anonymously across Norfolk.

**Norfolk Health and Wellbeing Board** – is due to receive a report on the All Age Autism Strategy for Norfolk at its meeting in July 2018.

**Children's Services Improvement Board** – received an update on work to address delays in ASD assessment & diagnosis on 18 December 2012. The Board asked for assurance that Looked After Children are being prioritised and that providers are tracking and reporting on the data.

## **2. Purpose of today's meeting**

- 2.1 Great Yarmouth and Waveney CCG is the lead commissioner of Child Health and Maternity across the whole of the Norfolk and Waveney area and has been asked to report back to NHOSC with:-
- the CCGs' progress in understanding the proportion of funding from each commissioner for children's autism services within the block contract with Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust (NCH&C)
  - progress on commissioning additional capacity for assessment & diagnosis, and the amount of additional funding, if possible.
  - details of what the additional funding is being used for
  - has it been possible to add more sensory expertise to the assessment team?
  - any improvements yet on waiting times / the pathway to diagnosis as a result of the extra investments
  - has there been success in shortening the Paediatrician pathway (i.e. with skilled triage to identify children, particularly over 5s, to refer on more quickly for ASD assessment) and standardising the info in the Paediatrician pathway so that it is more meaningful for those working in the ASD pathway?
  - how the oversight & monitoring of waiting times / the pathway has increased to manage the waiting list
  - has consideration been given to equality of access to assessment / diagnosis for children and young people without strong advocates?
  - the numbers of children currently on the waiting list for assessment / diagnosis and current waiting times

- the numbers of children currently waiting to see a Paediatrician (the 18 week referral pathway) and the current waiting times
- an update on current staffing and numbers and types of vacancies.

The CCG's report is attached at **Appendix A** and representatives will be in attendance to answer Members' questions.

- 2.2 Representatives of the NHS provider of services for children with autism in central and west Norfolk, Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust (NCH&C), have also been invited to attend to answer questions which may arise about current delivery of the commissioned services.

### **3. Suggested approach**

- 3.1 After the CCG representatives have presented their reports Members may wish to discuss the following areas:-

- (a) Are the CCG representatives satisfied that all 5 CCGs in Norfolk are now commissioning children's autism assessment and diagnosis services to an appropriate level?
- (b) The trajectory for improving waiting times for ASD assessment predicts that by 1 May 2018 no child will be waiting more than 52 weeks for assessment to start, assuming the predicted staffing is available. Is this an interim waiting time target? What is the ultimate target for waiting times for the ASD assessment service?
- (c) The additional post of 0.6 whole time equivalent (WTE) Nurse Specialist to provide Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) assessments was readvertised due to a lack of applicants from the original advertisement. Have there been sufficient applicants this time?
- (d) What is included in the Positive Behaviour Support Programme places offered to families whose child is waiting for an ASD assessment?

### **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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