

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 speech and language therapy (SLT) in Norfolk.

1. Background

- 1.1 Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (NHOSC) added 'Children's speech and language therapy' to its forward work programme in February 2017, following concerns raised by a Member about waiting times.
- 1.2 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.
 - 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.

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

- 1.3 On 7 September 2017 representatives from Norwich CCG (representing all the central & west CCGs), Great Yarmouth and Waveney CCG and East Coast Community Healthcare attended NHOSC to answer Members' questions and the Committee heard from Family Voice and several parents. The agenda papers and minutes of the meeting are available on the County Council website through the following link [NHOSC 7 Sept 2017](#).
- 1.4 NHOSC heard parents' concerns about the integrated service model in central and west Norfolk and the commissioners' assessment that performance was improving after a challenging start for the new service in April 2016. The key performance indicators for the integrated service showed improvements in waiting times for first

interventions and the speed with which SLT advice was provided for new Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). The Committee noted that there were, in effect, two waiting lists for service; one after initial referrals and one for reviews. It also heard that the integrated service commissioners were looking to improve engagement with families through a task and finish group and a Stakeholder Group would be established to bring together providers, commissioners and families.

- 1.5 NHOSC emphasised that it had no criticism of individual therapists, who were doing a fantastic job, but there were concerns about the length of time children were waiting, both after initial referral and again for review after a course of therapy. There were also concerns about whether the service model was adequate to meet children's needs.

At NHOSC on 7 December 2017 a Member raised a further issue about capacity at the SLT drop-in sessions at Angel Road Children's Centre, Norwich, following reports that families had been turned away.

- 1.6 The committee asked for an update on the progress of the SLT services across Norfolk, including the initiatives to establish a stakeholder group and task and finish group to resolve issues. This was initially scheduled for 5 April 2018 but on hearing that an independent review of the central and west Norfolk service was scheduled for May 2018 NHOSC agreed to postpone its scrutiny until the results of the review were available.

The review has been completed, with an executive summary having been presented to the commissioners and ECCH on 20 June 2018, but the process will finish with a full final report being presented to the commissioners at the end of July 2018.

2. Purpose of today's meeting

- 2.1 The commissioners of SLT services for Norfolk, including the central, west and Great Yarmouth areas, have been asked to report to today's meeting with the following information:-

- Outcome of the Better Communication CIC independent review of the central and west Norfolk SLT service.
- Progress on establishing a stakeholder group and a task & finish group to address issues of concern to parents and any changes to the service that have been made as a result.
- Current workload and the trend since the report to NHOSC in September 2017 including comparison between the commissioned capacity and actual numbers of referrals.
- Staffing – current number and types of vacancies.
- Waiting times – from referral to first intervention; and waiting times for those children who are referred back into the system for review after having been discharged.
- Key performance indicators (KPIs) - current performance against KPIs and trend in performance since last report to NHOSC.

- Complaints / user feedback – numbers of complaints; complaint themes; user satisfaction survey feedback since last report to NHOSC.
- Information about the take-up of drop in sessions at venues across the county and the numbers turned away from each session.

2.4 The CCGs and Norfolk County Council Children's Services have provided a report on the integrated SLT service for central and west Norfolk and the health SLT service for Great Yarmouth (attached at **Appendix A**) and representatives will attend to answer Members' questions.

2.5 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 SLT service and in the recent independent review. Family Voice also provided a report to NHOSC on 7 September 2017 which reflected the views of 70 respondents to an online questionnaire during the summer months in 2017.

Family Voice has provided further information for NHOSC, attached at **Appendix B** and a representative will speak to the committee.

2.6 Parent carers from SENSational Families, a small Norfolk based charity offering advice and support to local families who have a child with a disability or special education need (SEN), also attended NHOSC on 7 September 2017 and have been invited to share their views about the progress of the service. A representative will speak to the committee.

3. **Suggested approach**

3.1 After the CCGs' representatives have presented their report(s), Members may wish to discuss the following areas:-

- (a) What changes do the commissioners and provider expect to make to the services following the final report of the independent review?
- (b) How were families' / stakeholders' views taken into account during the review?
- (c) The review of the central and west Norfolk integrated service found that 'as a whole system, there is not sufficient resource to provide the desired level of provision to children and young people with speech, language and communication needs in Norfolk'. Given that this service is for children and early intervention may save greater costs in health and education interventions at a later stage, is there any prospect of releasing additional resources for the service?
- (d) The review found the key performance indicators for the central and west Norfolk integrated service need to be adjusted to measure outcomes as well as activity levels? How do the commissioners and ECCH plan to address this?

- (e) In response to the question 'Have we the right delivery model in place to meet the needs?' the central and west Norfolk service review noted that 'allocation of resources outside of this contract have led to a series of unintended consequences'. What are these allocations and is the situation resolvable?
- (f) The commissioners' report says that a stakeholder group for SLT will be set up in autumn 2018. Will there be representation on that group from Family Voice and / or other parent / carer groups?

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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