

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

HEALTH & WELLBEING BOARD

18 MARCH 2022

QUESTION No. 1 in accordance with Standing Order No 36

Tom Lake to ask the Chair of the Health & Wellbeing Board:

Children's Mental Health Services

Information from carers suggests that child mental health services are failing in a way that is different and more dangerous than those for adults.

Adult mental health services include the very extensive "Talking Therapies" services which range from advice lectures in person or online to intensive psychological treatment short of in-patient treatment. In this way a range of acuities from the mild to the highly acute are covered by a well organised and integrated service.

For children and adolescents the picture is more fragmented and evidence suggests that the standard is not uniformly high.

Because of the typical age of indication, ADHD and autistic spectrum conditions play a larger role for children. It is well known that waits for diagnosis can be over two years for these conditions.

Less acute difficulties are diagnosed and treated by in-school services, but evidence suggests that these do not reach the same standard as the adult services. In particular symptoms of anxiety and/or depression in children on the very long waiting lists for ADHD or autistic disorders can be dismissed as due to the very condition for which they have not yet been diagnosed, and they may not receive any support for these while they wait.

Even when acute anxiety is acknowledged, where children may be exhibiting suicidal actions, waits for treatment can be 12 months, leading to extensive suffering and loss of normal life opportunities. Children are missing the education to which they have a right.

My feeling is that primary mental health care services for children are more fragmented and of a lower standard than those available to adults on an easy access basis, such as Talking Therapies and those offered by practice-based practitioners. Services which are based in school are necessarily fragmented and cannot readily care for children who are not attending school.

It is appropriate to acknowledge the very good work done by charities such as No5 and Autism Berkshire in this area. But they cannot fully replace a well organised service.

Even if we acknowledge that the present situation is much heightened by the pandemic and its effects on children, should there not be an immediate investigation into this dangerous situation and an urgent review of the commissioning of mental health services for children and young people?

REPLY by the Vice-Chair of the Health & Wellbeing Board (Dr Andy Ciecierski) on behalf of the Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board (Councillor Hoskin):

A review of Children and Young People's mental health and emotional wellbeing services was undertaken in 2020/2021, sponsored by the Berkshire West Integrated Care Partnership's Children and Young People's Board. The aim of the review was to

- Understand the strengths and limitations of our current service offer across all partners
- Explore alternative arrangements and solutions implemented elsewhere in the UK that have evidence of improvements in key areas
- Suggest ways of improving our services and where we need to focus our efforts in the next phases of work
- Understanding what service users, their carers and families, as well as staff, think about the services and their experience of them, to capture opportunities for improvement.

The full Local Transformation Plan describes in detail the outcomes from the review as well as the refreshed priorities moving forwards. <https://www.berkshirewestccg.nhs.uk/about-us/how-we-work-with-others/the-local-transformation-plan/>.

Waiting times to access both assessment and treatment from specialist CAMH services remain higher than acceptable across the country and the situation in Berkshire is no different.

This has been recognised by NHS England, who have included a number of targets to improve access to NHS-funded mental health treatment for children and young people, with associated investment, in the NHS Long Term Plan.

One of the NHS Long Term Plan for Children and Young People Mental Health's ambition is to have 164,000 additional children and young people aged 0-25 accessing NHS funded services. In some cases funding is still only sufficient to improve access for a limited percentage; for example there are pilots around the country to try and reduce the waiting times for children and young people presenting to non-urgent, community-based mental health services; the new proposed standard is that children, young people and their families/carers should start to receive help within four weeks from request for service (referral). However Berkshire West is not covered by this pilot.

Berkshire West CCG (BW CCG) and Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust (BHFT) are working closely together alongside our local authority colleagues, schools and VCSE partners to achieve the ambition that more children and young people with emotional wellbeing and mental health needs can access evidence-based services in a timely manner and this is described in detail in the Local Transformation Plan.

The local approach to improving access to support is twofold.

- Increasing/improving the system partnership ability to identify emerging emotional wellbeing and mental health needs and provide support at an earlier level.
- Investment to expand the clinical workforce needed to deliver evidenced based interventions to meet the needs of Children and Young People.

There are a number of actions in place to support early intervention.

The CCG, alongside our LA colleagues, commission youth counselling across Berkshire West. In Reading this is from No5 Young People. Young people can access these services directly through self referral, via their school, GP or any other professional. The CCG and LAs also co-commission Kooth, a digital service which is fully accessible online and has a multi-function

platform that provides a full range of help from self-guided to professional counselling support available 24/7, 365 days a year, wherever the child or young person is located. It does not require a child to be in school. The CCG also funds early help activities by contributing to the Local Authorities budget for a number of initiatives aimed at supporting Children and Young People's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing. Given that children who are not in education are supported by the authority, we would expect some of the funding to be used to support children not in school.

The CCG also established three NHS-funded mental health support teams (MHST) in our three local authority settings which have built a school consultation model that is working well to enable schools to respond well first time as well as identify the children and young people that need MHST and wider provider support. Each MHST is set up in waves, centrally funded, and covers a cluster / patch, working to the outline of approximately 8,000 pupils per team. MHST are co-located or hosted within school clusters, depending on the infrastructure opportunities in each LA. Each MHST has three core functions-

- to deliver evidence-based interventions for mild-to-moderate mental health issues;
- support the senior mental health lead (programme being led by the DfE) in each school or college to introduce or develop their whole school or college approach;
- give timely advice to school and college staff and liaise with external specialist service to help children and young people to get the right support and stay in education.

The teams provide specialist evidence-based interventions that target vulnerable populations, such as Children in Care, and for the most frequently occurring referrals to CAMHS e.g. conduct disorder and anxiety and have to demonstrate routine outcome measures. There are two further teams (one in West Berkshire and one in Reading) which are currently being mobilised and which will be operational from September 2022 and will cover approximately 8000 pupils each. Further waves have not been confirmed.

The CCG commissions Autism Berkshire to provide support and advice to children and young people up aged 0-25 and their families who may have autism and/or ADHD as well as those who have a diagnosis. Autism Berkshire work in partnership with Parenting Special Children and provide one to one support, training, advice and activities for children young people and their families. The CCG has recently provided additional funding to Autism Berkshire to provide additional support to families whose needs are escalating, a food avoidance course and additional family mental health and wellbeing support. A link to their website is here

<https://www.autismberkshire.org.uk/berkshire-west-autism-adhd-support-service/>

The CCG have also re-issued 'The Little Blue Book of Sunshine', to promote advice and help available in our area to children and young people who might be experiencing low mood or mental health issues. The new version is digitally accessible as an e-book with click-able links and is downloadable from the usual app stores, Apple Books and Google Play Books. Printed versions were delivered to schools via the local authorities.

Finally there is increased collaboration between providers facilitated by the CCG to work to meet rising needs as they emerge, share intelligence and practise to manage quickly changing parameters on existing offers within national rules due to lockdowns

An example of this is the development of self-directed or online group parenting support for families of young people experiencing anxiety and depression.

To address waiting times for specialist CAMH services the CCG is developing an investment plan with BHFT for the next three years which will enable them to both expand the workforce in the

core specialist CAMH service and develop new services to address changing needs. The NHS investment includes the expansion of crisis services for children and young people, the development of a specialist service for children and young people with mental disorder and a learning disability and the opportunity to jointly fund with our LA partners a mental health service for children in care.

Alongside this, Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust are transforming their service offer, utilising learning from digital provision through the pandemic, developing a new digital offer and building on a quality improvement programme to redesign clinical care pathways.

It is anticipated that this approach will result in improved waiting times for Children and Young People, and their families in accessing support.

However, our ambition is being challenged by two factors.

The first is the unprecedented level of increase in referrals to children and young people's emotional wellbeing and specialist mental health services over the past 2 years. Referrals to CAMH services across the Southeast region have increased by 60% in the last 12 months and locally, Berkshire Healthcare CAMHS alone have seen an increase of 65%. The acuity, complexity and risk of referrals has also increased with 30% now urgent at the point of referral compared to 13% in the previous year, placing increasing demands on the CAMHS workforce.

The second challenge is that of workforce shortages. We are seeing higher turnover in the clinical workforce, with more staff leaving the clinical specialty altogether and the available staff pool diminishing.

The CCG and BHFT are reviewing the services commissioned in the coming year to understand what more can be done to improve efficiency, utilise digital technology, alternative workforce etc. to manage the growing demand and reduce waiting times.