

Thank you for your email communication outlining a number of questions posed in respect of children and young people with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) at a recent Healthwatch Advisory Board meeting.

Please note below a joint response from NHS Southend CCG and Southend Borough Council.

1. Has anything been done with CCG Southend regarding the opening the centre?

The Lighthouse Child Development Centre has been reopened. At the outset of the coronavirus pandemic and based on national guidance, many services were temporarily put on hold and staff were redeployed to front line hospital services.

2. There was a 18 month to 2 year wait for ASD diagnosis before covid, how has this impacting the wait list time now.

The coronavirus pandemic will impact the waiting times for ASD diagnosis, as above and in line with national guidance all non-urgent services were put on hold, this included all ASD diagnostic services. New and/or updated guidance is published regularly and services are slowly coming back on line, however strict adherence to PPE and other covid safety measures continue to make this a challenge for providers and families.

Diagnostic services for children up to the age of 5 are performed by the Lighthouse Centre, pre covid the waiting time was approximately 18 months-2 years. New multi-disciplinary pathway arrangements are now in place to expedite the assessment process which will both reduce the current under 5s waiting list and critically reduce the number of children who transfer to the over 5s waiting list.

Diagnostic services for children over 5 and up to 18 are commissioned from a variety of providers which has reduced waiting times successfully in the last 12 months. Pre-covid the average waiting time was approx. 6-9 months between being placed on the waiting list and assessment by external provider.

NHS Southend & Castlepoint & Rochford CCGs have approved the commissioning of a virtual diagnosis service, this new and exciting service will provide an opportunity for children and families to take part in an interactive diagnostic assessment in their own home. Whilst not suitable or appropriate for all families this new service will significantly reduce waiting times for assessment and enable those who would benefit from a face to face appointment access them within a quicker time frame

3. No information has been given to parents either waiting for an appointment or waiting to get put on the ASD pathway from the Lighthouse.

Commissioners are working with the Lighthouse Centre to develop a communication plan to ensure families receive regular communication.

4. Why are parents not being listened too regarding difficulties they are experiencing with kids suspected on the spectrum and Lighthouse paed's are only taking the word from schools and not taking into account these children mask. I have piles of dossiers from parents in Southend that have been ignored.

The Lighthouse Development Centre provides medical input and expertise for children and young people under their care. Whilst we cannot speak for the Lighthouse, clinical decisions are evidence based, it is therefore necessary to gather a range of information from available sources to inform the best course of action.

5. Why is there no specialist mental health provision in Southend for SEND children.

The EWMHs specialist mental health service is not commissioned to provide diagnostic or support services solely for neuro-developmental disorders i.e. ADHD or ASD. The service is however commissioned to support all children with a MH diagnosis, this includes tailored support and intervention for children and young people with SEND who have a co-morbid MH diagnosis.

The EWMHS service provides a specialist MH Learning Disability service, additional investment has enabled the team to expand recently ensuring appropriate coverage for the entire Essex footprint. Outside of the EWMHS service provision, a Community Learning Disability Service is commissioned providing health based and wider holistic support to children and families.

A new MH Counselling service has recently been commissioned in Southend, Castle Point & Rochford and Mid Essex to support children and young people experiencing anxiety and low self esteem. The service is provided by a trio of local MH charities offering a wide range of support, self referral from children and families is accepted together with professional referrals.

Following a successful bid via NHS England, funding has been secured to pilot Mental Health Support Teams (MHST) in 8 Southend schools. As part of this national project, the 8 schools will benefit from additional resource to support both teachers and pupils to identify emerging MH issues and manage them both in and outside of the school environment.

6. *In my opinion Emwhs are not fit for purpose. I also have many piles of dossiers from parents that have either not been able to access the service, have been told it's attachment, are only offered group therapy (6 sessions maximum) or emwhs safeguard to social services to get rid. (I also have evidence of this)*

If any young person or family feels the service is below the standard they expect, the formal complaints procedure should be followed.

7. *Why does the Southend LA have unlawful and discriminative criteria for the Children with disability team? Cutting out ASD and ADHD.*

The criteria are compliant with the Children Act (1989), the Chronically Sick and Disabled Act (1970) and the Equalities Act (2010). The legal definition of a child with a disability is:
'a child is disabled if he is blind, deaf or dumb, or suffers from a mental disorder of any kind or is substantially and permanently handicapped by illness, injury or congenital deformity or such other disability as may be prescribed'

The CWD eligibility criteria states that:

"Where a child has disabilities that appear to meet the threshold for intervention by CWD, the child and family will be offered an assessment under section 17 Children Act (1989) to determine whether the criteria for CWD are met and whether the services offered by CWD are appropriate for this child and family"

In respect of children with ASD:

"A diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), where the ASD affects the child's developmental progress significantly, i.e. where the child requires substantial or very substantial support and/or is educated at a specialist school."

In respect of ADHD:

"Although ADHD or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is, in and of itself, not classed as a disability, the same criteria apply as for ASD where the ADHD affects the child's developmental progress significantly, i.e. where the child requires substantial or very substantial support and/or is educated at a specialist school. A child must have measurable functional impairments."

Where a child does not meet the criteria for services from CWD, the parents will receive advice and information about what services may be more appropriate. For example: a child with ASD without a learning disability who also has diagnoses of mental health issues would be signposted to the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service (EWMHS) who provide advice and support to children, young people and families who are in need of support with their emotional wellbeing or mental health difficulties."

8. *Why are children with SEND who are house bound, suffering with mental health and school refuse are denied any connection.*

It is not clear from the question what these children are denied a connection to.

As noted above the EWMHS specialist mental health service is commissioned to support all children with a MH diagnosis, this includes children and young people with SEND who have a co-morbid MH diagnosis.

The Individual Tuition Service provides education for students of compulsory school age who are unable to attend school because of long-term illness. A copy of the medical tuition service policy can be located at <http://www.southendlearningnetwork.co.uk/Article/27463>. The service works with the pupil, parents, school and other professionals such as Educational Psychologists or the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service (EWMHS) to work towards reintegration into school.

The Southend SEND Support Advisory Team published a document 'Southend SEND: Shared Expectations' in March 2020, this is a guidance document for schools for statutory school aged pupils. Within the document it specifies both what the SEND Code of Practice or framework states must happen along with what is expected in Southend.

For pupils that have medical needs and attend alternative provision the guidance states schools are expected to undertake the following actions:-

- As soon as the school is aware that a pupil will be absent for more than 15 days a referral is made to the interim tuition outreach team and supporting evidence from the parent or carer is shared with consent, e.g. from NHS, EWMHS Consultant, Psychiatrist, Senior Clinical Manager or Southend's Teenage Pregnancy Advisor, GP.
- School provide programme of curriculum and relevant materials and liaise with the interim tutor to agree the individualised learning programme.
- School continue to maintain any plans, e.g. PEPs, ISPs or equivalent etc.
- School is active in the monitoring of progress, including the marking of homework, coursework etc.
- Child remains on the role of the school throughout the period of interim tuition.
- Medical Needs Policy is in place and ratified by the CCG Governing Body which makes reference to pupils that are hospitalised or placed in other forms of alternative provision due to medical needs.
- A reintegration plan is in place to support pupils with health needs to smoothly return to a mainstream education.
- School ensures that pupils, parents or carers and relevant health professional(s) contribute to producing a reintegration plan which includes key information, any actions, strategies or recommendations to support successful reintegration.
- Arrange suitable full time education (or as much as the child's health needs allow) as soon as it is clear that the child will be away from school for 15 school days or more."

9. Why is there no pathway's for personal health care budgets via Southend CCG.

NHS Southend CCG does not have a defined policy for the provision of Personal Health Budgets (PHBs) for children and young people. However, the CCG does follow National guidance which explicitly defines the 'right to have' a personal health budget currently applies both to adults and young adults who are eligible for NHS Continuing Healthcare, and children in receipt of continuing care.

Through the Children & Families Act 2014 CCGs and Local Authorities are required to **consider** the option of a personal budget for children and young people who are eligible for an education, health and care (EHC) plan.