**Championing Children and Young People’s Mental Health**

**June 2021**

The briefing gives an overview of the impact of the pandemic on children and young people’s mental health services and the approaches to improving the mental health of children and young people.

This briefing was produced for Members with support from the Healthy London Partnership.

**Background**

There have been long standing concerns about the availability of mental health support for children, young people and their families. Local authority members are likely to have had contact with families who have experienced difficulties in accessing children and young people’s mental health services or who have had long waiting periods.

Half of all adult mental health conditions have emerged by the age of 14 and 75% before the age of 24. The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health Prevalence Survey of children’s mental health conditions in 2017[[1]](#footnote-1) showed that the prevalence of all types of mental health issues were increasing.

The current pandemic has had a further impact on mental health and on the delivery of services to meet these needs. There is widespread concern about the impact of the pandemic, including school closures, on the mental health of children. In October 2020, a follow up to the 2017 Prevalence Survey was published by NHS Digital.[[2]](#footnote-2) This suggested a significant rise in the numbers of children and young people identified as having mental health issues. It is not possible to directly attribute all this rise to the pandemic, but it is likely that much of it is connected. In February 2021, the Office of the Children’s Commissioner raised similar concerns.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Children and young people’s mental health services have continued to operate throughout the pandemic. The majority of services have moved to a digital delivery. The outcomes for digital delivery are still under analysis but there are indications that this is viewed very positively by many young people, though it is not appropriate for all.

**System improvement**

The NHS published two key policy documents setting out the framework for system improvement: Future in Mind[[4]](#footnote-4) in 2015 and the Five Year Forward View for Mental Health[[5]](#footnote-5) in 2016. These policy documents were underpinned by additional investment in children and young people’s mental health services. The documents emphasised the importance of partnership working and developing mentally healthy approaches to children (and adults) in order to prevent the development of more serious issues. Transforming Children and Young People’s Mental Health[[6]](#footnote-6) in 2018 made further commitments, including the establishment of Mental Health Support Teams in education settings, which will be discussed at greater length below.

**NHS Long Term Plan**

The NHS Long Term Plan[[7]](#footnote-7) continued with the overall commitment to the improvement of mental health services. A wide range of commitments were made. Underpinning these was a commitment that there would be a relative increase in the spending on mental health services, and within that, there would be a relative increase in the proportion of spending on children’s mental health. The budget has been set for the five years up to 2023.

In November 2020, the Treasury allocated an additional £500 million for mental health services as part of the Spending Review.[[8]](#footnote-8) The allocation of this spending is currently under review.

The NHS White Paper[[9]](#endnote-1) sets out proposals for the further establishment of Integrated Care Systems, which are aimed at a greater integration of health and social care systems. Local authority involvement is seen as key. It will be important to ensure that the priority accorded to children and young people’s mental health is maintained through the ICS Governance arrangements.

**Local Authority Role in Child Mental Health Provision**

Local authorities are key partners in improvement of mental health services for children and their families.

Public health initiatives improve the general wellbeing of the population. This will include work on the public realm and the provision of universal services such as parks, leisure and cultural facilities and youth services.

Early intervention services, including early years, provide assistance to children and families in averting the development of more serious mental health difficulties. This includes services provided in education settings.

The interface between Children’s Social Care and Youth Offending Services with Children and Young People’s Mental Health Services is absolutely key in working with children with more traumatic experiences that may have affected their mental health.Good working relationships between key partners should be developed through bodies such as the Safeguarding Children’s Partnership.

**Increasing Access to Mental Health Support**

One of the key objectives of the NHS Long Term Plan has been to increase the numbers of children and young people who are offered a service. This includes services funded by the NHS, including many third sector providers. By 2023/24, at least an additional 345,000 children and young people aged 0-25 will be able to access support via NHS funded mental health services and school or college-based Mental Health Support Teams. The key measure for achieving this target is published through the Mental Health Services Data Set.[[10]](#footnote-9)

One of the main limiting factors in improving access is the availability of suitably trained and qualified staff. Training and Qualification take many years for the main professions. In London, the Healthy London Partnership Children and Young People’s Mental Health Workforce Strategy[[11]](#footnote-10) was developed in May 2019 to support this this aspect of the NHS Long Term Plan.

Digital support is a key factor in increasing access to mental health services and many areas have commissioned digital providers to offer this service. An example is Kooth which is commissioned in all but two of the boroughs across London. Good Thinking[[12]](#footnote-11) is London’s digital mental wellbeing service. It has now been extended for young people and provides a range of advice and resources for use, as well as for parents.

**Mental Health Support in Schools and other Education Settings**

The importance of good mental health support in schools and other education settings has been increasingly recognised. The NHS has been committed to the establishment of Mental Health Support Teams (MHST), which will deliver evidence based interventions. The NHS Long Term Plan committed to having established MHSTs serving 25% of the population by 2023. In London we are on target to achieve this aim.

However, MHSTs are not intended to be the only service operating within education settings. Many areas already have widespread services available to children, commissioned by local authorities, CCGs and schools themselves. The Local Transformation Plans should set out what these services are. Due to the complexity of commissioning arrangements, these services are not always consistent across different settings.

Other initiatives include the Schools Link programme[[13]](#footnote-12) and Mental Health First Aid Training, which is being provided both through the Department for Education (DfE) and additionally through the Thrive LDN Programme, supported by the Mayor of London and led by the London Health Board partners.[[14]](#footnote-13) Further information on services for schools are available through the Healthy London Partnership Mental Health in Schools Toolkit.[[15]](#footnote-14)

In response to the pandemic, the DfE commissioned an additional training programme available to schools and education settings, the Education Wellbeing Programme.[[16]](#footnote-15) Every local authority allocated a lead officer to assist in this programme.

**Local planning**

Provision of CYP mental health services and support is complex, involving multiple partner agencies.

Local authorities provide mental health services directly but also play a leadership role in bringing together other agencies as well as acting as champions for children’s mental health via local governance arrangements.

The Local Transformation Planning process, overseen through the Health and Wellbeing Board, is the key forum for local governance.

From 2015, all Clinical Commissioning Groups and their partners were obliged to produce a Local Transformation Plan, published on the Local Authority and the CCG website. The plans are partnership documents aimed at improving the totality of the offer within a Local Authority area and should be updated annually.

Local Transformation Plans should set out how service users and people with lived experience have been engaged in planning and delivery. The involvement of children and young people, as well as their families, is seen by the NHS as a vital component of service improvement.

Local Transformation Plans should clearly evidence how areas are working collaboratively to take urgent action to increase the scale and pace of progress of reducing health inequalities in the development and delivery of services, and to regularly assess this progress. The impact of the pandemic has been felt disproportionately on certain sections of the population including those living in most deprived neighbourhoods, people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, those who have other long-term health conditions and on families where there is domestic violence.

Local areas should use their Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and information from Public Health in developing their local transformation planning.

**The Local Transformation Plan remains the key document for any local authority area to understand how services are being improved against the expectations contained within the NHS Long Term Plan.**

Although the expectation to publish Local Transformation Plans has been delayed in appreciation of the pressures that services are under during the pandemic, this planning cycle remains the key means by which Council members should be able to understand what is taking place and how it is being funded. Currently plans should be refreshed and published by 30 September 2021.

**Key considerations for local governance and Health and Wellbeing Boards**

* Does the Local Transformation Plan clearly set out the financial commitments to services to support mental health for children? Is investment growing proportionately compared to health services overall and adult mental health services?
* What are the Governance arrangements that ensure that children’s mental health continues to have a high priority?
* Is the information about local services, including relevant local authority services such as Early Help, available and accessible to children, young people and their families?
* How many more children and young people have been seen by NHS funded mental health services and is this in line with national targets?
* How does the local area measure waiting times for different services and are those improving?
* How are children, young people and their families involved in the planning of services for mental health support?
* How do Local Transformation Plans address inequalities in health outcomes in the area?
* Is the local partnership working well to support children’s mental health?
* What is the local offer for children and young people through their schools and colleges, including Mental Health Support Teams?

Members will have a chance to discuss children and young people’s mental health further at the member meeting being held on 28 June 2021.

1. https://stateofchildhealth.rcpch.ac.uk/evidence/mental-health/prevalence/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2020-wave-1-follow-up [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/cco-the-state-of-childrens-mental-health-services-2020-21.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\_data/file/414024/Childrens\_Mental\_Health.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Mental-Health-Taskforce-FYFV-final.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\_data/file/728892/government-response-to-consultation-on-transforming-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/publication/nhs-long-term-plan/ [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://hmtreasury-newsroom.prgloo.com/news/mental-health-to-receive-funding-boost-at-spending-review> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-health-and-social-care-for-all [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
10. https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/data-collections-and-data-sets/data-sets/mental-health-services-data-set/access-data [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. <https://www.healthylondon.org/resource/children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-workforce-strategy/> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. https://www.good-thinking.uk/youngpeople/ [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. https://www.annafreud.org/schools-and-colleges/research-and-practice/the-link-programme-new/ [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. https://thriveldn.co.uk/core-activities/youth-mental-health-first-aid/ [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
15. https://www.healthylondon.org/resource/schools-mental-health-toolkit/ [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
16. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/8m-programme-to-boost-pupil-and-teacher-wellbeing [↑](#footnote-ref-15)