

20 September 2021

Agenda Item: 10

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, INTEGRATED STRATEGIC
COMMISSIONING AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT**

AUTISM PRE-DIAGNOSTIC SUPPORT SERVICE

Purpose of the Report

1. The report seeks approval to proceed with the procurement of an Autism pre-diagnostic support service within timescales set by NHS England.

Information

2. Through Transforming Care Partnerships local authorities with their Clinical Commissioning Group partners have been working on a programme to support people with a learning disability and/or Autism to develop suitable community services. The aim is to ensure there is a reduction in avoidable hospital admissions and that those living inappropriately in hospital can move into their local communities.
3. In June 2021 regional Transforming Care partners were invited by NHS England to complete an Expression of Interest for funding for projects to support the Autism diagnostic pathway.
4. Projects were requested that were innovative in their approach, focused on a particular part of the Autism diagnostic pathway and that complemented rather than replicated existing work. Projects also needed to display learning that could be shared across the Midlands region and identify another area that could act as a control for their project. Locally links have been made with colleagues in Derby and Derbyshire to carry out this element.
5. In July the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Transforming Care Partnership was notified that the bid had been successful and £84,000 had been awarded to develop the project.
6. The proposal is for a voluntary and community support service to span across the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care System (including Bassetlaw) footprint offering pre-diagnosis support, whilst colleagues across Derbyshire will focus on post-diagnosis support, thereby enabling each area to act as a control for the other. This will allow greater in-depth understanding of the role of information, advice and guidance throughout the diagnostic pathway. Learning will be embedded from both projects to

provide a continuity of care throughout the diagnosis process and beyond if the evaluation evidences positive outcomes.

Why the service is needed

7. A Neurodevelopmental Specialist Service (NeSS) was launched in Nottinghamshire on 1st April 2021. There is high demand for the service and waiting times for formal assessment and diagnosis can be up to two years for completion. The Neurodevelopmental Specialist Service has capacity to offer only limited post-diagnostic support and support regarding reasonable adjustments/referrals to wider services. There is currently an average waiting time of 12 weeks for a first diagnostic assessment and whilst the clinical team works to risk assess referrals to meet demand, there is also a need to support people whilst this process is taking place. Currently the local waiting list for diagnosis stands at 411 with a further 314 people having received their first appointment and 67 people actively involved in the diagnostic process.
8. From discussions with Experts by Experience and community Care and Treatment Reviews it is known that to leave people on the waiting list with no guidance or support can have a negative impact on people's mental health. This proposal goes some way to close that gap within our local pathway.
9. Little support is currently available at pre-diagnosis stage specifically for people with Autism and instead people are directed to generic services which may not understand their specific needs. People often report feeling unsupported and have told the Council that "whilst there might be services out there suitable for them they were difficult to find and people felt that they were somewhat left to help themselves when sometimes they needed assistance" (Adults with Autism Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, 2019). As stated by regional Experts by Experience "there should be a focus on 'getting it right the first time' this can help to prevent crisis and save resources". The proposed service would support people from the earliest point they require support and/or diagnostic referral.

The service

10. The service will be holistic in approach and have the ability to provide information and signposting across a range of subject areas to support people with their presenting needs in a timely manner, thereby avoiding a deterioration of the situation. As stated by regional Experts by Experience "it would be beneficial for autistic people to be more easily able to access support for different issues, as often when there are co-occurring conditions, the process of seeking support can be very fragmented".
11. It is proposed that by tackling presenting needs individuals may be able to avoid crises and be better able to be supported within their communities thereby avoiding a deterioration in wellbeing and costly extended support. Care and Treatment Reviews show that issues such as housing, debt, safeguarding, education and employment issues all arise and can impact negatively on a person's mental wellbeing. Supporting and signposting people to such services whilst waiting for a diagnosis should support people to maintain good mental wellbeing.

12. Nottinghamshire can utilise an online learning resource that Derbyshire has already established via a hidden YouTube channel to provide information, tips and useful techniques to people with Autism and their families.
13. Key elements of the service will include:
 - a. an information, advice and guidance service with multiple access routes (i.e. online, via telephone and face-to-face)
 - b. a website to provide information about the service and relevant support organisations
 - c. the development of a Nottinghamshire Autism Alliance to support organisations delivering services and other key individuals
 - d. an expansion of the existing Derbyshire online learning resources to provide initial tools and learning for individuals and families.
14. The funding of £84,000 from NHS England will mean there are some limitations in the service's capacity given the Countywide coverage. Partners will be discussing the use of Section 256 partnership monies to the value of £76,000 to add to this, to give additional capacity to the service. If this funding is approved at the Learning Disability and Autism Executive Board on 20th September, there will also be funding to provide "Brain in Hand" which is a mechanism to promote coping skills for individuals. This will enable people to better manage more practical matters which are often the issues that if not well supported lead to anxiety and a deterioration in mental health.
15. A full breakdown of costs and timescales can be found in **Appendix 1**. The funding for the service has been allocated for one year but needs to be spent before the end of March 2022.

Other Options Considered

16. To undertake a joint procurement exercise with Derby and Derbyshire.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

17. The NHS England money has been approved and will be released to the Authority in September 2021.
18. Under the terms of the grant, the service needs to be in place by March 2022 and therefore needs to be procured during this calendar year.
19. The use by Nottinghamshire of a single provider framework with multiple call-offs for the separate project elements will allow some flexibility but without the complexities of the arrangements being proposed by Derbyshire which would prove difficult given the timescales.
20. The recommendations allow for the service to proceed, utilising the NHS England funding without the use of the additional £76,000 from partnership monies, however capacity would be more limited.

Statutory and Policy Implications

21. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

22. The cost of tender is expected to be £160,000. This will be funded by £84,000 from NHS England and £76,000 from Section 256 partnership money.
23. NHS England will provide the funding to cover all elements of the bid listed at **paragraph 13**. If additional monies to the value of £76,000 are agreed by the Learning Disability and Autism Executive Board on 20th September, this will fund additional capacity within the information and advice element of the service and be used to broaden the offer to include "Brain in Hand".

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That Committee gives approval to proceed with the procurement of an Autism pre-diagnostic service using available funding of £84,000 from NHS England and, subject to approval by the Learning Disability and Autism Executive Board, £76,000 from partnership funds. Should the £76,000 not receive approval from the Learning Disability and Autism Executive Board the service specification will be adjusted accordingly.

Kashif Ahmed

Service Director, Integrated Strategic Commissioning and Service Improvement

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Mercy Lett-Charnock

Commissioning Manager, Integrated Strategic Commissioning

T: 0115 9773073

E: mercy.lett-charnock@nottscg.gov.uk

Constitutional Comments (LPW 07/09/21)

24. The recommendations fall within the remit of the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee by virtue of its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (DG 08/09/21)

25. The cost of tender is expected to be £160,000. This will be funded by £84,000 from NHS England, Transforming Care Partnership and £76,000 from Section 256 partnership money, which is going for approval on 20th September 2021.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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