

Item 6 Public Question for Health and Wellbeing Board 18th November 2021

Question from Councillor Wood 11th October 2021:

I would like to ask a question regarding children who are potentially high functioning autistic but who are not being diagnosed by the NHS within the published timescales of 18 months.

The reason appears to be because they are home schooled. Many of these children are being pulled out of school by their parents because forcing them into mainstream schools is resulting in severe physical and mental health issues.

It is nothing to do with their learning abilities as many are extremely clever, but my question today is not about schooling.

I am aware of one 6-year-old who has been waiting 4 years for a diagnosis having been referred by a paediatric consultant neurologist at the John Radcliffe, and who has recently been told that there is still a 6 year waiting list, and other children who have had an initial consultation but once it is known they are home schooled, no follow up appointments are conducted by the NHS.

From a very quick 10 minute count up in only one group of home educated neurodivergent children in Bucks, there are 6 who have been waiting for an appointment since 2017, 7 since 2018, 1 has just been diagnosed after waiting 4 years, 1 after 6 years and one an appalling 11 years. This is just the tip of the iceberg. I emphasise that this was a very quick count up and this is a really widespread issue not an exception.

- Berkshire offer a portage service where children under 3 and their parents have a team to help the parents cope and offer advice and 2 weekly meetings.
- In Hillingdon, there are health visitors specially trained in autism, who are there to support parents and children.
- In Hertfordshire, they are diagnosing home educated children within 6 months and they have access to all the support they need.
- In Bucks, children are not even able to get a diagnosis unless they are in a school. The Bucks NHS will not accept private diagnosis even when the consultant doing the assessment is the same one the NHS use. The families get no help or support. There is no access to specialist services such as occupational therapy, educational psychologists and eating disorder clinics unless the child is in a school.

These children's basic human rights are being denied, as they are being wiped off the system and slipping through the cracks. Basically, they are being told that because they are home schooled, they are not entitled to the medical help they need. I would like to know why this is happening to our Buckinghamshire children and if something is going to be done about it.

Responses have been received from the Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust (BHT) and Buckinghamshire Council (BC) Children's Service.

The assessment service for an autism diagnosis sits within the Neuro Development Collaborative (NDC) across NHS Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust and NHS Oxford Health

Foundation Trust. In order to reduce waiting times, £750,000 has been invested into the pathway over the last 18 months. The current average wait from referral to assessment is 572 days – these figures include both Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

The NDC will assess children and young people who are home schooled and this is not a prohibitive factor to accessing the service. Gathering information as a secondary source (as indicated by National Institute of Clinical Excellence) can be more challenging, but it is not a restrictive factor in referring for assessment or receiving diagnosis via the NDC. Parents can self-refer for assessment and do not require a school referral.

Children and young people diagnosed in the private sector with ASD can be referred to the NHS pathway for post-diagnostic support without requiring a further diagnostic assessment on the NHS. Children and young people diagnosed with ADHD in the private sector can be referred to the NHS pathway for medication follow up without needing another formal diagnosis via NHS. There is a wait list for medication follow-up but work has been completed to reduce this.

For those children who need to see a community paediatrician outside of the NDC, the maximum waiting time as of last month for a child into community children's services delivered by NHS Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust is 63 weeks; there are 12 children waiting over a year. Access to this service is not predicated on school setting.

The integrated therapies service (covering speech and language, occupational therapy and physiotherapy) is delivered by NHS Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust. Referrals for home-educated children who require therapies are accepted should they meet current service criteria. The therapies will be delivered to home educated children either face-to-face in a clinic setting or remotely into the home depending upon clinical requirements. There are more challenges for delivery of provision for those home educated as if supporting for education need or statutory provision then therapies will be supporting outcomes within the home environment, whereas outcomes on an Education and Healthcare Plan (EHCP) will have been set for the education setting. Additionally, a large cohort of these children and young people are likely to have social communication difficulties and outcomes around this need are best supported within the education setting. This is because there is opportunity for carryover of therapy skills with peers in naturalistic social situations (as well as group therapy interventions where appropriate).

Buckinghamshire has a portage service and children do not need a formal diagnosis to access this service.

Children and young people in Buckinghamshire are able to access eating disorder services; elective home education has no bearing on access to this service.

Buckinghamshire has a strong co-production ethos and works closely with Families and Carers Together (FACT) Bucks on commissioning and delivery of services. Families with children with special educational needs should be encouraged to contact FACT Bucks for support.

Additionally, if families have complaints or issues to resolve, they can access support via Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS), which is independent from the Council and health services. Should families want support raising issues specifically with health services they can also contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) for support.

Pupils who are electively home educated with additional needs are monitored particularly closely and are reviewed regularly.

Question from Councillor Winn 8th November 2021:

The question I would like to ask is how does the Patient to GP ratio in Aylesbury compare to the rest of Buckinghamshire? And to the UK? And how we will address any gaps in provision both in the short term and longer term as the population increases as a result of the Vale of Aylesbury Vale Local Plan?

Responses have been received from the Buckinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Buckinghamshire Council (BC) Planning and Environment Service.

In relation to GP coverage:

The data available from NHS Digital shows that on 29 September 2021:

- The combined total coverage for Aylesbury practices is 47 full time equivalent (FTE) GPs per 100,000 patients.
- This compares with coverage for the combined practices in the rest of Buckinghamshire (excluding the Aylesbury practices) of 59 FTE GPs per 100,000 patients.
- The national data available suggests that the average coverage is 43 FTE GPs per 100,000 patients.
- However, primary medical services are provided by a wide range of healthcare professionals such as nurses, pharmacists and paramedics, not just GPs. The use of a GP to patient ratio does not fully represent the primary workforce that is available to the population.

In respect of how gaps in provision will be addressed in the shorter term:

There is a national shortage of GPs and other primary care professionals. The CCG recognises that PCNs and practices are working hard to recruit to vacant positions.

The Winter Access Fund has provided the opportunity to increase capacity and improve access to GP services this coming winter, but this will be dependent on sourcing additional workforce.

In relation to how gaps in provision will be addressed in the longer term:

The CCG has been working with practices and Primary Care Networks (PCNs) in Aylesbury to ensure there is capacity to meet population growth.

Finally, The Council's Planning Policy Team has provided the following information in relation to Vale of Aylesbury Vale Local Plan:

The Aylesbury CCG and its replacement body, the Buckinghamshire CCG were involved over several years in the preparation of the Adopted Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP) (2021).

The CCGs are key stakeholders for Local Plans and Councils seek their input as the Local Plan policies and site allocations are prepared, for example asking for their views and advice at key consultation stages. As a result of the engagement with the CCG, a number of the VALP policies include requirements for primary healthcare. These are linked to the level of planned new development and the associated population increases arising from that level of development.

The Council will continue to engage with health providers as part of the preparation of the new Local Plan for the whole of Buckinghamshire. Early contact has already been made with key stakeholder organisations such as the Buckinghamshire CCG. This has been about how the Council will engage with them in drawing up the Local Plan and the strategic issues of interest to them.

This engagement will continue, for example at each key consultation stage and, importantly, as part of the infrastructure evidence needed to underpin the new Local Plan. The future needs of the health sector will be an essential part of this work. Infrastructure requirements will be tested and set out as the Local Plan proceeds towards adoption. When planning applications related to Local Plan site allocations are considered the Council will work with developers as they bring sites forward to ensure infrastructure requirements are met.

More information about the Local Plan for Buckinghamshire, and the current timetable can be seen on the website <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/local-development-plans/buckinghamshire-local-plan/>