

## TRAFFORD COUNCIL

**Report to:** Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** 25<sup>th</sup> July 2023  
**Report for:** Decision  
**Report of:** The Chair of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee

### Report Title

Task and Finish Group report on Children and Young People's Access to Mental Health Services.

### Summary

The Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee Approved the formation of a Task and Finish Group to look at the access available to children and young people within Trafford to mental health services. This report covers the process followed by the Task and Finish Group, the Findings of the Group, and the Recommendations stemming from those findings for submission to the Executive.

### Recommendation(s)

That the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee approve the report and recommendations 1- 10 listed below for submission to the Executive.

1. That the Executive support the recommendations from the Early Help Needs Assessment Refresh March 2023 (Appendix 2).
2. That the CYP Scrutiny Committee receive updates on progress of the recommendations from the Early Help Needs Assessment Refresh for the themes of Mental health, Children's behaviour and emotional regulation, Parenting support, and SEND in March 2024.
3. That the Hub of Hope (<https://hubofhope.co.uk/>) be advertised on the Council's Website and the Trafford Directory.
4. That the Council Promote sign posting of the Hub of Hope (<https://hubofhope.co.uk/>) to partner organisations including schools.
5. That the Executive look at the feasibility of commissioning a preventative support service that uses a whole family-based approach for secondary school aged children and to report back to CYP Scrutiny in 6 months' time (January 2024).
6. That the Executive look at the feasibility of creating a Council supported Parents Forum specifically for parents with children suffering from mental

health issues and report back to the CYP Scrutiny Committee by the end of the municipal year (March 2024).

7. That Trafford measure wait times to the first meaningful interaction/treatment rather than first contact to prevent hidden waiting lists from 2024/25 onwards.
8. That a standard referral form and initial assessment form be created for use by all Trafford providers to make it easier for records to be transferred between providers and prevent young people from having to tell their story multiple times. The referral form to be co-produced with providers and reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it is fit for purpose and to be used from 2024/25 municipal year.
9. That Trafford create a standard user experience survey to be used by all providers on an annual basis to enable cross comparison, identify trends over time, and for reporting to CYP Scrutiny. The first survey to be run in March 2024 and results report to CYP Scrutiny at their first meeting of 2024/25 municipal year.
10. That Trafford have staffing continuity as a KPI for all new CYP mental health service provider contracts.

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## **1. Background**

1.1 The Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee received a request from the Health Scrutiny Committee to form a joint Task and Finish Group to review Children and Young People's Access to Mental Health Services at their meeting on the 27<sup>th</sup> September 2022. At the meeting the request was considered by the Committee and agreed. Following the agreement, an email was sent out to all Children and Young people's Scrutiny and Health Scrutiny Members asking if they wished to take part. Out of the combined Membership Councillors Western, Whetton, Maitland, Haughey, and Hartley all volunteered to take part in the group.

## **2. Scope of the review**

2.1 The first meeting of the Task and finish group was held on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2022. At the meeting the Councillors agreed that the scope of the meeting would be limited to how young people accessed Mental Health Services, which meant that they would look at ease of referral, time taken to receive support, and wrap around support while waiting to access a service. The group agreed an approach to deliver the review which was captured within the groups Terms of Reference (appendix 1) and a draft schedule of meetings was also agreed to ensure the work continued at pace.

The Terms of Reference were shared with the Corporate Director of Children's Services, the Deputy Director of Public Health, and Officers who supported the review to ensure that the aims were achievable and the approach was fit for purpose.

## **3. Process of the review**

3.1 Over the course of the review the task and finish group met a total of 8 times with 4 of those meetings involving Officers from Trafford Council and providers. The meetings were held on the 25<sup>th</sup> October 2022, 17<sup>th</sup> November 2022, 19<sup>th</sup> December 2022, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2023, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2023, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2023, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2023, and 6<sup>th</sup> July 2023. During and in between those meetings the Committee have received presentations and documents from officers and the group also completed their own desk top research to improve their knowledge of the subject area. In addition to this Councillor's spoke with residents who had contacted them with concerns about young people's mental health services.

3.2 The approach taken by the group varied from the original plan laid out within the Terms of Reference. This change was in large part due to the impact of the by election for the Parliamentary Constituency for Stretford and Urmston held in December which reduced the level of resource available to the group and subsequently narrowed the approach taken.

## **4. Task and Finish Group findings**

### **4.1 Trafford Council Commissioning of Services and Offer**

4.1.1 The Task and Finish Group were very impressed with the approach taken by Trafford, commissioned providers, and the offer provided by the Council. The commissioning officers the Group met with were very knowledgeable about the area as well as the commissioning process. When looking at the processes used by commissioners it was clear they involved a wide range of stakeholders including providers, users, and parents' groups when developing specifications for services and they were aware of best practice within the field of mental health.

4.1.2 Officers were also clearly aware of the issues facing the service as demonstrated by the Waiting Times Initiatives Programme, the Early Help Needs Assessment (Appendix 2), and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. The Group were particularly impressed with the Early Help Needs Assessment and the recommendations it contained. The Group urge the Executive to support the recommendations of the assessment and request that updates on the progress of the recommendations for the themes of Mental health, Children's behaviour and emotional regulation, Parenting support, and SEND be provided to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee.

4.1.3 The Task and Finish Group were also impressed by the range and quality of the support offered by Trafford with online support, direct 1:2:1 support, and group support all being available. The Councillors noted that Trafford had support for different levels of issues ranging from prevention and early help all the way to crisis support.

## **4.2 Hub of Hope**

4.2.1 One resource that the group became aware of during the review that they felt was not being used sufficiently was the Hub of Hope (<https://hubofhope.co.uk/>). The group members were made aware of this resource by the Executive Member for Finance, Change, and Governance. Having looked at the Hub of Hope the group feel that a link to the site should be made available on the Council's website and the Trafford Directory as well as being sign posted to by Schools and providers of mental health services.

## **4.3 Growing demand and the need to look to prevention rather than cure**

4.3.1 The increase in demand for services and complexity of cases was raised in every conversation the group had with officers and providers and was clearly reflected in the statistics the Group were shown. Due to the limited level of resources available Trafford will not be able to afford to upscale the level of support to cope with the numbers of young people presenting with mental health issues if the current trends continue. One Officer shared a link to a study which had identified the rise in anxiety and depressive symptoms in young people following the pandemic and it is unlikely that the increase in demand stemming from the pandemic will reduce any time soon, as children and young people impacted by the pandemic progress through the education system.

4.4.1 To address the level of demand the Group feel that the Council needs to focus upon strengthening the preventative support offer. The Group were very impressed with the service offer to primary school aged children provided by Trafford Sunrise and would like to see Council provide a preventative offer to secondary school aged children and young people if it is feasible to do so.

#### **4.4 Lack of support available to parents**

4.4.1 In discussions with parents who had experience of their child suffering with mental health issues it became apparent to the group that there was a lack of support available. This issue runs throughout the process from referral, treatment, and through to post treatment support. Officers are aware of this gap in provision and the Group were told of work ongoing in this area for example the development of a single point of contact for mental health services.

4.4.2 The Group believe that the creation of a Parents' Forum specifically for parents whose children are suffering from mental health problems would help to address this issue. The forum could act as a form of peer support as well as being a stakeholder group for commissioners and officers to consult with to improve support for parents and parents experience of accessing services, which would enable parents to give more support to their children.

#### **4.5 Hidden wait times**

4.5.1 When conducting the desk top exercise, the Group found a paper called "Wait time to what? Could reducing wait times for child mental health services worsen outcomes?" (Appendix 3) which outlines how focusing upon reducing wait times could negatively impact a patient by increasing the amount of time before a patient receives evidence-based interventions. In addition, the Group came across a press release from the Royal College of Psychiatrists called "Hidden waits force more than three quarters of mental health patients to seek help from emergency services" (Appendix 4) which states that 43% of patients on hidden waiting lists reported that their mental health worsened during that time. The press release defines a hidden wait as the time between initial contact and second appointment (when treatment begins).

4.5.2 When the group received data on wait times from services they were listed as being to first contact/first treatment. This was due to the different ways that providers recorded and reported their waiting times. To avoid the possibility of hidden waiting times the Group want all providers to report wait times to the first evidence-based intervention rather than first contact.

#### **4.6 Lack of consistency in approach**

4.6.1 There were several areas where a lack of consistency raises concerns for the Task and Finish Group. The first area is with regards to referral forms and the information collected by each service. If a young person's condition or circumstances change while they are engaging a service which requires them to switch provider, the

Group feel this process should be as seamless as possible. To achieve that the Group want to have a standard referral form for services provided by Trafford. The form would then be able to move with the young person when they switched to another service and reduce the need for the young person to repeat their story. The Group recognise that the creation of such a form would be difficult as providers are often contracted by clients which could all have different requirements. To tackle this, the Group suggest that the form be co-produced with providers and be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that it remains fit for purpose.

4.6.2 The second area where a lack of consistency across the offer is of concern is in relation to reporting. While the Group are aware that the providers will be asked to report different measures by different clients on different elements of their service, the Group would like for all Trafford provided services to have a standardised user experience survey. As with the referral form, the Group believe this should be co-produced by the Council with providers and service users and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure it remains fit for purpose. The reason the Group have selected user experience is in recognition of the subjective nature of Mental Health.

4.6.3 The third area where the Group is concerned by a lack of consistency is in relation to staffing. When meeting with providers they discussed the difficulties they faced with recruitment and retention of staff. The Group are aware of the importance of consistency in staff when working with children through their knowledge of difficulties Council services face in the same area. The Group would like for contracts with providers of children and young people's mental health services to have staffing continuity as a KPI to ensure that the Council is aware of the staffing position for all commissioned services.