

NHS Vale of York CCG Report to Health Scrutiny Committee, November 2019

CCG Statement on Primary Mental Health Team Closure

We deeply regret to confirm the closure of the Primary Care Mental Health service.

The service was developed to assist patients seeking mental health support from their GP, and launched in January 2019 as a pilot programme. This limited service was trialled in some practices in the Vale of York. Unfortunately due to complex financial circumstances it was not possible to continue the pilot.

The following report provides an explanation of the circumstances regarding the set up and eventual closure of the service.

Background to the funding of the service

In January 2019, the Primary Mental Health Team (PMHT) was set up by Priory Medical Group (PMG) on behalf of nine Vale of York practices. The PMHT service was established to support frontline general practitioners by providing an additional service to refer patients with mental health issues. These included mental health issues such as stress, anxiety and depression. These are patients that would normally be seen by their GPs for these mental health issues.

The source of funding for this was from the NHS General Practice Forward View Practice Transformation Support Scheme. Under the scheme, a capitated sum of £3 per head of population was made available to practices to fund schemes that would improve healthcare for patients and sustain general practice. The £3 per head investment consisted of £1.50 per head in 2017/18 and £1.50 per head in 2018/19 which could be spent in each year or combined as £3 per head in 2018/19, which was the case in most CCGs. This was made available fully to general practices in 2018/19 totalling £683,277 for city of York practices.

Over the last 2 years this funded the development of several Community Teams in York, including the piloted Primary Care Mental Health Workers, Care Home Nurses and other Health Care Workers. It should be acknowledged that the general practices involved set up these schemes in good faith. In particular, Priory Medical Group generously led on the establishment of the Primary Care Mental Health team on behalf of other practices and took on the management and associated risks of doing so. This required real collaborative working across practices and the initiative was well received and supported by local GPs and patients. It should also be noted that these are not CCG-commissioned services but the CCG acted as the funder of the services that were set up and managed by general practices.

What happened to the funding in 2019/20

Also of note, the funding source was non-recurrent money. That said based on funding allocations to the CCG in previous years where the monies had been made available each year by the NHS there was an expectation that this would be maintained. It was expected

that the longevity of the projects could be ensured and supported by the CCG on an on-going basis investment through any cash savings delivered, and that was the CCG's original intention. However, in 2019/20 the NHS made significant changes to the GP contract and the fund was re-allocated to fund the establishment of Primary Care Networks (PCN). Consequently, this left both the CCG and practices involved in an extremely difficult situation with an unexpected funding gap. The re-allocated funds for PCNs have strict instructions on their use and left no scope to channel these resources to the existing Primary Care Mental Health staff.

PMG sought assistance from the CCG but unfortunately CCG funding for the year had already been allocated and there were insufficient reserves to cover the costs of the service for the rest of the financial year. The only way the CCG could potentially have maintained funding to the service would have been to reduce funding to other commissioned services. (The full year cost of the service just for the city of York residents is around £310,000.) It had also been expected that data on the pilot would be collated including an evaluation of its efficacy which would inform a further decision on future funding for the service. However, as the service was prematurely stopped it was not possible to ascertain how effective this service has been. This made it difficult to justify any decision to disinvest in other services in order to maintain it.

Consequently, due to the lack of onward funding, a very difficult decision was made by the practice for the service to be withdrawn. The closure of the service has inevitably created anger and frustration, both for patients as well as the general practices involved which is deeply regrettable.

Health system response

The GPs involved, Tees, Esk and Wear Valley (TEWV) NHS Trust (the main specialist mental health provider) and the CCG have been working closely to ensure patients utilising the provision are referred to appropriate existing alternatives such as

- the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) Service who offer Cognitive Behavioural Therapy,
- TEWV's Mental Wellbeing Team,
- and third sector organisations such as York Mind who provide mental health and wellbeing services.

This has included a careful examination of patients referred who are on the waiting list and triage to appropriate services. The patients were also advised to ring the Crisis and Access Service or attend A&E if they felt unsafe or at risk.

We have also worked with several practices with high mental health demand and in the past month put in IAPT workers in those practices. We are already seeing an increase in referrals for IAPT as a result of this action. In addition, it is our understanding that some practices have expressed an interest in retaining some of the Primary Care Mental Health workers. The CCG is also committed to working with the affected practices to try and mitigate any financial loss as a result of this.

Post-script

This has been a difficult and painful experience for all stakeholders involved. As iterated above, the service was set up in good faith in an attempt to strengthen primary care and increase investment in services that would benefit patients. It was done with some risk but the decision made to set up the service was based on what was known at the time regarding available funding and in the strong belief that it was the right thing to do to improve patient access to mental health care. Unfortunately, the changes in the funding allocation were unexpected and difficult to mitigate against. In all fairness to PMG, had they known that the funding would not be available they would not have undertaken this endeavour.

The key lessons learned from this unfortunate incident is of the risks of establishing services using non-recurrent monies, as well as the difficulties created for patients and general practices when services are closed. The importance of sourcing sustainable funding for services is crucial and cannot be understated. The need for clearer communication between funder, service providers and patients is also clearly vital as there have been misunderstandings between the parties concerned that have not helped and undoubtedly affected trust and relationships that will need to be re-built.

On a final note, despite very challenging financial circumstances, the CCG has increased support for mental health services in York with an additional £3.5 million of dedicated funding this year compared to 2018/19. This investment has helped to increase capacity in Children and Young People's Mental Health Services, facilitate greater access to psychological therapies, and improve early intervention for individuals suffering from psychosis. The CCG is committed to meeting the Mental Health Investment Standard going forward. We will also continue to work together with partners to strengthen services in areas of high need to address mental health inequalities.