

Adult Stammering Service Update

January 2024

In April 2021, after giving notice to Sheffield Clinical Commissioning Group, the Sheffield Children's NHS Foundation Trust (SCFT) stopped acceptance of adult referrals to the Speech and Language stammering service. This decision was based on concerns around three main risk areas:

- The service was seeing patients outside of the normal and extended age range for SCFT in a shared setting.
- There were concerns around the governance that was in place to support care for the extended age range due to our position as a paediatric provider.
- The wider Speech and Language service was struggling to deliver care in a timely way to children and young people, giving rise to questions regarding whether delivery to adults constituted the best use of limited therapist resource.

The decision was referred to the Sheffield City Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) who recommended the service re-open to referrals in August 2021, whilst work was undertaken in Sheffield to develop a future proposal for provision of adult stammering services.

A public involvement programme was launched, and the findings of the engagement programme were finalised in May 2023. The engagement exercise found that:

- Most respondents reported not minding that they received therapy from a therapist who works with both children and adults.
- There was mixed feedback on attendance to appointments in a setting where both children and adults were present, but appointment times were ranked as more important, with evening availability and car parking being preferential.
- Overwhelmingly, there was a preference for appointments individually and in person.
- SCFT Speech and Language Colleagues were interviewed by Integrated Care Board colleagues and felt strongly that the service should continue in its current form.
- Wider stakeholders in health, commissioning and the STAMMA charity noted the importance of having a specialist service for adults who stammer in Sheffield and were complimentary of the current service.

During the same period the Trust also engaged with over 1,000 people on producing two key guiding Trust Strategies; our Clinical Strategy was published in July 2023 and our Quality Promise will launch in January 2024. A core principle of how we seek to deliver these is that we engage, listen, and co-produce our services with the people who we support to meet our aims of delivering outstanding patient care.

In line with our principle of being a listening organisation and after receiving the feedback from the engagement exercise, we asked our senior leadership team within Speech and Language and Community wellbeing and Mental Health Services (CWAMH) to undertake a review of our original decision. This review reported back to our Executive Team in December 2023. The team found that:

- There is no cure for stammering, those who stammer are best supported on a continual and consistent basis. A life span approach to service delivery is not unusual, and can be evidenced locally in Barnsley, Doncaster, and Leeds.
- Low referral rates for adults who stammer (less than 30 per year in Sheffield) mean that clinical competence for an adult only specialist would be difficult to maintain. The clinical approaches and ethos are the same regardless of whether the patient is an adult or a child. In Sheffield, this clinical competence currently sits with the SCFT Speech and Language team.

In regard to mitigation of original concerns and considering the best way forward for the specialist adult stammering service in Sheffield, the SCFT Speech and Language therapy team have:

- Undertaken full risk reviews for staff, adult patients and children and young people and their families.
- Provided access to adult safeguarding training and supervision for those staff delivering the service.
- Requested adult safeguarding posters to be displayed in the relevant waiting areas.

- Completed a full risk assessment for our Flockton outpatient area which is where the service is delivered.
- Provided trauma informed supervision for the relevant clinicians.

In addition to these changes, it is acknowledged that the stammering team already have the knowledge, leadership, and expertise to deliver the specialist service. Provision of specialist stammering services in Sheffield is felt to be an integral part of the service portfolio.

Although capacity remains a significant issue for the service as a whole, it is acknowledged that ceasing the adult stammering service would release very little extra in real terms to the paediatric Speech and Language pathways.

The engagement process undertaken for this pathway enabled the Trust to listen to the voices of past and current service users alongside our colleagues and stakeholders. Sheffield ICB have confirmed a desire to continue the commissioning of an adult specialist service is required in Sheffield. Given that the specialist knowledge lies with SCFT, our Executive Team have agreed that we will continue the adult stammering service within the Trust with the mitigations described above. This aligns to a key theme with our clinical strategy and supports our ambitions as an anchor organisation in Sheffield to improve both education and employment potential for all in our local communities. Sheffield Children' NHS Foundation Trust has no intention of reviewing this decision in the near future.

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