



## Children's Neurodevelopment Service

Update: March 2022

Local NHS organisations understand the concerns of families across Bradford district and Craven about the delay in autism and ADHD (neurodevelopment) assessments for children and young people.

We remain fully committed to improving access to the neurodevelopment assessment service and are writing to tell you about what we are doing to make improvements.

We would like to apologise that children and young people and their families are experiencing a delay. We are committed to improving access to the neurodevelopment assessment service and we have made additional financial investments to address the current pressures that lead to these delays.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in increased waiting times for assessment and created significant challenges for many families. National guidance during the pandemic meant that the neurodevelopment assessment services were unable to see children and young people face to face but we were able to carry out some parts of the assessment via telephone or video link.

We resumed in-person assessments as soon as we were permitted and, where appropriate to use telephone or video link we have continued to work in this way.

### Why is there a delay in neurodevelopment assessments?

Autism assessments are being delayed for several reasons:

- the autism assessment process is highly specialised and complex
- assessment often involves coordinating input from a range of NHS staff including psychologists, paediatricians, nurses, speech and language therapists and education staff
- staffing challenges in respect of the recruitment of clinical staff
- the demand for neurodevelopment assessments is increasing significantly, partly because parents and teachers are becoming more aware of the need for these assessments

The situation in the Bradford district and Craven area reflects the picture in the UK and unfortunately families in many areas of the country are experiencing similar long waits for their child's assessment.

### What have you done to address the long waiting times?

We have developed new ways of providing care to improve access to assessments. The Bradford District and Craven Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) invested additional funding to implement these new ways and to increase capacity to improve access for children waiting for assessment. Additional recurrent funding has also been invested to further increase the number of assessments that can be completed each year.

### What are the new pathways?

Children under seven years old will follow an assessment pathway delivered by Airedale NHS Foundation Trust or Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.



Children aged seven years old or above will follow an assessment pathway delivered by Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust

Are some children waiting longer than others?

Each of the local health providers, Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust, Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Airedale NHS Foundation Trust, have a waiting list for assessments. This means that the length of wait for children on each pathway will vary. However, within each pathway, children are being assessed in the order in which they were referred.

What else is being done to ensure children are assessed as quickly as possible?

The CCG previously provided additional funding to work with external providers of autism assessment services to support additional neurodevelopment assessment appointments to be offered, many families have benefited over the last 18 months.

Further CCG funding has been provided to continue to work with the external providers to support a significant number of additional assessments over coming months. This initiative will allow many assessments to be completed much earlier and as a result will benefit all children and young people on the waiting list by reducing the overall waiting time.

Children and young people who have their assessment undertaken by one of our external providers continue to be supported by the Bradford District and Craven system.

Working towards a needs-based approach

In recognition of the need to improve the support available to children, young people and their families the health system is working in collaboration with Bradford Council to develop a needs-based approach to supporting children and young people with neurodevelopment needs.

This project is called DATA1 (Digitally Acting Together As One). It uses data and co-production to achieve the following:

- Improve awareness of autism/neuro diversity.
- Improve the pathway to allow earlier identification.
- Provide support for children and young people via a newly developed profiling tool to be used in schools by trained staff.
- The creation of neuro diverse profiles which will lead to an accurate identification of need as well as tailor made advice and support.

Co-Production with parents/carers (Via the Parent Carers forum and AWARE) and school staff has begun as well as development of the profile tool. This will be piloted in Keighley, Holme Wood, Manningham and Girdlington during this academic year. All schools in these areas have been contacted to join this innovative project, following which this will be introduced throughout the District.

How can we get support while we wait for assessment?

We are aware that it can be a challenging time whilst your child waits for the neurodevelopment assessment and would like to share with you some of the support that is available locally, please see below for details:



**Social Communication, Interaction and Learning team (SCIL):** The Communication and Interaction Team (part of the SCIL Team) offers a range of support to maintained mainstream schools, free schools, academies, private and voluntary nurseries and childminders in the Bradford district. Individual support can be accessed for children and young people with communication and interaction needs aged 0-25; a diagnosis of autism is not necessary.

To access the service settings are asked to complete a referral form which can be found by visiting:  
<http://www.skills4bradford.co.uk/Services/5179>

**AWARE:** This local charity provides support for young people up to the age of 25 and their families in the Bradford district and Keighley area. Children and young people do not need to have a formal Autism or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) diagnosis to access AWARE support.

AWARE have been given additional funding to develop a new service Bradford Early Advice Team (BEAT). This will offer pre-diagnostic support groups and courses for families waiting for an assessment, the courses will be online during the COVID-19 pandemic. BEAT can also support you with information, advice, signposting and other online resources. Find out more about the support on their website: [aware-uk.org](http://aware-uk.org)

**Phone:** 01535 661275    **Email:** [info@aware-uk.org](mailto:info@aware-uk.org)

**Community groups:** There are many community groups active in the Bradford district, offering support for families and young people. You can find information about groups by using the online DIVA Bradford directory at: <https://divabradford.org.uk/directory>.

You can search by using keywords and the specific link for autism is:  
[https://divabradford.org.uk/directory?combine=autism&geographical\\_area\\_works\\_in\\_9=All&attributes\\_167=All&civicrm\\_proximity\\_postcode=&distance=All](https://divabradford.org.uk/directory?combine=autism&geographical_area_works_in_9=All&attributes_167=All&civicrm_proximity_postcode=&distance=All)

#### **Mental health and wellbeing:**

We know that waiting for assessment is difficult not just for the child or young person but for the whole family and looking after your mental health and wellbeing is important.

#### **Healthy Minds: sources of support**

[www.healthyminds.services](http://www.healthyminds.services) is an online resource for everyone to use and is specifically aimed at encouraging us all to look after our mental health. The online mental health and wellbeing directory gives details of the local services available where you can get support -services are still here to help.

#### **Kooth: online support for young people**

Kooth is a free anonymous online platform offering mental health support for 11 to 24 year olds, and it may be useful to help some young people manage their mental health while awaiting assessment.

[www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com)

Young people can keep a daily journal of their feelings and chat to Kooth's friendly team about what is on their mind.



**First Response: mental health crisis**

If you are experiencing mental health crisis, the friendly team at First Response are available around the clock and you can reach them by calling freephone 0800 952 1181

First Response is open 24 hours-a-day, 7 days-a-week, for anyone living in the Bradford district or Craven area.