

Services for children and young people's emotional well-being and mental health

Since July a project has been under way with the overall aim of creating an integrated and comprehensive service for children and young people's emotional well-being and mental health in Cornwall and Isles of Scilly.

The project was developed in response to concerns raised in inspections about accessibility, coordination and effectiveness of services. There were particular concerns about services for looked after children, for children with learning disabilities and difficulties, for young people aged 16-18, and about access, including waiting times and access out of normal working hours. There was a general concern about partnership working.

The NHS now spends about £5.5m on child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), and the Council over £1m, of which £835,000 was in the form of specific grant but is now part of its overall allocation. Earlier in 2010 the PCT had committed nearly £1m additional funding with some specific aims in mind: improving response times to referrals, creating an out of hours advice with next day assessment service, and replacing time-limited grant funding for targeted mental health work in schools.

A Partnership Board now meets monthly to bring representatives of service providers, service users and commissioners together to tackle issues of concern and work toward integrated and comprehensive services. Substantial progress has been made in respect of services for looked after children and children with disabilities. Since November no one should be waiting more than 28 days for a service following referral, a huge improvement on the previous year. The out of hours advice with next day assessment service has been established.

Information about all services for the emotional well-being and mental health of children and young people has been collated and incorporated into the Family Information Service.

The voice of young people, who have their own Board and commissioning plan, has been a constant presence through these developments. They are currently undertaking a review of the quality of services at each of the main clinics in the area, due to report early in the New Year.

There remain major challenges which include:

- Maintaining and embedding these improvements
- Achieving greater consistency – people report big differences, with some excellent but other unsatisfactory services in different parts of the area
- Improving the arrangements for 16-18 year olds – sorting out the transition to adult services is a major priority for young people

- Improving coordination and efficiency – some services are operating in isolation; there are gaps and overlaps.

A great opportunity has arisen with the decision of the PCT to integrate child health services and place them under the direction of Alison Cook. As part of this process, early in the New Year, the PCT will consider a proposal to bring services for children's emotional well-being and mental health at the eastern end of Cornwall, currently provided by Plymouth PCT, together with those for the rest of Cornwall and Isles of Scilly under the Cornwall Foundation NHS Trust. Alison is already part of the leadership team of the Children's Trust and will be well placed to continue the work of integration and service improvement.

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