

Audiology update

Following a full report presented to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2009 and subsequently a briefing in 2010, this paper is intended to give an update on audiology services currently provided across Kent. In addition it sets out to answer the supplementary questions asked by HOSC.

1. An overview of the way Audiology services have developed since 2009.

Paediatric services

Changes to the provision of paediatric audiology services in west Kent were implemented from 2010 due to the identification of inadequate facilities reported by the Department of Health quality assurance team.

The service was revisited in May 2011 and a further Quality Assurance report rated the service 4.41 out of 5. In addition, the service received organisational awards and those nominated by a parent from the Kent Deaf Children's Society.

In June 2011, new sound proofed facilities were opened in Sevenoaks Hospital, Gravesham Community Hospital and Hawkhurst. The Hawkhurst clinic was replaced in October this year by a new sound proofed facility in Maidstone. A new facility in the Swale Multi Agency Specialist Hub opened in September. In the same month the service was accredited as a centre to deliver the British Academy of Audiology Higher training scheme.

Additional staff have been appointed to the service and following implementation of a new IT system to support paperless working, the administrative processes have been streamlined and standardised. This has led to an increase in the number of patients seen.

Service leads have also worked with commissioners to provide bone conductor hearing aids for appropriate children. This resulted in the following:

- Since October 2009 all patients are seen within 6/18 weeks
- Audiology work from community paediatrics is absorbed into the service
- Ear moulds are undertaken within the service
- The service profile has been raised within the local health economy and within the provider organisation

Audiology services in east Kent benefit from the employment of a Consultant Audiovestibular Physician (AVP) and three full time Paediatric Audiologists (with one supporting the AVP clinic). This represents an increase of one whole time equivalent audiologist since 2009.

Audiologist led clinics are provided in Ashford, Canterbury, Folkestone and Ramsgate with paediatric hearing aid clinics operating at all sites with the exception

of Folkestone. Multi-disciplinary clinics (AVP, audiologists and teacher of the deaf) also provided clinics at these sites. This ensures a coherent pathway to enable children to have access to early year's services and community provision.

Adult services

In December 2010, NHS West Kent was informed by one of the largest providers of adult audiology services that they would no longer be able to continue their contract with NHS West Kent. With just six weeks' notice to find an alternative provider for patients, arrangements were made to transfer the patients concerned to another existing provider.

Due to the urgent transfer of patients and in order to ensure continuity of care there have been no further developments in adult audiology since this date. The priority for NHS West Kent was to ensure that patient care was not interrupted and that the quality of care provided has continued enabling patients to be seen in a timely manner.

In east Kent, adults are seen within the current guidelines and fall within an 18 week pathway. All patients are seen within that time frame unless they choose to extend their pathway through exercising patient choice. The average wait for adult audiology in east Kent is now an average of 13 weeks from referral through to the fitting of a hearing device.

Currently GP's do not carry out hearing tests, but patients with hearing difficulties are offered a choice firstly as to whether they would like the opportunity of having an audiometry test and secondly as to where they would like to have that test carried out. Over the last five years a number of audiology clinics have been established to work alongside GP practices in Whitstable, Sittingbourne, Deal, Dover, Ramsgate, Westgate and Folkestone. This enables patients to be seen at a location closer to their homes and in addition helps to establish a robust pathway approach across the area. In addition, east Kent audiology services are further supported by an independent organisation called Hearbase which offers clinics at a number of centres throughout the area including an additional service at Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother hospital in Margate.

2. Spend on audiology services in the last two years

Historically audiology activity within the Acute Trust providers was commissioned as part of the contract for all ear, nose and throat services and funded within a block contract arrangement. It was recognised that this activity needed to be reported separately in order to ensure the most appropriate investment was given to audiology. Since this split, NHS Kent and Medway have identified and recorded an overall spend of £6,624,294 over the last two years for NHS West Kent audiology services. Coding systems employed by the Trust however do not record the split of activity or spend between paediatric and adult services.

Over the last two years, service spend in east Kent has totalled £3,114,918 at local acute providers. In addition east Kent CCGs further utilised a number of independent audiology clinics working at locations throughout the area and spend at these as

totalled £2,600,000. Once again hospital coding systems currently do not identify the spend in audiology as split between paediatric and adult services.

3. Audiology services in QIPP plans

Paediatric services

Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) are currently going through transition with a view to becoming statutory organisations from April 2013. Whilst paediatric audiology does not appear on QIPP plans this year or for 2013/14, the Child Health and Maternity Commissioning support team and Integrated Provider Management team will work with CCGs to ensure referral pathways and contracts are monitored and reviewed appropriately.

Adult services

The west Kent QIPP plan for audiology focuses on the long term monitoring of patients who were transferred to an alternative provider in January 2011. In addition to this the referral pathways and contracts are monitored and reviewed appropriately. This programme of work helped west Kent to implement self-referrals for patients to the service within a year of referral in order to improve access to services.

Similarly, in east Kent, the focus will be on contract and performance management.

4. Main referral routes to audiology services and waiting times.

Paediatric services

The main referral routes in to paediatric audiology services are via GPs, ENT, Community Paediatricians, Health Visitors and School Nurses.

In west Kent, waiting times do not vary; all children have access to local services and the service meets its 6 weeks national target of 100%. An increase in referrals in east Kent however, has seen an increase in waiting times which vary across localities. These are set out in Table 1.

Table 1: Waiting times from May- November 2012 for East Kent AVB clinics

Average of Weeks wait	Month								
	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Total
Folkestone	29.3	13.7	22.2	15.0	18.2	6.5	5.2	5.9	14.5
Ashford	12.5	17.0	22.2	12.3	14.7	8.0	15.4	7.8	13.6
Canterbury	9.6	16.9	17.8	20.5	13.1	12.6	7.7	9.0	13.6
Ramsgate	21.3	11.5	17.7	13.7	16.8	17.7	9.6	7.1	13.6
Total	18.6	14.8	18.7	15.9	15.3	12.6	9.6	8.0	13.8

Waiting times for the Audiologist led clinic also vary with clinics having a slightly longer waiting time for those over 3 years of age. These are set out in Table 2.

Table 2: Waiting times for east Kent Audiologist-led clinic

Age over 3 years	Number of new referrals from October	Waiting times (as at 4/12/12)
Audiologist Clinic – Canterbury	111	Over 3 months
Audiologist Clinic – Folkestone	20	2 months
Audiologist Clinic – Ashford	35	1-2 months
Audiologist Clinic – Ramsgate	83	Over 3 months
Age 0-3 years		
Canterbury	55	2-3 months
Ashford	63	2-3 months
Ramsgate	19	1-2 months

Adult services

The main referral routes to Adult Audiology services in Kent are written GP referral to the Audiology departments or via ENT for complex patients, patient self-referral within a year and referrals from the West Kent Children’s service when patients turn 16 years of age. Currently all patients referred for audiology across Kent are assessed within 6 weeks and treated within 18 weeks in line with the Department of Health guidelines.

5. Numbers of people in Kent accessing audiology services and proportion accessing services outside Kent and Medway

Paediatric services

The majority of paediatric patients were seen within the services housed in Kent and Medway however a small number each year are seen outside of Kent due to patient, parent or carer choice or to access specialist services in London (identified below)

- Guys and St Thomas – CLAPA, Cochlear Implant and Bone Anchored Hearing Aid (BAHA) surgery.
- GOSH – Auditory processing disorder clinic, Cochlear Implant and BAHA surgery, Second opinion on management.

- Royal National Throat Nose and Ear Hospital – cochlear implant, second opinion on management.

Adult services

The number of referrals over the last twelve months to audiology in west Kent was 12,560. 5% of these referrals were outside of Kent and Medway mainly being the specialist London Hospitals.

In east Kent, 16,000 referrals were made into the acute service, a further 4,000 referrals were made into the independent providers operating on behalf of the NHS. The number of east Kent patients accessing services outside of Kent and Medway is thought to be very small (less than 1%).

6. Changes to paediatric services in west Kent due to inadequate facilities

As outlined in the overview section of this paper, the changes proposed in 2010 have been fully implemented. Clinics are now being delivered in Sevenoaks, Gravesham, Maidstone and Swale.

Additional staff have been appointed to the service to ensure sustainability and continued delivery of a high quality service.

7. Delivery of paediatric services in east Kent

As detailed earlier in this paper, the East Kent Paediatric service comprises of one Consultant Audiovestibular Physician (AVP) and 3 full time Paediatric Audiologists, one of which supports the AVP clinic.

The clinics are as follows:

- AVP clinic in Ashford, Canterbury, Folkestone and Ramsgate.
- Paediatric hearing aid clinic in Ashford, Canterbury and Ramsgate
- Audiologist –led clinics at Ashford, Canterbury, Folkestone and Ramsgate.
- Multidisciplinary or Joint Clinics (AVP, audiologist and teacher of the deaf at Ashford, Canterbury and Ramsgate.
- Audiologist Auditory Brainstem Response (ABR) clinic at Canterbury as needed with or without oral sedation.
- Hearing aid transition clinic for those moving to adult hearing aid service held twice a year held by paediatric audiologist, adult audiologist and teacher of the deaf.

Please see Appendix 1 for the East Kent Children's Hearing Service care pathway.

8. Future service developments

Paediatric services

Future development for paediatric audiology in west Kent includes constantly reviewing and monitoring progress. An increase in the number of referrals indicates a need for further recruitment which is being considered by the provider. Capital bids to upgrade testing equipment have just been approved. The service is currently undergoing its next round of quality assurance and outcomes from this will be incorporated in future plans.

With regards to east Kent paediatric audiology, a business case is being developed to recruit a fourth Audiologist to support the increase in demand. This will enable the Trust to reduce waiting times to 6 weeks across all sites.

Clinics in the Ashford and Thanet Multi-Agency Specialist Hubs will commence in January 2013 enabling access to newly built, fit for purpose paediatric audiology soundproof rooms.

In addition, the Trust is keen to work with commissioners to secure funding for bone anchored hearing aids on soft headbands for children which will negate the need for patients to travel to specialist sites in London.

Adult services

In west Kent, there is currently no new adult audiology commissioning projects planned although this may change if audiology is selected for any future procurement exercises under the Any Qualified Provider (AQP) process.

In east Kent, previous adult audiology commissioning was overseen by a Lead Commissioner. This role has now been subsumed by east Kent Clinical Commissioning Groups - Ashford, Canterbury and Coastal, Thanet and South Kent Coast. As Members are aware, the four east Kent Clinical Commissioning Groups are currently going through transition processes including authorisation to become statutory bodies as from April 2013. In addition they are developing their commissioning intentions for 2013/14 to decide which of their commissioning responsibilities to collaborate on with their adjacent CCGs.

East Kent CCGs have indicated that audiology is an area they would wish to collaborate on with Canterbury and Coastal CCG potentially becoming the lead for this. The discussions between CCGs in this regard are on-going and will need to be finalised. If CCGs agree to work together and for one CCG to lead on audiology, time needs to be allowed for the lead CCG to collaborate with other CCG colleagues with a view to bringing a detailed update to HOSC at a future date.