

Children's Cancer Principal Treatment Centre: Briefing from NHS England and Evelina London Children's Hospital on progress

Background

In March 2024, after a rigorous, clinically-led process including a public consultation, NHS England chose Evelina London Children's Hospital (part of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust) to be the future provider of very specialist cancer services for children who live in south London and much of south east England¹.

As a result of this decision, the current Children's Cancer Principal Treatment Centre, which is provided across two sites (The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust's hospital in Sutton and St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust's hospital in Tooting), will move to Evelina London, with conventional radiotherapy at University College Hospital. This is not expected to happen before October 2026. This reconfiguration will mean:

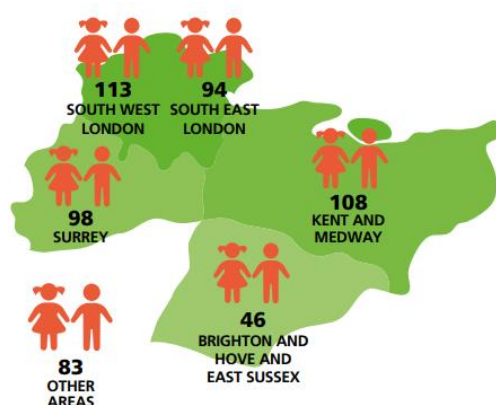
- seriously ill children with cancer undergoing chemotherapy or bone marrow transplants will be on the same site as a level 3 children's intensive care unit (the highest level of intensive care) which is able to provide life support. This is required by the [national service specification](#) which sets the clinical requirements for Principal Treatment Centres in England and is based on clear and robust clinical evidence (including NICE guidance) about what is best for children with cancer.
- children will benefit from the expertise of many other specialist services that they may need within Evelina London's specialist children's hospital
- the future centre will have the potential, like other major centres worldwide, to provide ground-breaking CAR-T treatment and other treatments expected in the future that require a children's intensive care unit onsite.

Who does this change affect?

Children's Cancer Principal Treatment Centres are responsible for making sure every child with cancer gets the expert care they need. They provide diagnosis, treatments, and coordination of very specialist care for children aged 15 and under, and there are 13 of them in England. Data from the public consultation about this change, which was undertaken by NHS England in autumn 2023, showed that:

- about 1,400 children are under the care of the Principal Treatment Centre (PTC) for south London and much of south east England at any given time
- about 190 children in the catchment area are newly diagnosed with cancer every year.

This graphic shows the number of children from each area having inpatient care at the PTC.



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¹ You can read more about the decision-making by NHS England (London and South East Regions) at <https://www.transformationpartners.nhs.uk/childrenscancercentre/key-information/>

How will this work?

All specialist children's cancer services will transfer from The Royal Marsden to Evelina London except for children's conventional radiotherapy, which will move to University College Hospital in central London². This is where children with cancer who live in the catchment area of south London, Kent, Medway, most of Surrey and much of Sussex already have proton beam therapy³. Conventional radiotherapy for patients aged 16+ will continue to be provided at The Royal Marsden.

Children's cancer surgery currently provided at St George's Hospital will also transfer to Evelina London. St George's children's cancer shared care unit⁴, neurosurgery service⁵, and children's intensive care unit will not move, and will continue to provide care for children who need it.

At Evelina London, there will be an inpatient ward, day case treatments area, and an outpatients department specially designed for children with cancer and their families. Many other services that children with cancer may need, including the level 3 children's intensive care unit, diagnostics (such as MRI and CT scans), and specialist children's services (heart, kidney, gastroenterology, infectious diseases services, and many others) are already provided by Evelina London and will be expanded where necessary to cope with the added demand.

Some inpatients will need to be transferred from Evelina London for treatment elsewhere, such as for radiotherapy⁶, or specialist surgery, including neurosurgery, at centres with specific expertise⁷. This will be carefully planned.

Benefits of the change

The future Principal Treatment Centre at Evelina London will bring together expert staff from the current service at The Royal Marsden and St George's Hospital with Evelina London's specialist teams who already care for children with complex and rare medical conditions.

At the future centre:

- very sick children who need intensive care input will no longer be transferred to another hospital as happens now. Such transfers are currently done as safely as possible but, even in a special children's ambulance with an expert team onboard, they add avoidable risks, and stress, to what is already a very difficult situation
- some very sick children may be able to avoid intensive care completely, thanks to face-to-face review by onsite intensive care specialists, working closely with the cancer teams
- for children who need it, the intensive care unit will be just one floor away from the cancer ward
- most other specialist children's services that children with cancer may need will also be onsite, including tertiary heart and kidney services.

² University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, which University College Hospital is part of, already provides all forms of radiotherapy for children under the care of the other Principal Treatment Centres (PTCs) in London and the south east.

³ In coming years, more children are expected to have proton beam therapy than conventional radiotherapy. Though it is only suitable for certain types of tumours, proton beam therapy precisely targets tumours, reducing damage to healthy tissue and potentially reducing long-term side effects.

⁴ This is one of 15 children's cancer shared care units in district general hospitals across the catchment area, which provide supportive care and, where agreed, specific chemotherapy treatments, as close to home as possible, sharing care with the PTC.

⁵ The majority of neurosurgery (approximately 80%) for children with cancer will continue to be at King's College Hospital, with the other 20% at St George's Hospital, as now.

⁶ Conventional radiotherapy is onsite at The Royal Marsden as part of the PTC. When children's cancer services move, children will have all their radiotherapy at University College Hospital instead of some, as now. While bringing services together will create opportunities to improve care, it will also mean planned transfers of about 10 inpatients a year that don't happen now, and longer journeys for about 25 children a year having radiotherapy as outpatients. More information is at <https://www.transformationpartners.nhs.uk/childrenscancercentre/key-information/>

⁷ Children already have bone, eye and liver cancer surgery, as well as cancer-related neurosurgery, at a number of different specialist centres because of the specific expertise these hospitals have, and this will continue.

- Guy's and St Thomas' has pledged to create exceptional capabilities for immunological and advanced cellular research for children's cancer care, supported by a comprehensive clinical trial programme and advanced imaging research. This could have national and international benefits
- it will be easier for different specialist teams treating the same children to work closely together, improving care for children, supporting new kinds of research, and helping the future centre keep and attract new staff
- more children will be supported to access care closer to home where this is clinically appropriate, as a result of Evelina London using its experience of working closely with paediatric teams across the catchment area to improve care at children's cancer shared care units.

This is a complex programme and, as with any service move, there are risks that need to be managed. All organisations involved are committed to working closely together to ensure the best outcome for children.

Progress so far

Since March, Evelina London and NHS England (London and South East regions) have been working with partners to jointly plan and put in place arrangements that will enable the Principal Treatment Centre to transfer safely to Evelina London, building on the strengths of the existing service and making the most of everything Evelina London has to offer. The service is not expected to transfer before October 2026 and there will be no sudden changes to children's cancer care in the meantime. Ensuring continuity of care now and the safe move of the service when the time comes is the priority of everyone involved.

NHS England's role is to oversee implementation of the reconfiguration. This includes the delivery of recommendations agreed at the [decision-making meeting](#) and [advice from the Mayor of London](#) to ensure that, in line with the objectives for the service change, the future centre:

- **complies** with the national service specification with all the benefits that will bring
- **builds** on the many strengths of the existing children's cancer service
- **gives best quality care** to achieve **world-class outcomes** for children with cancer for decades to come.

NHS England is working with The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust, St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and other partners to minimise any impacts on the current providers. It is also working with the Children's Cancer Network to improve the range of care provided by children's cancer shared care units across the catchment area. This is in line with [the national service specification for these units](#) and will help reduce the need for travel to Evelina London.

Evelina London's role is to deliver the safe transfer of the Principal Treatment Centre to its future location, successfully integrating very specialist children's cancer services and clinical trials into its existing outstanding-rated children's services. As part of this, it is working closely with partners, patients and families, staff and other key stakeholders to ensure that the future centre delivers the service change objectives⁸. This will include addressing any potential issues or risks, such as those raised through the public consultation and other engagement⁹.

Evelina London is **listening to patients, families, staff and other experts** and has:

⁸ You can read more about Evelina London's approach, including how it is involving children, families and the public, at www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/childrenscancer

⁹ Potential issues raised to date include travel to the future centre and for radiotherapy, impacts on the children's cancer workforce, and on research. For more information, <https://www.transformationpartners.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/You-said-we-did-report-how-we-have-responded-to-feedback-from-the-consultation-.pdf>

- established strong working relationships with key partners including The Royal Marsden and St George's. Families of young patients treated by them for cancer and their staff are helping shape plans for the future centre
- set up a fully functioning programme, complete with a structure of Boards and working groups, and robust arrangements for patient, public and staff engagement at all levels. Representatives from the current service are an integral part of workstreams, including those with a focus on developing the designs for the future service, clinical pathways, and workforce planning
- set up a Partnership Advisory Board to be a 'critical friend' on patient and public engagement, with sub groups that look at travel, access and accommodation, and clinical matters, including pathways and patient experience, from the point of view of patients and families.

Evelina London is finding ways to reduce the stress for families of children **travelling to the future cancer centre** with plans for:

- drawing on its extensive experience of looking after children who require complex care to reduce the number of times they need to travel to hospital. For example, scheduling multiple appointments across different clinical specialities for the same day
- providing patient transport vehicles when needed for children travelling to an appointment/hospital stay
- free parking available for all parents/carers of children with cancer who prefer to drive their children to their appointments
- discussions with Transport for London about the possibility of exempting cars taking children to appointments from ULEZ (Ultra Low Emissions Zone) and congestion charges. This would mean parents would not have to claim back these costs. It would benefit all children undergoing planned care at Evelina London
- a parent bed and storage area next to every patient bed on the children's cancer ward¹⁰
- a significant increase in the number of single rooms on the cancer ward compared to the current service, enabling privacy, comfort and high-quality care for patients and families
- advice and oversight from the Travel, Access and Accommodation Advisory Group of family members and charities that Evelina London has set up to advise this work. Most of its members are parents (as suggested by the Mayor of London) and recruitment will continue throughout the programme to ensure diverse representation across the catchment areas and patient groups
- plans to provide advice, guidance and support, including education, to staff treating children with cancer in shared care units. This will complement work by NHS England and Children's Cancer Networks to agree a schedule of chemotherapy drugs that can be given at shared care units. Both will increase the range of treatments available closer to home, in line with healthcare policy.

Evelina London is making sure the future centre **meets the needs of patients, families and staff** and has:

- appointed an expert design team to develop plans for the building's layout and environment – chosen with input from staff and patient representatives
- developed high-level floorplans for the ward, day treatment and outpatient spaces drawing on detailed feedback from the public consultation, and 20+ recent engagement sessions with staff, family members, and children's cancer charities
- agreed and scheduled the programme of internal moves at Evelina London which will release space for the future Principal Treatment Centre

¹⁰ In addition to the beds on the ward, there are parent rooms adjacent to the children's intensive care unit and further accommodation available on the St Thomas' site. The 59-bedroom Ronald McDonald house for families whose children face long stays in Evelina London Children's hospital is a 5-10 minute walk away. This is the biggest facility of its kind in London and the south east

- recruited to roles essential to the successful delivery of the programme, with the support of funding from NHS England.

Other providers involved are also being supported to recruit and release staff so they can fully participate in the development of plans.

Evelina London will focus next on:

- finalising its **outline business case** for this development (an important requirement to demonstrate that plans continue to be robust, affordable and will meet the needs of the service)
- establishing a **Research Advisory Board** to advise on how best to manage risks and maximise opportunities from the relocation of the children's cancer centre
- developing an integrated workforce plan and a workforce engagement plan to **support the retention of the current highly skilled, expert staff** during this period of transition and any **recruitment required** to ensure the future centre has the expertise it needs
- setting up a Clinical Oversight Group to oversee all aspects of the development of clinical pathways for the future centre, including **neurosurgery**, and will work closely with University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust on **radiotherapy**.

We at NHS England and Evelina London are very grateful to everyone who is contributing to this work. The programme is well and truly underway and gaining momentum all the time. Families, staff and charities are sharing their experience and expertise to help ensure the change happens as soon and as smoothly as possible, for the sake of the children and young people who will benefit from more joined-up care. We are committed to ensuring their voices, alongside those of other partners, guide the programme to create the best possible services for children.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this further:

- please contact Evelina London at ChildrensCancer@gstt.nhs.uk.
- please contact NHS England at england.ptcchildrenscancer@nhs.net.