Promoting & protecting children's rights

Send by email: sarah.blow@swlondon.nhs.uk

Sarah Blow
Accountable Officer
NHS Kingston CCG

29th January 2019

Dear Sarah Blow,

I am writing to you as the Accountable Officer for NHS Kingston CCG. This is a statutory letter under Section 2C of the Children Act 2004, to which you are required to respond[i].

This follows research my team has undertaken into NHS children's mental health services. My Briefing 'The State of Children's Mental Health Services' focuses on progress in children's mental health services. Despite some improvements in access to provision, too few children are receiving help and barriers to access remain considerable. In response, I will be calling on the Government to increase funding to increase the scale and speed of development of children's mental health services, both in the NHS and outside.

However, this research also finds significant local variation between CCG's in terms of provision and accessibility of services. The data shows that some areas are effectively years ahead in terms of improving services. My team has assessed areas based on data that individual CCGs have provided to NHS England and NHS Digital. In doing this, my team has compared CCGs to one another, rather than against an objective standard. While there are big issues across England, I am concerned to see that your CCG appears to perform poorly relative to others. In particular the data shows that:

- NHS Kingston CCG committed just 0.67% of its budget to children's mental health services last year.
- This means your CCG was spending just £41.15 per child last year, compared to £188 per adult. Even when we account for additional services provided by NHS England[ii] – which is equivalent to £33 per child – we find adult spending per head to be significantly higher.
- 4.3% of children were in contact with services, against an estimated national prevalence of 12.8% of children who have a diagnosable mental health condition.
- Of these, 52% of children who were referred to CYPMHS did not go on enter treatment[iii]
- It also meant that children were waiting an average of 62 days to enter treatment.

As I state above, this assessment is based on the data that you and the services you have commissioned provided to NHS England and NHS Digital. If you think the data is incorrect, or our analysis is misleading, please get in touch.

Given these findings, I am writing to formally ask that you:

1) Acknowledge the findings of CYPMHS in your area in our report and the significant impact this is having on children and their families.
2) Set out a clear timetable for improvements in CYPMHS in your area, including the work you are undertaking with the community and voluntary sector to expand services.
3) Explain how you will be meeting the following commitments outlined in the NHS Long Term Plan:

Children's Commissioner for England: Anne Longfield OBE

Post: Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT
Tel: 020 7783 8330 Email: info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk
Visit: www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

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a. Increase funding for children's mental health services at a greater rate than funding overall and spending on adult mental health, to address the significance imbalance identified above. I would like to understand what specific targets you have set in this regard.

b. Embedding mental health support in schools and colleges

c. "Ensure that 100% of children and young people who need specialist mental health care can access it"[iv]

4) Specifically, I would ask that straight away you:

a. Ensure at least 1% of your budget is dedicated to CYPMHS in 2019/20

b. Aim to ensure that 'no child is turned away' by guaranteeing that every child referred to CYPMHS will be offered some type of support either from the NHS or voluntary sector partner. I would be grateful if you would give a timeframe for this response.

This letter, and your response, will be published.

Section 2C of the 2004 gives me discretion over the time-frame in which I require a response. Given the seriousness of these issues, I expect a response by 11th March 2020. If you cannot respond by this date please contact my Head of Public Affairs, Martin Lennon (martin.lennon@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk) to discuss an extension.

I look forward to working with you to improve the provision of mental health services for children.

Yours sincerely,

Anne Longfield
Children's Commissioner for England

[i] Section 2(C)(3) of the Children Act 2004 applies when, following the publication of a report, the Children's Commissioners writes to someone 'exercising functions of a public nature' relative to children. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/section/2C

[ii] By which I mean NHS specialised commissioning, providing in-patient and other highly specialised services.

[iii] Defined as two or more contacts with CYMPHS.

[iv] https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/nhs-long-term-plan-version-1.2.pdf