

Enter and View

Speech and Language Service – Adults.

10 March 2023



Report on Enter and View Visit Undertaken by Healthwatch Staffordshire on 10 March 2023

Service Visited:

Speech and Language Therapy - Adults – MPFT Staffordshire countywide (NS; SS).

Done via Microsoft Teams, due to adverse weather, thus unable to access venue.

Context of Visit:

MPFT has organised a Quality Standards Assurance Visit (QSAV), and this has been arranged alongside Staffordshire Healthwatch.

Currently there is a 'Service Review' taking place within the MPFT NHS, looking at how the Speech and Language therapy is being delivered for the adult population of Staffordshire and what the future needs are.

Review Method:

This visit was done jointly between Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (MPFT), who were conducting an internal quality visit and Healthwatch Staffordshire who were conducting an independent Enter and View.

The main aim, by combining the visits, was to gain a comprehensive view of the service, with minimal disruption to operational delivery. The review meeting was held via Microsoft teams, due to adverse weather conditions, on the morning of the planned visit, impeding travelling. On another day, the Trust's *Involvement team* will speak to five service users to gain their experience of the services, first hand; this will enable MPFT to gain a holistic view of the service. A day of shadowing the team to observe clinical care delivery has also been arranged.

Both Healthwatch and the MPFT Quality Team are producing their reports individually and this report is an independent view from Healthwatch. Thanks goes to all MPFT staff, who made us welcome into the meeting and participated to the discussions, with honesty and transparency.

The Review Team: The visiting team consisted of:

- Daniela Ballantine, Engagement Officer, Healthwatch Staffordshire
- Quality Assurance and Effectiveness Manager, MPFT
- Trust Governor
- Trust Non-Executive Director
- Senior Clinical Quality Improvement & Assurance Manager, Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Integrated Care Board

The SLT Team presenting updates on the delivery of service were:

- Operational Manager, Speech and Language Therapy, MPFT
- SLT Lead, MPFT
- SLT Lead, MPFT
- other SLT practitioners and professionals from the MPFT - were present and participated into the discussions.

Service Outline:

The Operational Manager, gave an overview of the service, explaining there are two parts to the team; before, the North and the South were separate; their aim now is to come together and work cohesively as one team, still covering countywide.

The team provides assessment, intervention, and treatments for people experiencing language and communication difficulties, which significantly impact their daily life. The Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) team provides therapy and support for the adult population of Staffordshire: anyone aged 18+, who has been referred into the service.

Service Users – approximately 60% of referrals to the SLT, are for people suffering from Dysphagia, which is a swallowing impairment, thus persons experiencing varying degrees of feeding and swallowing problems, associated with risks of choking.

The rest of the SLT referrals are for adults with a wide span of communication needs, ranging from disfluency diagnosis (stuttering, stammering), to Stroke and related speech and communication problems, which can also be experienced as a result of head injury, head/neck cancers, degenerative (progressive) diseases: Dementia, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's etc.

For the above patients, especially those with Motor Neurone Diseases (MND) and survivors of strokes, the SLT offer *Alternative and Augmentative (Enhancive) Communication* methods, from simple Alphabet aids and devices to hi-tech equipment, depending on individual needs.

Additionally, the team works well with a small number of patients with voice disorders, which may include support for people through their transgender journey.

Settings:

North Staffordshire service: Bentilee Neighbourhood Centre, Dawlish Drive, Bentilee, Stoke-On-Trent, ST2 0EU, Telephone: 01782 234481.

South Staffordshire have got centres in Cannock, Lichfield and Stafford; some are based within the Community Hospital Lichfield or the County Hospital Stafford.

North and South are managed by an operational manager, with locality leads in each team.

[Speech & Language Therapy Services \(Adults\) :: Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust \(mpft.nhs.uk\)](https://www.mpft.nhs.uk)

Settings (continued):

The team receives self-referrals, referrals from GP's, from Carers, referrals from Hospitals; the therapists liaise with patients, their family /carer, other professionals. The Speech and Language Therapists work in a variety of settings: patient's homes, Care Homes, Community Clinics that patients attend, Tele-health service for Voice patients that lost their voice through over-use: professionals such as teachers, singers, who are usually happy to do several therapy sessions via on-line platform.

Other settings are within Hospital Wards, for example, at Haywood Hospital - MPFT provide some support to the hospital, to overcome some capacity issues they have had at the hospital and help the patients as soon as practicable. This now includes support to: Sneyd Ward, Stroke rehabilitation ward, and Broadfield ward, which is a specialist rehabilitation ward for adults with disabling conditions, including acquired brain injury, all neurological and spinal cord disorders, musculoskeletal conditions and limb loss.

When discussing recruitment challenges, the team explained that they used innovative methods, by recruiting Band 5 Speech and Language Therapists and progressing them to Band6, through appropriate training and development of skills on the job, including being able to do the 'Feeding and Swallowing Assessments' for the Dysphagia patients. They work alongside a senior, more experienced colleague, and they learn from the SLT (Band6 and Band7) specialists. This model proved to be working well, thus it has been effective.

Staffing: there are 35 staff-members countywide, and these include:

- Speech and Language Therapists (Band 6; Band 7).
- Speech and Language Therapists (Band 5) or Assistant Practitioners (Band 4)
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We were informed that currently, there is a shortage of staff, which management are addressing, by using innovative ways for recruitment and retention of new staff.

Staff appeared to be well motivated, passionate, and working as a cohesive team, despite the above pressures and capacity issues within the service.

The Speech and Language Therapists liaise and collaborate with:

- Psychologists
- Occupational Therapists
- Dieticians (regarding nutrition, feeding & swallowing)
- Healthcare Support Workers
- Psychiatrists
- Community Mental Health Practitioners (CMHPs); and the Crisis teams
- Social Workers and/ or Social Prescribers

- Nursing Homes staff; Care Agencies; Charitable organisations, supporting patients with loans, aids, adaptations, or equipment - Parkinson's Foundation, Multiple Sclerosis Society, Motor Neurone Disease Association (MNDA) etc.
- Partners providing support with housing, financial support, well-being, and lifestyle services.

As the pandemic has eased, staff are working a mixture of: from the office or other setting, and remotely. This appears to be working well. On the whole, the team did not describe any challenges with digital technology and access to electronic systems.

We were told that, historically, the team had been commissioned differently in the North and the South of the SLT, within the MPFT. However, in March'20, three areas within the South: Cannock, Lichfield, and Stafford, were brought together, to provide a service for one list of patients, while in the North, there are specialist teams led by (Band 7), who cover each element of the service (Dysphagia, voice and communication).

The challenges around capacity and demand, have been partially addressed by using staff more flexibly across North and South, in as far as possible. The team were asked regarding any health inequalities that might be present or arise as a result of different ways of working between the North and the South.

The team acknowledged that, due to very specialised skills of the Band 7 therapists, there could potentially be inequalities amongst service users, in terms of waiting times for them; this situation has been very challenging and rather impossible to avoid.

Referrals and Wait Times:

The referral pathway: there is an 'Open' referral process that can be done on-line.

Approximately, GPs refer a proportion of 40% of the patients, Nursing homes refer another 40%, and 20% of referrals are Acute, received from Hospital-wards or other acute settings.

There is a 36 weeks' waiting list for patients with Dysphagia, although waiting times are usually shorter, for patients with general communication problems (see NOTES).

Some staff told us they are working with manageable caseloads and are now able to case manage (see NOTES), drawing on the full range of clinical resources across the countywide team including those of wider partners, thus offering a more holistic approach.

Feedback from service users to this changing approach is generally positive with a more personalised response that attempts to address the issues that were causing them a degree of anxiety, rather than treating the symptoms alone.

Contact Details for Professionals and the Public:

[Speech & Language Therapy Services \(Adults\) :: Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust \(mpft.nhs.uk\)](https://www.mpft.nhs.uk/services/speech-language-therapy/adults)

The above website offers detailed information regarding the Speech and Language service and contact and referral methods and pathways.

Service User Experiences:

The Involvement team will speak to five service users and to gain their experience of the services, first hand; this will enable MPFT to gain a holistic view of the service.

Calls to the Healthwatch Enquiries Line have included queries about SLT referral pathways for adults, and we signposted them in the right direction, offering them information, advice and guidance.

Some patients have already confirmed that the service they have been receiving from the SLT team, has been of a high standard.

Supporting the Rehabilitation of Service Users and Patients

There is currently a Service Review taking place, looking at establishing further ways of transforming the service, to benefit the Trust, the staff, and its service users.

Summary and Recommendations:

The joint quality visit by Staffordshire Healthwatch with the MPFT's Quality Team has been very positive.

The visit was able to demonstrate considerable progress in meeting the challenges of moving from a diagnosis led service to an approach that is needs led, thus focusing on the rehabilitation of patients with speech and language disorders, or any other communication conditions.

Strengths:

- Successfully integrating two teams into one, and working as a cohesive team
- Addressing staff recruitment and retention, through innovative ways, as highlighted in this report.
- Investment in a range of partners that can address the wider determinants of physical and emotional health and showing a positive impact.
- A reduction in the waiting list to 36 weeks for Dysphagia patients; waiting lists were longer before.
- Proactive management of referrals by the relevant team, on a weekly basis.
- Developed a more holistic approach to case management.
- Evidence of positive team management that has created an inclusive and very supportive environment, within which staff and partners operate.
- Strong values and MPFT corporate culture, shining through staff's attitudes and behaviours.

- A very high calibre of personnel, who are very passionate about their work.
- A recognition from service users of good quality service delivered by the SLT.

Needs:

- Continue to design and improve Care Pathways for patients or service users.
- The Service Review to identify and implement viable solutions for the disparity between demand and capacity, as the Speech and Language service countywide, are under-resourced, in terms of staff capacity.

NOTES:

FEEDBACK and updates from the MPFT NHS Trust, received on 24/03/23:

The Operational Manager wished to make some further clarifications, regarding waiting times and, regarding managing caseloads by staff, as captured below:

- 'There is a prioritisation system in place, to prioritise those patients who need to be seen quickly. Currently, the longest wait for Dysphagia is 48 weeks. However, our urgent patients get seen much quicker: usually within 4 weeks'.

A junior speech and language therapist in the south, was comfortable with her caseload. However, according to the Operational Manager, across the teams:

- 'Staff do not feel there are manageable caseloads.'
