Proposed
ASD Unified Diagnostic Pathway
Fiona Knott, Iona Wood

Fiona.knott@berkshire.nhs.uk
Iona.wood@berkshire.nhs.uk
Background

• Initially considered a rare disorder, numbers of children recognised to have an ASD have increased significantly year by year
• Current best estimates suggest prevalence of just over 1%
• Using figures provided by Children with Disabilities Needs Assessment: estimated 1160 children with ASD in NHS Berkshire West.
• Increases in prevalence combined with complex range of needs for children and families pose a significant challenge for health, education and social care
ASD Services

• Services have developed over time in a piecemeal fashion in Berkshire
• Recent Dingley review highlighted very considerable issues for ASD in Berkshire; mirrors UK-wide NAS ‘You Need to Know’ report. Both refer to problems with:

  ❖ Screening, diagnosis, intervention (eg mental health, speech and language, occupational therapy), education, support (including respite, leisure), training
Diagnostic pathway

• To make manageable the huge task of improving services across the board, we are tackling the diagnostic pathway as a first step, because its manageable and (relatively) quick to implement.

  ▶ To develop a high quality diagnostic service in Berkshire, with screening and onward referral as appropriate.
Diagnostic shortfalls: why?

• Significant increase in the demand for assessment, leading to large increase in referrals

❖ DLC records show 97 children were referred for diagnostic assessment in 2004 and 300 in 2009
Diagnostic shortfalls: why

• Age criteria for access is arbitrary and confusing across Berkshire
• No standardized assessment procedure (process, tools, involvement of other profs)
• Lack of protocol about what is offered immediately post diagnosis
• Lack of training about ASD (recognition, referral, diagnosis)
Proposed diagnostic pathway

• Planned new unified pathway where all children under 18 are seen by 1 service, in clinics that meet their particular needs, with a single point of access and following a standardised process
Principles of new system

• All children to be offered the same assessment process, with timely diversion to CAMHS Choice or Paeds appointment if ASD looks unlikely at any stage

• Assessment to follow National Autism Plan for Children, and NICE guidelines.
Referral process

• Online information will include downloadable referral form, clinic information, info about ASD, links, Photos to help prepare children?

• Referral – to one centre using standardised referral forms. Referral by GP, schools, HV
Referral process

• Following receipt of referral, we will ring referrer or parent for more information or to clarify their understanding of the referral if needed
• May also of course come to CAMHS or paeds for other reasons and be referred across
• Similarly, if need for assessment is not clear, children can have a ‘choice’ appointment in CAMHS or Paeds
Screening process

• We will send out standardised screening questionnaires (home and school/nursery), a form asking parents to describe their concerns, and to give us information about the professionals involved with their child

• We will include some information about the purpose of the assessment and the process with this pack
Screening and triage

• Once all forms returned, telephone call to parents if additional information needed or for clarification
• Allocate to appropriate clinic. Clinics might include ‘straightforward’ assessment (1 specialist and 1 non-specialist), complex/second opinion (2 or 3 specialist ASD clinicians)
• Assessment will not proceed till all forms are back including those from school (we will chase!)
Assessment Clinic

- Appointment letter plus leaflet about the process, including information about what to say to young people and a leaflet for children
- Assessment. Single clinic lasting about 2 hours for developmental history and ADOS, brief feedback
- Staffed by experienced and trained clinicians
School and other information

• Additional school /nursery information collected by observation or interview (assistant psych) in most cases
• May be omitted if sufficient information already available
• Reports from SLT, EP etc as appropriate
Feedback appointment

• Aiming to offer feedback in a month
• Appointment with parents, finalise report, screen for onward referrals (OT, SLT, medical conditions, mental health)
• Information pack for parents including local services, information about ASD
Post feedback

• Multi-professional meeting if required
• Parents invited to psycho-education group (PAWS, Moving on, etc)
• Close to diagnostic pathway (but with onward referrals where appropriate)
Benefits

• Primary benefit: pathway is clear; families will have a speedy and organised journey with feedback and onward referral built in
• Follows NICE guidelines using high quality assessments and trained staff
• Many other benefits eg training, research, service development