

Dear Colleagues,

We wanted to ensure you are fully sighted on the changes we are making to the referral criteria for autism assessment and paediatric services within Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire so you are able to respond to any queries from your constituents.

There has been, for some time, a steady rise across England in the number of children and young people seeking a referral for an autism assessment or paediatric appointment and this has further increased because of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Over the past two years, there has been a 350% rise in the numbers of children waiting for an autism assessment. We currently have 2,792 children across BNSSG on the waiting list and 1,638 children in the triage process. Children who are being seen currently have waited over two years for an autism assessment, and 50 weeks for a paediatric appointment. Children who are now being referred will wait considerably longer.

To meet the needs of as many children, young people and families as possible, we have moved to a needs-led model of support. Under this model, support services are designed to be flexible and responsive to changes in an individual's circumstances and needs.

This means the way we manage our waiting lists is changing. From 1 March, referrals received will be prioritised on the needs of each child, young person and family.

This review has been led by our clinicians and overseen through our internal quality assurance process. On average 40% of the current referrals will meet this criterion outlined overleaf and via the web links.

Children do not require a diagnosis to have their needs met in schools and other settings, and the wait for the outcome of a diagnostic assessment can delay children receiving appropriate support. If a child does not meet the criteria, parents/carers and the referrer will receive a letter containing information about how other services may be able to provide a needs-based assessment, with recommendations on how to meet the child's needs without requiring a diagnosis. This could include school/nursery/college (SENCO), children's centre, health visitor, or universal health services.

To support this, Sirona's Associate Director for Children's Services, Lorraine McMullen, has recorded a [short presentation to talk through the main changes](#) which is being shared with stakeholders and local parent/carer forums have helped us with our approach to letters to families.

Every family on our waiting list will receive a letter explaining the change and every child referred before 1 March will be triaged according to the previous criteria. We have also set up a dedicated helpdesk which is available Monday to Friday during usual office hours on CPASDhelpdesk@nhs.net and the telephone number 0300 125 5560.



**Bristol, North Somerset
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A summary of the changes can be found online – [paediatric referrals](#) or [autism assessment](#). The ICB has been briefed on these changes and is fully supportive of the new approach.

Representatives of the Sirona team joined North Somerset colleagues on Thursday, 23 February, at the regular meeting of MPs with the ICB; and will join Bristol MP colleagues on Friday, 3 March. A date is not currently fixed for a meeting with South Gloucestershire MP colleagues but if one would be helpful, please contact Becky Balloch at the ICB: becky.balloch@nhs.net.

We hope you find this helpful, and if there are any queries, please do not hesitate to contact us.

With best wishes

Ceridwen Massey, Chief Operating Officer at Sirona care & health