Statement on ADHD Assessment Policy in Coventry and Warwickshire

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a condition that affects people's behaviour, causing restlessness, trouble concentrating, and impulsive actions. While most cases are diagnosed in childhood, there are a growing number of adults seeking diagnosis.

In Coventry and Warwickshire, our current ADHD assessment system is not working effectively—particularly for children. We currently have over 7500 children and young people waiting for an ADHD assessment and waiting times for some children will be in excess of 10 years. This is unacceptable and clearly signals the need for a different approach.

ADHD assessments fall under "Right to Choose" national policy [1] so patients are able to see any provider in the country who holds a qualifying contract with any Integrated Care Board or NHS England, as long as this is in line with any local policy. This has resulted in adult waiting lists being considerably lower as there are many more providers across the country who offer adult assessments compared to children. Adults can often be seen in a few months, while children with potentially more severe symptoms can wait much longer. Currently 70% of "right to choose" assessments of individuals who live in Coventry and Warwickshire are for adults.

However, our clinical experts advise that the impact of an ADHD diagnosis is significantly more profound for children. For many children, a diagnosis can be life-changing—helping them stay in school, develop social skills, succeed in exams, and learn how to function and thrive in society. By contrast, most adults have already developed coping mechanisms for their ADHD, and while diagnosis and access to medication can be beneficial in some cases, the impact is generally less transformative.

We are also unable to undertake any kind of quality monitoring and assessment of ADHD assessments when carried out by organisations which Coventry and Warwickshire ICB does not hold a direct contract with. We believe there may be significant overdiagnosis for adults which can lead to unnecessary medication and other complications. As we do not manage the waiting lists we are also unable to prioritise those who are most unwell/most at risk to or control our costs – in 2024/45 we spent £2.5m on adult ADHD assessments through Right to Choose which is nearly double the entire budget for all age ADHD assessments delivered by our local provider, Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust.

We are committed to undertaking a radical development and transformation of ADHD services in our area. This will take time to do properly, and will address not just the waiting list, but improve the service from initial identification of symptoms, through to assessment and subsequent support and care.

In the meantime, however, we must act urgently to reduce the backlog and prioritise those in greatest need. Therefore, while we work on this ADHD transformation programme, we are introducing a temporary policy.

From now on, **we will only accept new ADHD referrals for people aged 25 and under.**

No new referrals will be accepted for those aged over 25.

This decision will allow us to redirect capacity and resources to begin reducing the waiting list for children. It is expected to free up significant clinical time and release funding that we can reinvest into children's ADHD services.

Importantly, this change does not affect adults who are already on the waiting list—if you are over 25 and have already been referred, your assessment will still go ahead.

This interim policy will remain in place until we have implemented a new, comprehensive ADHD pathway for Coventry and Warwickshire that is fit for purpose and supports all of our local residents.

[1] Right to Choose grant patients the legal right to select their own service provider for some health needs. This means they are able to access any provider who supplies ADHD assessment services to the NHS via a qualifying contracted held with an ICB or NHS England anywhere in England.

Summary messages and supporting grid

1. The current ADHD assessment system in Coventry and Warwickshire is not working effectively, especially for children, with waiting lists stretching up to seven years.
2. A new interim policy is being introduced to accept only new ADHD referrals for people aged 25 and under, freeing up clinical time and funding to be reinvested into children's ADHD services
3. There is a commitment to undertake a comprehensive review of the entire ADHD assessment pathway, working with children, young people, and adults with ADHD, to ensure it meets their needs

How we do ADHD assessments isn't working	**We've put in an interim policy to prioritise children**	**We're going to transform how we deliver ADHD services**
Children have to wait for up to seven years	Receiving a diagnosis benefits children much more than adults	We will improve all aspects of the ADHD service
We spend more than is affordable on adult assessment	The policy restricts all referrals for adults 25+	Work started in April and includes all system partners
We have concerns about quality and value of RtC	This releases funding and capacity to tackle waiting lists	The policy will remain until new services are established