



**South West London**

3rd Floor  
120 The Broadway  
London  
SW19 1RH

23 October 2023

Our Ref: SWLICB/PALS-042

Mr Pete Flavell  
Chief Executive Officer, Healthwatch Sutton  
Sent via Email: [pete@healthwatchesutton.org.uk](mailto:pete@healthwatchesutton.org.uk)

**Re: Healthwatch report: The impact of the Covid pandemic on the mental wellbeing of 9-11 year-olds in Sutton**

Dear Pete,

Thank you for sharing the Sutton Healthwatch report on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental wellbeing of children in years 5 and 6 of primary school. We appreciate your dedication to this important issue and the thorough analysis which has been provided in the report.

Your report clearly highlights a concerning decline in the overall mental wellbeing of children within this age group between 2020 and 2023. This reflects the national increase in the prevalence rates. NHS Digital data shows an increase from one in nine children experiencing mental health problems in 2017 to one in six in 2022. The number of children who miss half or more of school attendance has doubled since the pandemic and demand for children and young people's mental health services in SW London has increased in terms of volumes of referrals, acuity, and complexity.

Your six key findings developed from your wide-ranging survey provide valuable insights into the potential causes and areas that require attention. As part of developing the all age Mental Health Strategy earlier this year, the ICB sought feedback from service users, carers and wider stakeholders. Children and young people's mental health is a key priority within the strategy and the outputs from your survey will help to support the ICB's insight into the prevailing needs for children and young people emotional and mental wellbeing.

Work is underway across the ICB to better support children and young people and address current levels of need. Increased funding of £3.8m was allocated to children's mental health in 2023/24 to improve access and to continue the expansion of school support teams. There is a focus on increasing understanding of effective mental ill-health prevention for children and young people and increasing universal mental health and wellbeing support in settings such as schools and community services. The ICB also aims to improve awareness to support self-help and early

diagnosis and reduce stigma by supporting children and young people to normalise talking about mental wellbeing.

There are several challenges to addressing the increase in demand and the recruitment and retention of a sustainable workforce is a significant issue for children and young people's mental health services across London, and one we are working to address. We are utilising non-traditional workforces through our teams, such as occupational therapist and expanding the workforce using Recruit-to-Train posts through NHS and voluntary sector providers.

The section below seeks to respond to the eight areas identified in your letter dated 4th October 2023:

### **1. Contacts**

- SW London ICB – John Atherton [john.atherton@swlondon.nhs.uk](mailto:john.atherton@swlondon.nhs.uk) (Director of Mental Health Transformation)
- SWLSTG – Amy Scammell [amy.scammell@swlstg.nhs.uk](mailto:amy.scammell@swlstg.nhs.uk) (Director of Strategy, Transformation & Commercial Development)

### **2. External contacts**

- Off the Record – [karenstott@talkofftherecord.org](mailto:karenstott@talkofftherecord.org) (Chief Executive Officer)

### **3. Activity**

There are several programmes of work underway to make services more accessible:

- Development of a children & young people's mental health directory for SW London, which details the range providers across the six boroughs.
- Implementation of better communication tools by developing a waiting list pack to support children and parents awaiting a first appointment with the emotional wellbeing services. This includes access to curated self-help materials while awaiting a first appointment.
- Deployment of mental health early intervention and prevention posts within primary care settings.
- Investment in the South London Listens project to deliver a Virtual Waiting Room to provide support and self-help guidance while people await an appointment and the digitalisation of the CAMHS waiting lists.

### **4. Report response**

- Less happy

This is in line with access into the children and young people's mental health services increasing significantly over the past three years supported by national and local trend data from NHS England. The underlying causes are complex and national analysis shows links to a range of factors including increased recognition of mental health issues, the enduring impact of the pandemic and increased financial insecurity, which is a significant risk factor for children and young people's mental health.

- Experiencing more negative issues, especially girls

Girls account for 64% of referrals into Sutton's mental health services. Girls reporting difficult negative experiences would again be in line with the referral patterns we observe.

- Less happy about family

Across the system we have increased the volume of digital and early intervention opportunities for children and young people to access, such as Kooth.

Kooth reported that 'issues with family' as the primary presenting issue has increased to over 20% across 2022/23.

- Continuing to use social media inappropriate for their age

The 2023 refresh of the ICB's Children and Young People's MH Transformation Plan detailed how more children and young people are negatively impacted by social media and spend more time on social media than they intend. Analysis of appropriate and more positive methods of social media presence is being explored as social media is also one of the primary sources of learning and information seeking for young people.

Kooth are working with the ICB on social media campaigns to engage with CYPs who need additional mental health support.

- Less supervised and supported online.

Engagement sessions have demonstrated that children and their families want to access a range of support options outside of medical settings, including online platforms. Within the whole school offer the ambition is to ensure that each school cluster has access to online/digital counselling.

- Less happy about secondary school and SATs

The disruption to schools during the pandemic was significant and the longer term impact continues to be reported by head teachers. Mental health support teams are available and work within schools to deliver evidence-based interventions for children and young people with mild-to-moderate mental health problems and support teachers to ensure children and young people get the right support. Additionally, the ICB has worked with school leadership teams to review the signposting and service mapping available within schools to support pupils and their families to access services where required.

## **5. Action**

The all age SW London Mental Health Strategy was agreed in May 2023. Children and Young People's mental health has been identified as a core area for development for 2023/24. The key aim is to better support CYPs and their families. To do so, we are focussing on the following outcomes:

1. Access rates improved
2. Waiting times reduced
3. Increased support and signposting available

#### 4. Increased proportion of funding allocated to children's mental health

We are supporting better access and flow by working closely with system partners to ensure the pathways are clearly mapped. We are reaching out to children for their views on better ways to access services through SW London. This will inform and shape how we develop our digital pathways and access points into services moving forwards.

In terms of next steps, the ICB would value the ongoing input of Healthwatch to review the support offered to children awaiting assessment and treatment.

#### 6. Dissemination

There are two groups that would benefit from receiving this report. The SW London Children & Young People Steering Group focuses on service developments and planning and the SW London Mental Health Partnership Delivery Group is the all age senior meeting that defines mental health ambitions in SW London and oversee the delivery of these through the supportive relationships between the system, provider collaborative and boroughs. Healthwatch would be welcome to attend both meetings to discuss the report and next steps.

#### 7. Recommendations

Healthwatch to be invited to join a meeting of the SW London Mental Health Partnership Delivery Group to update the group on the findings of the survey and to discuss next steps to address the issues highlighted by the survey for both Sutton and SW London.

#### 8. Other

Feedback from children and their families highlight the need for more cohesive and flexible services. We are committed to working with our partners (including the local authorities, communities, and voluntary sector) to ensure we improve the quality of care and timely access to services. The ICB would value ongoing discussions with Healthwatch as it continues to develop services to meet the increased need for mental health and wellbeing support for children and young people.

Yours sincerely,



**Sarah Blow**  
**Chief Officer**  
**NHS South West London Integrated Care Board**