

Royal College of Psychiatrists' briefing

Spotlight on: Waiting times for children and young people with an urgent eating disorder case



November 2021

This briefing turns the spotlight on to one of the longest standing waiting time standards within mental health services in England. Children and young people (up to the age of 19) are expected to receive NICE-approved treatment for an urgent eating disorder within one week and within four weeks for a routine case.¹ The target for both of these measures was 95% by the end of the 2020/21 financial year.

We currently track performance for the urgent measure only on Mental Health Watch, therefore that is the focus for this briefing.

What does the latest data show about performance and variation?

In the first quarter of 2021/22, only 61.0% of children and young people with an urgent eating disorder started treatment within one week, the lowest percentage since the second quarter of 2016/17 (58.0%). This needs to be seen in a context where demand for services has grown significantly, with the number of completed pathways in the latest quarter being 160% higher than the corresponding period in the previous year (852 compared to 328). The lower performance against the one-week metric is therefore likely to be linked to capacity constraints in the face of significantly increased demand.

Of the clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) in operation as of April 2021, 99 out of 106 had completed pathways over the twelve months to June 2021. Of those areas, just 30 (30.3%) attained the 95% target over the year, including 27 that reported 100% performance. However 38 CCGs reported performance below 70% or 25 below 60%. While it is clearly possible for CCGs to meet the target, a significant majority are currently falling below expectations.

Turning the lens on to Sustainability and Transformation Partnership/Integrated Care System (STP/ICS) areas, only 6 attained the 95% target in the year to June - two of which reported 100%:

- Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly
- Kent and Medway

By contrast, fewer than 40% of children and young people with an urgent case commenced treatment within a week in three STP/ICS areas:

- Gloucestershire (30.4%)
- South East London (35.4%)
- Coventry and Warwickshire (35.7%).

It is worth noting that despite the overall decline in performance against the target, the percentage of children and young people seen within the 1-week window improved in 16 of the 42 STP/ICS areas in the year to June 2021 compared to the year to June 2020. We did however see performance decline by more than 25 percentage points in 10 areas over that same period. Again, these changes are needed to be seen in the context of rising demand, with completed

¹ NHS England, Guidance for reporting against access and waiting time standards: Children and Young People with an Eating Disorder; Early Intervention in Psychosis, February 2016. Available online: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/mentalhealth/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/2016/02/tech-cyped-eip.pdf> [Accessed 4 November 2021].

pathways having more than doubled in the year to June 2021 (2,896) compared to the year to June 2020 (1,383).

Chart 1 below shows the full national picture on performance against the urgent waiting time target from the beginning of 2016/17 onwards. Chart 2 then illustrates performance in all of the STP/ICS areas for the full year to June 2021, highlighting the areas still meeting the target and those with performance below 60%.

Chart 1 – CYPED urgent waiting target, national performance, 2016/17 to 2021/22

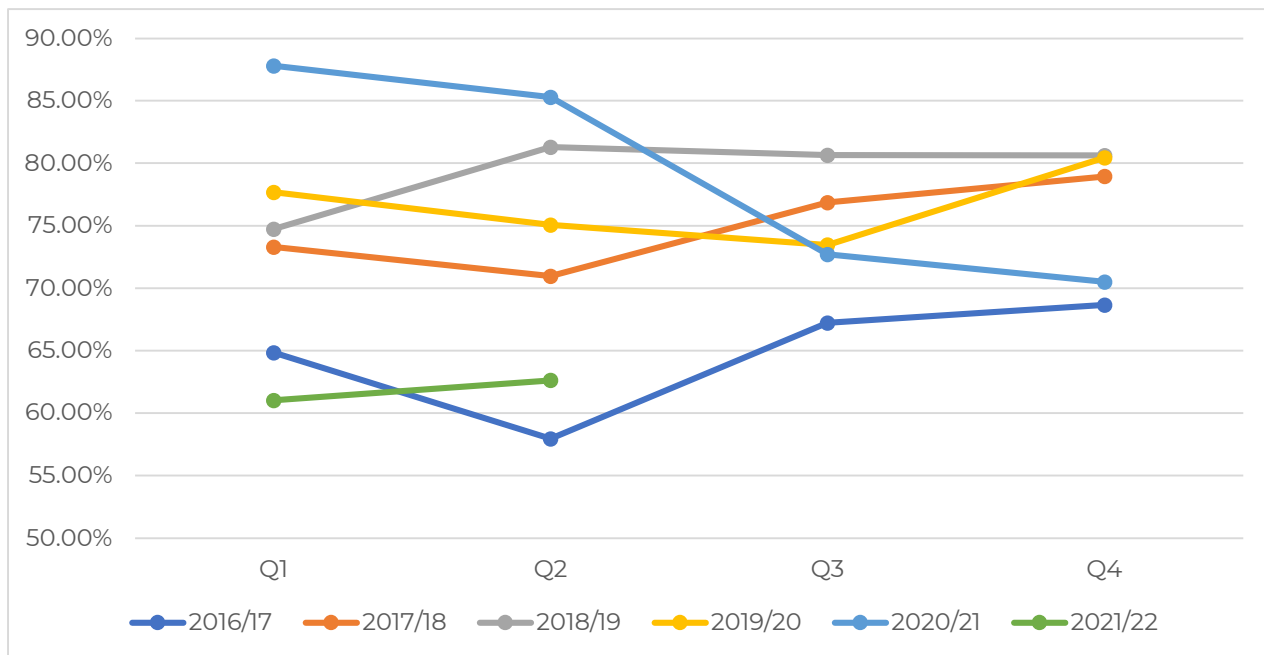
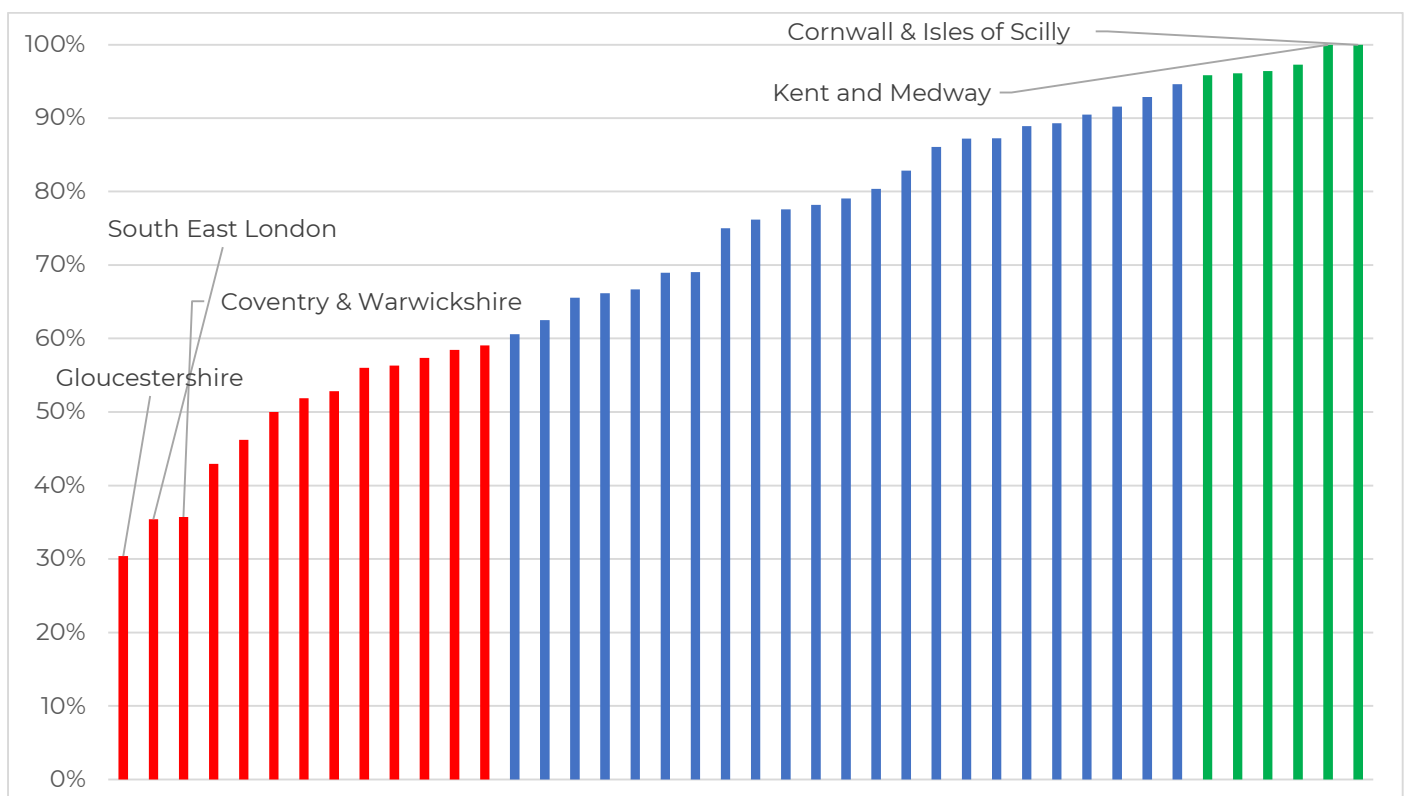


Chart 2 – CYPED urgent waits within 1 week, the 12 months to June 2021



What was the state of play one year ago?

As highlighted above, the first quarter of 2020/21 saw nationwide performance against the urgent waiting time measure hit a peak to date of 87.8%. This was 10.1 percentage points higher than the same quarter in the previous year (77.7%) with only a very slight increase in completed pathways (328 compared to 318).

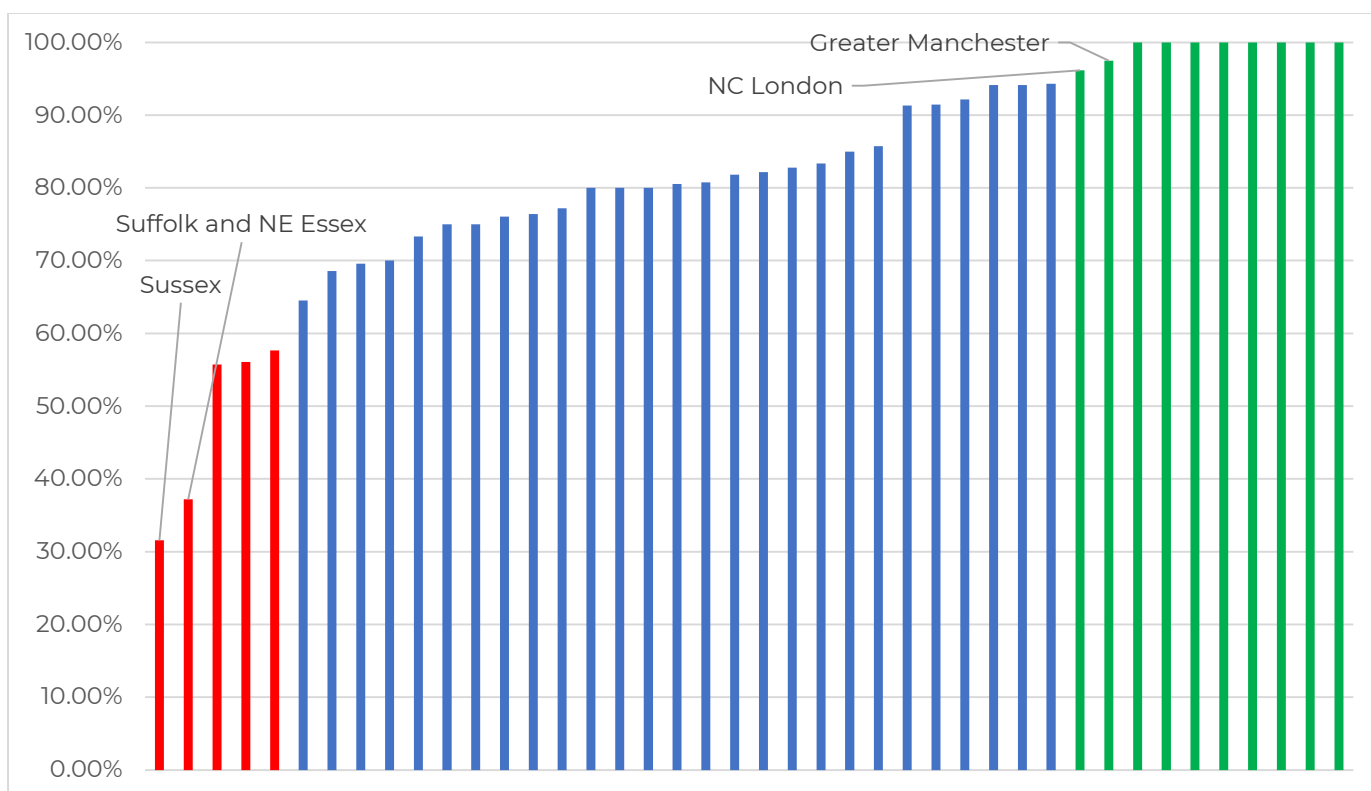
Historical NHS England data has been reviewed to combine earlier data to reflect the current clinical commissioning group boundaries. On this basis, 86 of 106 current CCGs had completed pathways in the year to June 2020. 28 of those achieved the target well ahead of schedule, 27 of which posted performance of 100%. At the other end of the scale, 23 CCGs had performance below 70%, 15 of which were also below 60%.

Meanwhile 10 STP/ICS areas met the target, 8 of which attained 100%: Bath and North East, Swindon and Wiltshire; Cambridgeshire & Peterborough; Cornwall & Isles of Scilly; Nottinghamshire; Shropshire & Telford and Wrekin; South East London; Staffordshire; and Surrey Heartlands. In five STP/ICS areas by contrast fewer than 60% of children and young people were seen within a week with the worst performance found in the following three:

1. Sussex – 31.6%
2. Suffolk and North East Essex – 37.2%
3. Devon – 55.7%

Chart 3 shows the full range of performance by STP/ICS area in the year to June 2020.

Chart 3 – CYPED urgent waits within 1 week, the 12 months to June 2020



What difference has the pandemic made to performance?

The last section of this 'spotlight on' briefing pulls through two charts from Mental Health Watch to illustrate the four STP/ICS areas that have experienced the most substantial declines in performance against the waiting time target and those who were able to most improve over the past year.

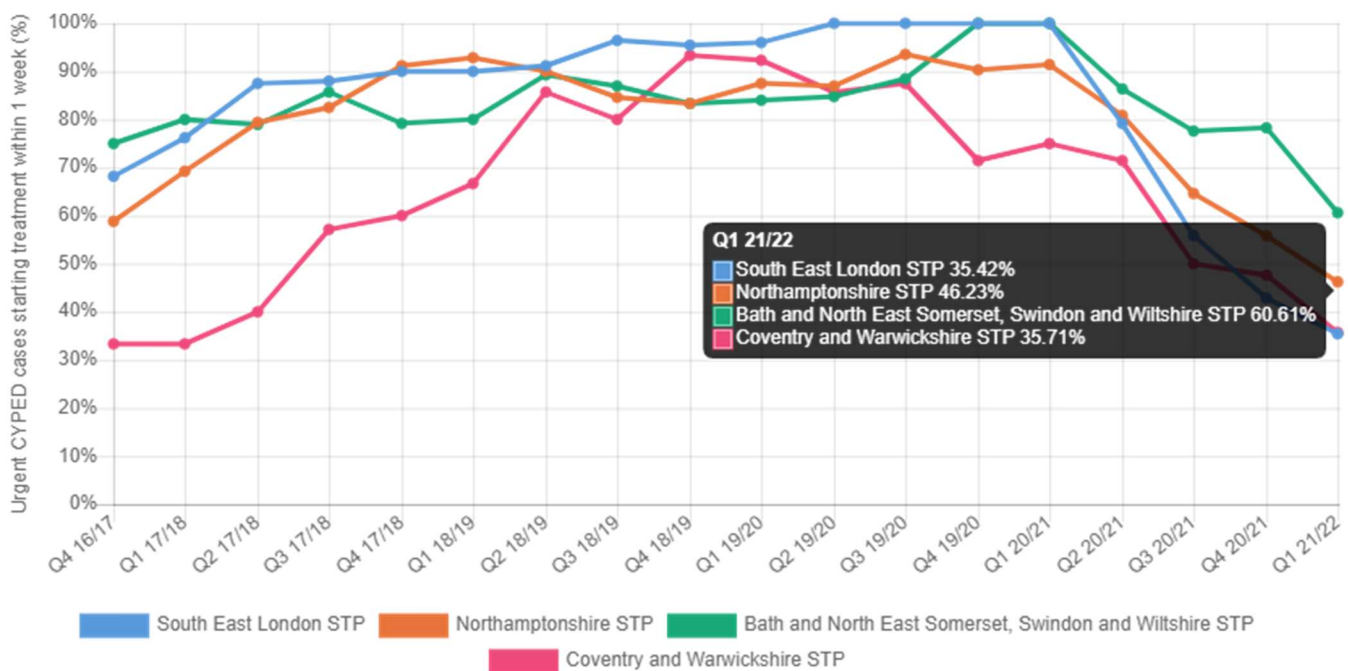
Chart 4 illustrates that in South East London performance against the urgent target has declined markedly after several quarters when the area had met it ahead of schedule. Demand increased by 336.4% over the year however, from 11 completed pathways in the year to June 2020 and then 48 in the year to June 2021 – a substantially higher percentage increase than the England average (109.4%). Percentage changes in completed pathways for the other areas shown in Chart 4 were as follows:

- Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire – 112.9% (66 compared to 31)
- Coventry and Warwickshire – 250.0% (28 compared to 8)
- Northamptonshire – 202.9% (from 35 to 106).

Chart 5 overleaf shows that Kent and Medway attained a 24 percentage point improvement in performance against the target over the same period (from 76.0% to 100%), while managing a 43.8% increase in demand (from 146 to 210). Demand growth in the other areas featured in that chart were:

- Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire – 115.4% (56 compared to 26)
- Mid and South Essex – 100.0% (72 compared to 36)
- Somerset – 52.2% (35 compared to 23).

Chart 4 – CYPED urgent waits within 1 week, sharpest performance declines



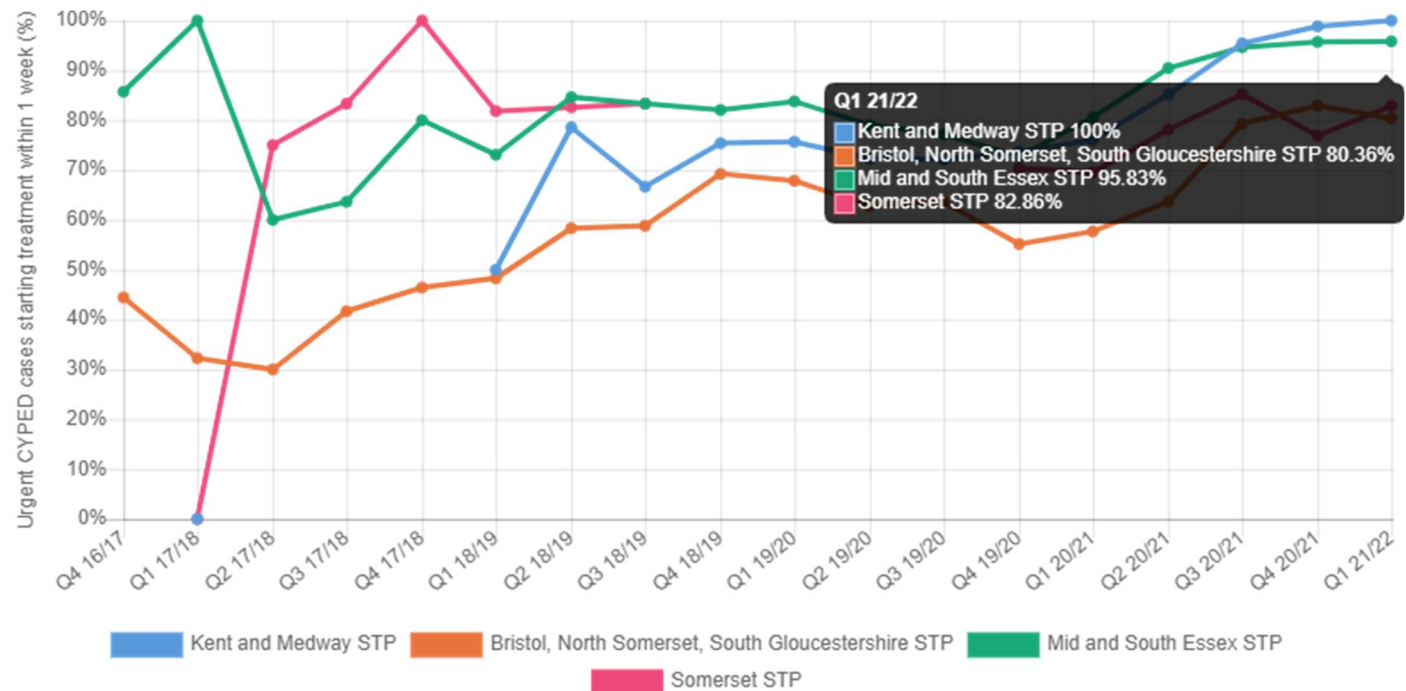
How is performance reported for CYP eating disorder services?

Quarterly data is published by NHS England² and also included retrospectively on its Mental Health Dashboard.³ National performance against the waiting time standard is reported for each three month period in turn, whereas local performance is measured on a rolling annual basis to minimise the possibility of patient identification.

² NHS England, Children and Young People with an Eating Disorder Waiting Times, August 2021. Available online: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/cyped-waiting-times/> [Accessed 4 November 2021].
³ NHS England, NHS Mental Health Dashboard. Available online: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/mental-health/taskforce/imp/mh-dashboard/> [Accessed 4 November 2021]

Alongside target performance, it is possible to track both the number of completed pathways and the number of patients still awaiting treatment at the end of each quarter, both still within the target window and those whose case is already in breach of the target.

Chart 5 – CYPED urgent waits within 1 week, biggest performance improvements



When did services get closest to meeting the urgent ED target nationwide?

A new peak level was actually attained during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic (April-June 2020) of 87.8%, with performance then beginning to decline sharply as demand for services increased substantially from the second quarter of 2020/21 onwards.

The previous peak had been in the second quarter of 2018/19 (July-September), when 81.3% of children and young people started treatment within a week. It was therefore already apparent prior to the pandemic that the 95% target was unlikely to be met by the end of 2020/21.

What next?

RCPsych will continue to analyse and monitor performance against the target in future updates of Mental Health Watch to determine whether consistent improvement is attained and also whether the recent demand challenges are sustained.

Sources

All of the access data has been extracted from NHS England’s quarterly data collection on children and young people with eating disorder waiting times and the NHS Mental Health Dashboard published by NHS England on 12 August 2021.