

To: All Worcestershire GPs

Children Families and Communities
County Hall
Spetchley Road
Worcester
WR5 2NP

12 February 2018

Dear Colleagues

Referrals to Umbrella Pathway

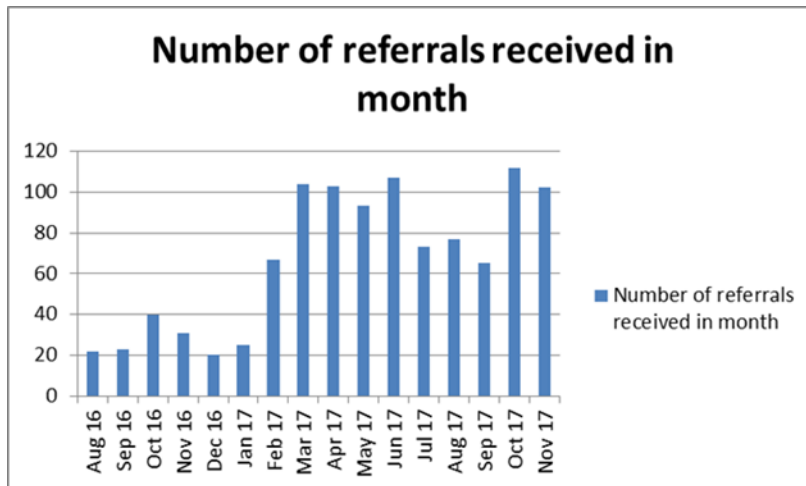
The Umbrella Pathway is the multi-disciplinary assessment and diagnosis pathway for autism assessment for children in Worcestershire, which can only be accessed by professional referral. We are writing to advise that the following provisions have been agreed in relation to referrals to the Umbrella pathway and are being implemented with immediate effect:

- a) **All referrals to the Umbrella Pathway must include evidence that an early help and/or graduated approach response has been considered and implemented in relation to the presenting difficulties and needs of the child, rather than an assumption that ASD is the cause.** These may include:
 - courses and resources to support parenting
<https://ylc.worcestershire.gov.uk/care-and-support/family-support/>
 - support in school or early years setting, including seeking specialist advice from Babcock Prime or other suitable equivalent provider/specialist
<https://www.babcockprime.co.uk/>
 - specific health professional appropriate to need and in line with referral criteria
<http://www.hacw.nhs.uk/ourservices/childrens-services/>
- b) **Referrals which do not demonstrate the above and/or do not include significant evidence indicating the likelihood of ASD will not be accepted for assessment on the pathway.**
- c) **Referrals to the Umbrella Pathway can only be accepted if made or supported by professionals who are involved in the assessment pathway.**

We appreciate that you may have some concerns or questions about these changes and hope that some of these may be answered below:

Why are these changes necessary?

As shown in the graph below, there has been a recent large increase in the number of referrals to the Umbrella pathway, much greater than we would expect in line with increased awareness or expected prevalence of ASD in the population.



We want the Umbrella Pathway to work in a timely and efficient way for those children for whom a diagnosis of ASD would be appropriate. It is a resource and time intensive pathway which may involve assessments by several professionals, often in more than one setting. At the moment, it is taking longer for children to complete the process than we would like and many of them are not given a diagnosis of ASD at the end of it.

What's the problem with referrals at the moment?

In looking in to how and why the number of referrals per month has more than doubled within a year, we have identified that:

- Some referrals contain insufficient evidence that early support and help has been offered to meet the needs of the child and/or to address other possible reasons for their difficulties and behaviour prior to consideration of ASD as a cause;
- Some referrals contain insufficient evidence that there are difficulties or behaviours present across a range of areas that would indicate possible ASD. We look for difficulties in the areas of social reciprocity, non-verbal communication, social relationships, restricted repetitive patterns of behaviour and sensory difficulties (DSM V Criteria for Autism);
- It may not be reasonable to expect some people who have referred to Umbrella in the past to have all the knowledge and information to make a full and appropriate referral to the Umbrella Pathway as detailed above.

If not ASD, then what?

NICE guidelines and diagnostic criteria manuals such as the DSM-V and ICD-10 make it clear that at times children presenting with symptoms or behaviours which may resemble autism in whole or part may be more appropriately understood through a different diagnosis or indeed no diagnosis at all.

Different difficulties and diagnoses which may account for some or all of the behaviours seen in children where autism is being considered include:

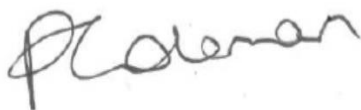
- attachment difficulties;
- response to trauma;
- inadequate parenting;
- speech and language difficulties;
- learning difficulties;
- mental health difficulties, particularly high anxiety leading to inflexibility and avoidance;
- sensory processing difficulties;
- sensory loss such as hearing or visual impairment;
- English as an additional language

Before referring to the Umbrella Pathway, therefore, it will often be appropriate to explore other possible explanations and/or offer early help or graduated response support and/or employ a period of 'watchful waiting' first.

Who can refer in to the Umbrella Pathway now?

Referrals can only be accepted if made by a community paediatrician, speech and language therapist, clinical or educational psychologist, occupational therapist or specialist teacher for autism **or** by another health professional or school SENCO with the support of one of the aforementioned professionals. Referrals must be made on the Umbrella Pathway referral form.

Yours sincerely



Philippa Coleman
Interim Lead Commissioner
Children's Community Health
Services

Worcestershire County Council



Stephanie Courts
Children's Clinical Services
Manager

Worcestershire Health and
Care NHS Trust



Gabrielle Stacey
Head of Specialist
Education

Babcock Prime