

Health Overview Select Committee Minutes Meeting 10:00 am, Thursday 6 November 2025 Council Chamber, County Hall, Martineau Lane Norwich NR1 2DH

Histopathology Delays

The Committee received a report, outlining the delays at the Histopathology Department at Norfolk and Norwich University Hospitals (NNUH) and the actions being taken to reduce and mitigate the delays identified.

Dr Stuart Williams introduced the report, explaining the main challenges and mitigation measures outlined in the report, and it was confirmed that progress was being tracked against a recovery trajectory, with early improvements already evident.

A Committee Member noted the pressure on staff and asked what wellbeing measures were in place. Officers explained that the team had successfully cleared the laboratory backlog earlier in the year, which had boosted morale. A variety of resources were highlighted, including one-to-one meetings, access to a 24-hour counselling helpline, and monthly visits from well-being practitioners.

A Committee Member requested more detail on turnaround times of reports, specifically the shortest and longest wait times. Officers AGREED to provide a written breakdown of turnaround times for histopathology reports.

The Committee heard that outsourcing was necessary at present and would be evaluated after experience. It was viewed as a temporary measure to manage peaks in demand rather than a long-term strategy, with the preference being to build internal capacity through robust workforce planning and improved modelling.

The Chair queried how it could be concluded that no significant harm had occurred given the delays, noting the difficulty of capturing the full picture. Officers explained that harm was assessed through incident reporting, patient safety investigations, and learning reviews. While no patient safety incidents had been identified through formal processes, it was noted that outcomes could be complex. Patient surveys and staff feedback were used, but these provided only a partial insight.

Having reviewed and commented on the report, the Health Overview Select Committee NOTED the report and REQUESTED a breakdown of turnaround times for histopathology reports exceeding the benchmark, including shortest and longest wait times, to reflect the impact on patients.

Speech and Language Therapy

The Committee received a report which provided an update on Speech and Language Therapy (SaLT) services for both children, young persons and adult services.

Rebecca Hulme and Karin Bryant introduced the report, highlighting the following key elements to the Select Committee. Most issues at QEHL had now been resolved, and services reinstated. Work was underway with the charity STAMMA to update service specifications and explore alternative provision. East Coast Community Healthcare C.I.C (ECCH) have had successful recruitment to their SaLT, enabling in-house delivery and a move towards a more sustainable service model. A system-wide review of adult SaLT services, previously delayed, was now scheduled for completion by the end of the calendar year. For children and young people, demand for services had continued to rise, but performance had remained stable with reduced waiting times.

A Committee Member asked how many speech and language therapists are employed across adult and children's services and whether current staffing levels were sufficient. Officers confirmed that exact numbers were not available at the meeting but AGREED to provide them after the meeting. A Committee Member acknowledged the efforts of parents, teaching assistants, and volunteers delivering SaLT in schools and suggested exploring community-based early years approaches. Officers explained that not all children with communication needs required a therapist, some benefited from reinforcement techniques. The nationally recognised balanced model supported this approach by enabling therapists to train parents and professionals to embed these skills.

It was noted that current data only reflected those waiting for assessment and AGREED that further data could be provided on how many children were actively receiving support from a speech and language therapist.

The Chair expressed concern that there was no commissioned pathway for prisoners requiring SaLT. Officers explained that while there was access to services if needed, conversations were ongoing between providers regarding inreach and outreach. Officers AGREED to take this away and provide further details on prisoner access to SaLT.

Having reviewed and commented on the report, the Health Overview Select Committee made the following recommendations:

To ESTABLISH a task and finish group to gather feedback from service users, families, and professionals on speech and language therapy provision, focusing on user experience, barriers, and opportunities for improvement, and for the ICB to report back to the Committee alongside a service update.

To WRITE to central government addressing the need for a joint policy across health, education, and social care to improve coordination for SaLT, and to request investigation into the rising number of referrals for speech and language support in children, with action to address the underlying causes.

To REQUEST the following information:

- Data on how many speech and language therapists were employed across adult and children's services
- Data on how many children were actively receiving support from a speech and language therapist.
- A breakdown of waiting times by condition.
- Further details on prisoner access to SaLT.