

# Stakeholder Briefing

## Difficult Decisions engagement change for moderate hearing loss in northern Staffordshire

29 January 2021

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North Staffordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) Governing Body met on 28 January 2021 to discuss a recommendation which affects the commissioning policy that sets the eligibility criteria for NHS funded hearing aids for adults with hearing loss. The Governing Body approved a recommendation to remove any restrictions for patients with moderate hearing loss in this policy.

The approval of this policy amendment means the current providers of hearing aids in North Staffordshire will be issued with a contract variation and will be able to work to the revised policy from mid-February 2021.

This will also change the Difficult Decisions programme going forward. The programme will not include the hearing aids for moderate hearing loss for North Staffordshire as it is being addressed through the commissioning policy. However, the work, along with the other five CCGs in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, remains paused due to the continued efforts needed to fight the Coronavirus pandemic and rollout of the vaccine.

### Background

The provision of hearing aids across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent was reviewed following the release of a Cochrane review in 2017 and release of NICE Guideline NG98 - Hearing Loss in Adults: Assessment and Management in 2018.

Following a review of the evidence by the CCGs Clinical Priorities Advisory Group (CPAG), all six CCGs at their respective Governing Body meetings approved the recommendation to undertake a formal consultation for a number of areas including the provision of hearing aids for non-complex audiology.

In 2018, it was agreed that both categories would be included in the Difficult Decisions programme of work to ensure the North Staffordshire CCG policy was reviewed in its entirety and as part of the commissioning business cycle (in line with its policy on the prioritisation of healthcare resources).

The CCGs expected to launch the formal consultation in September 2020, once the options development and appraisal process was complete. However, as a result of Coronavirus pandemic the work had to be suspended in April 2020.

Following communication of the engagement report from the initial phase in November 2020, and continued pausing of the work, a number of stakeholders requested the CCG review its position on hearing aids. In particular, the request was to consider the evidence available and whether this is sufficient to review the provision of hearing aids outside of the Difficult Decisions programme.

The CCG initiated a review of the clinical evidence to identify whether there is any additional evidence available that may change the original CPAG prioritisation scores. The review did not identify any additional evidence that had not already been considered by the CPAG. It was however noted that the evidence of benefit to patient with moderate hearing loss was stronger than the evidence of benefit to patients with mild hearing loss.

During the review, we recognised the likely outcome of future engagement and consultation is that no restrictions for moderate hearing loss will be implemented across the other five CCGs and therefore the current restriction in northern Staffordshire should be removed.

## Next steps

The Difficult Decisions programme remains on hold. When the work continues, the consultation will only include hearing aids for those with mild hearing loss across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

For more information on the Difficult Decisions programme please visit

- <https://www.cannockchaseccg.nhs.uk/get-involved/consultation-and-engagement/difficult-decisions>
- <https://eaststaffsccg.nhs.uk/get-involved/consultation-and-engagement/difficult-decisions>
- <https://www.northstaffsccg.nhs.uk/get-involved/consultation-engagement/difficult-decisions>
- <https://sesandspccg.nhs.uk/get-involved/consultation-and-engagement/difficult-decisions>
- <https://www.staffordsurroundsccg.nhs.uk/get-involved/consultation-and-engagement/difficult-decisions>
- <https://www.stokeccg.nhs.uk/get-involved/consultation-engagement/difficult-decisions>