

Background of the MSK programme

The programme started in 2023 to deliver the changes required to address the variation in community and secondary care MSK waiting time across our seven places in North East London and deliver more activity in the community in accordance with national guidance for MSK pathways.

The prime aim is that all MSK suitable for community MSK services should be seen and assessed within an average of 6 weeks

The work identified five of our seven places requiring urgent increase in capacity for their respective community services in order to deliver on this aim. These were Barking & Dagenham, Havering, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest. In addition, as part of the equitable access across NEL, the getUBetter digital tool will also be extended to City and Hackney.

New funding is limited and savings from reduced diagnostics and reduced outpatient activity has to pay for the additional staffing. This formed the business case and an investment of £4 million into services which was approved in April 2025.

Key Changes	Aim
Increasing community service workforce through recruitment using the approved funds from the business case	To reduce existing community backlogs and increase capacity to enable community providers to assess patients for physio and MSK services within 6 weeks and manage more activity away from secondary care services.
Implementation of MSK Single Points of Access (SPoA) in all Places	To clinically triage and enable the managing of more MSK patients (80-90%) in the community. To enable our NEL secondary care providers to meet their 18 week RTT target in orthopaedic services, improve conversion rates, reduce discharge at first appointment.
Changing GP Direct Access to MRI	Reduce MSK related MRI activity that does not meet guidance to deliver cost savings that are reinvested into MSK community services
Investment into the getUBetter digital tool for all NEL place populations and adding in Pain Management module, extending app to City and Hackney place	To support MSK activity reductions by empowering patients and promoting prevention

Progress to date

- **NELFT and BHRUT covering BHR places are now going out to advert for new staffing.**
- **Barts have agreed case and have started advertising in August**
- **getUBetter self management app being extended to City and Hackney patients from the 11th August 2025**
- **MRI referral forms revised and uploaded on to GP systems for the five places (excludes CH and Newham)**

Note – these are estimations only at this stage

Next steps – estimated timelines	Planned for completion (subject to change)
Finalise contract agreements with 3 community providers	July 31st – Oct 2025
Staff recruited in full (partial will be earlier)	Aug – Dec 2025
Backlogs cleared	Sep - Nov 2025
SPoA live	Sep – Nov 2025
6 week average wait achieved	January 2026

Programme key risk(s)

- Recruitment takes time to get the right people in post and some services may find it more difficult than others.
- Delays in recruitment may:
 - Delay SPoAs going live
 - Delay backlog clearance
 - Impact waiting time (although with some staff recruitment waiting times will reduce to 8-12 weeks)
- Over performance in MRI risk to finance

Place	Provider Service	MRI Direct Access changes	Latest updates on progress
Barking & Dagenham	North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT)	Healthshare Forms amended	Staff resourcing agreed and adverts for Senior physiotherapist are now out
City and Hackney	Homerton Healthcare (Locomotor)	T Quest format being reviewed	Changes to eRS and single point of access being developed gUB App being rolled out during August and September
Havering	North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT)	Healthshare Forms amended	Staff resourcing agreed and adverts for Senior physiotherapist are now out
Newham	East London Foundation Trust (ELFT)	All routine MSK goes via SPoA and MRI considered as part of the assessment	Reviewing gUB app project for more targeted interventions to reduce wait times.
Redbridge	Barking, Havering and Redbridge UT (BHRUT)	Healthshare Forms amended	BHRUT agreed the resourcing and now advertising for new staff as well as recruit interim staff to reduce the backlog
Tower Hamlets	Barts Health	InHealth Forms amended	Internal staff resourcing case now progressing to advertising for new physio resources. Early work and talent pool will mean some staff in place from September.
Waltham Forest	Barts Health	InHealth Forms amended	Internal staff resourcing case now progressing to advertising for new physio resources. Early work and talent pool will mean some staff in place from Aug/Sep.

Next steps

- getUBetter App re-commissioned for all of NEL and will now include a pain management module. This will be rolled out in each place based on local pathways so may take a few months to implement for patient access
- MRI – GP Direct access to routine MRI will be restricted to NON MSK related criteria from October 2025. Routine MRIs are not recommended for MSK Conditions in Primary Care and all NEL MSK services are being aligned to Newham for MRI access.