

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.

Latest Progress

- New MRI access criteria for Primary Care will come into effect from 17 November 2025.
- All services will maintain urgent referral waits to APP (ESP) services to support MRI changes
- Staff have now been recruited by all four services with ongoing recruitment for more to be in place in the next few months
- NELFT have now approved the gUB app for use within their services in B&D and Havering –this will support with waiting list clearance
- getUBetter self management Pain Management module plan for roll out being developed

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

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)	Sep – Jan 2026
Backlog Clearance to	From Sep 2025 – Mar 26
SPoA (interim) live	From Jan 2026
6 week average wait achieved	From January 2026 in some places

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 to full 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)	Cora Health (Healthshare) Implementing MSK related MRI changes from 17th Nov 2025.	Shared approach to staffing with Havering. Total of 2 posts recruited across the two services. More out to advert. NELFT approved IG and are now implementing gUB app into the service. Service will prioritise urgent referral process.
City and Hackney	Homerton Healthcare (Locomotor)	T Quest format being reviewed	Changes to eRS and single point of access being developed. gUB App rolled out across practices and implemented into locomotor services. MRI changes being implemented on T-Quest in November
Havering	North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT)	Cora Health (Healthshare) Implementing MSK related MRI changes from 17th Nov 2025.	Shared approach to staffing with Barking & Dagenham. Total of 2 posts recruited across the two services. More out to advert. NELFT approved IG and are now implementing gUB app into the service. Service will maintain urgent referral process.
Newham	East London Foundation Trust (ELFT)	No changes to services	Service continues to manage waiting lists and prioritise patients.
Redbridge	Barking, Havering and Redbridge UT (BHRUT)	Cora Health (Healthshare) Implementing MSK related MRI changes from 17th Nov 2025.	BHRUT has successfully recruited to eight posts, with start dates from October. The Band 4 position is currently being advertised. Redbridge aim to have waiting time to 6 weeks shortly and will ensure any urgent referrals are prioritised to mitigate MRI access change.
Tower Hamlets	Barts Health	InHealth implementing MSK related MRI changes from 17th Nov 2025.	Barts has successfully appointed to five posts in Tower Hamlets. Recruitment for remaining posts is ongoing, with interviews currently in progress. Urgent referrals will be prioritised to manage impact from MRI change.
Waltham Forest	Barts Health	InHealth implementing MSK related MRI changes from 17th Nov 2025.	Barts has completed recruitment for all twelve posts in Waltham Forest, with appointed staff starting from October. This will ensure capacity will manage any issues around MRI changes and clear waiting lists quickly.

Next steps

- MRI – GP Direct access to routine MRI will be restricted to NON MSK related criteria from 17th November 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.
- GPs will have access to one MRI referral form titled '*Non-MSK MRI Referral Form*' from 17th November.
- GP Portal is currently being updated for all Places to ensure the latest MSK pathways, including those for urgent referrals, are clearly reflected.