

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 times across our seven places in North East London and deliver more activity in the community in accordance with national guidance for MSK pathways.

The work identified five of our seven places requiring urgent increase in capacity for their respective community services. 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.

Further Information can be found here - [Musculoskeletal – North East London](#)

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 in a timely way 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 to surgery, reduce discharge at first appointment.
Changing GP Direct Access to MRI	Align MSK diagnostics to best practice guidelines. Associated cost savings 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, with earlier access to self management advice, education & rehabilitation.

Latest Progress

- Community MSK services have started designing their Single Point of Access (SPoA) models and are working with Primary Care to ensure the referral pathways within the SPoA are appropriate and clinically effective
- GPs now only have access to a single referral form, titled 'Non-MSK MRI Referral Form' for Non MSK MR imaging.
- Patients presenting to primary care who require MSK assessment/support will now be referred directly to the MSK Community Service for assessment and consideration of diagnostics, in line with MSK pathways.
- MSK referral criteria & Urgent MSK guidance can be found here [Musculoskeletal – North East London](#)

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 2025– Mar 2026
Backlog Clearance	From Sep 2025 – Mar 26
Single Point of Access for MSK services	March 2026 – June 2026
6 week average wait achieved	From June 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 to full Single point of access going live
 - Delay backlog clearance
 - Impact on waiting times for community MSK services – this is being actively monitored via MSK Delivery Board governance.

Place	Provider	Overall Average Wait for Routine First Appointment	Overall Average Wait for Urgent First Appointment	Latest updates on progress
Barking & Dagenham	North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT)	Tier 2 (APP/ESP): 7 weeks Physio: 36 weeks	Tier 2 (APP/ESP): 2 weeks Physio: 3 weeks	Recruitment is progressing and the service has made considerable progress in reducing long waiters this month. Physio routine waits have reduced by 3 weeks. The service is prioritising patients waiting over 52 weeks and has scheduled additional “blitz” clinics in the coming months to ensure all long-waiters are seen.
City and Hackney	Homerton Healthcare (Locomotive)	Tier 2 (APP/ESP): 5 weeks Physio: 9 weeks	Tier 2 (APP/ESP): 3 weeks Physio: 3 weeks	City and Hackney are now recovering a slip in performance due to some staff vacancies. Average waits are down to 8 weeks and should return to 6 weeks in the coming months.
Havering	North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT)	Tier 2 (APP/ESP): 9 weeks Physio: 14 weeks	Tier 2 (APP/ESP): 0 weeks Physio: 2 weeks	Havering MSK service has no long waiters and continues to recruit to new posts to reduce waiting time to 6 weeks.
Newham	East London Foundation Trust (ELFT)	Awaiting Data	Awaiting Data	The service is managing patients in approx average of 8 weeks with no long waiters. Specific data is expected by Apr 26.
Redbridge	Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospital (BHRUT)	Tier 2 (APP/ESP): 3 weeks Physio: 17 weeks	Tier 2 (APP/ESP): 1 week Physio: 2 weeks	BHRUT has successfully recruited to all posts, with service activity now increasing. Two additional “blitz” clinics are scheduled in February to address the temporary rise in the waiting list following the migration to ePR.
Tower Hamlets	Barts Health	Tier 2 (APP/ESP): 11 weeks Physio: 26 weeks	Tier 2 (APP/ESP): 2 weeks Physio: 2 weeks	Barts has successfully recruited to all posts in Tower Hamlets, with activity increasing significantly month on month. The service is projecting that the Physio service will reach a 10-week wait within Q1 2026/27.
Waltham Forest	Barts Health	Tier 2 (APP/ESP): 4 weeks Physio: 16 weeks	Tier 2 (APP/ESP): 2 weeks Physio: 4 weeks	Barts has now onboarded all clinical posts in Waltham Forest, with activity continuing to rise. Following an increase in referrals into the service since MRI restrictions were introduced in November 2025, the service is mitigating the impact by running additional in-house CAD days.

What does Physiotherapy (Tier 1) offer?

- Band 5-7 Physiotherapy Team
- MSK Assessment & Treatment – personalised care approach: can include manual therapy, exercise prescription, group exercise, advice / education, rehabilitation programmes.

What does Advanced Practice Physio (APP) / ESP (Tier 2) offer?

- Band 8 Physiotherapy Team
- MSK Assessment & Diagnostics (as appropriate)
- Can include joint injection therapy & prescribing.
- Direct links with secondary care services i.e. ortho / neurosurgery.

Please see guidance here on referral criteria for Tier 1 & 2 services. [Musculoskeletal – North East London](#)

Next steps

- Each Place is developing an SPoA plan, with implementation planned from March 2026 – June 2026.
- Community MSK services are continuing to engage with Primary Care to support collaborative pathway development.
- Colleagues interested in contributing to SPoA pathway design with Community MSK services are encouraged to make contact.