

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](#)

Latest Progress

- Redbridge (BHRUT) went live with their MSK Single Point of Access on 29th May 2026
- Havering, B&D, Waltham Forest and Tower Hamlets, are continuing to design their SPoA models and are working with Patients, Primary and Secondary Care to ensure the referral pathways within the SPoA are appropriate and clinically effective.
- Community MSK leads are continuing to attend various GP events in the coming weeks.
- Patients presenting to primary care who require MSK assessment/support should 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](#)

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. This will be for all MSK and Orthopaedic referrals.	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.

Next Steps	Planned for completion (subject to change)
Staff recruited in full (partial will be earlier)	Sep 2025– Mar 2026
Backlog Clearance	From Sep 2025 – May 26
Single Point of Access for MSK services	May 2026 – August 2026
6 week average wait achieved	From June 2026

Programme key risk(s)

- Delays in recruitment impacting service recovery and implementation of single point of access for MSK and Orthopaedic referrals.
- Ensuring all stakeholders (primary care, secondary care, patient representatives) agree MSK pathways for implementing single point of access model.

Actions for Primary Care

- Primary Care to continue to signpost patients to the GetUBetter app for self-management support. [GetUBetter – North East London](#)
- FCPs across NEL are encouraged to engage with their local Community MSK services to support referral quality improvement and pathway optimisation.
- If you would like to be involved in the **MSK Transformation work** in NEL, please email us at nelondonicb.nelmsktransformationprogramme@nhs.net

NEL MSK Programme Implementation - Waiting Times & Progress Update

May 2026

Place	Provider	Tier 1 (Physiotherapy): Average Wait for First Appointment	Tier 2 (APP/ESP): Average Wait for First Appointment	Latest updates on progress
Barking & Dagenham	North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT)	Overall Average Wait: 13 Urgent Wait: 1	Overall Average Wait: 5 Urgent Wait: 0	The service have significantly reduced their physiotherapy waiting list. Additional “blitz” clinics are being delivered to further reduce waiting lists whilst the service prepares to go live with Single Point of Access. As of the end of May the service is reporting a 11 week wait for the Tier 1 Physiotherapy service.
City and Hackney	Homerton Healthcare (Locomotive)	Overall Average Wait: 8 Urgent Wait: 2	Overall Average Wait: 6 Urgent Wait: 2	Average waits remain at 8 weeks for the Physiotherapy service and should return to 6 weeks in the coming months. Urgent appointments continue to be seen in 2 weeks.
Havering	North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT)	Overall Average Wait: 4 Urgent Wait: 1	Overall Average Wait: 5 Urgent Wait: 0	Significant improvement in waiting times, with physiotherapy now at a 4-week average. The service is preparing to go live with MSK SPoA, with continued progress in reducing the backlog.
Newham	East London Foundation Trust (ELFT)	Awaiting Data	Awaiting Data	The service is managing patients on average within 4 weeks with no long waiters. Specific data is expected in coming months.
Redbridge	Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospital (BHRUT)	Overall Average Wait: 11 Urgent Wait: 1	Overall Average Wait: 3 Urgent Wait: 1	MSK SPoA has now gone live, with activity levels within the service continuing to increase. The service is operationally prepared for an increase in referrals from the go live of SPoA and expect to maintain their current average wait for a first appointment.
Tower Hamlets	Barts Health	Overall Average Wait: 12 Urgent Wait: 2	Overall Average Wait: 5 Urgent Wait: 2	Tower Hamlets are continuing to run assessment days, allowing them to see a large number of patients. The Physiotherapy wait list is continuing to reduce, and the service are engaging with FCPs in the area, to help improve the relationship between the community service and primary care.
Waltham Forest	Barts Health	Overall Average Wait: 10 Urgent Wait: 5	Overall Average Wait: 5 Urgent Wait: 2	The service has seen a sustained increase in referral volumes and is looking to work more closely with primary care colleagues to explore opportunities for managing appropriate patients within primary care settings. This collaborative approach aims to help manage demand, reduce waiting times, and support future pathway developments, including the implementation of a Single Point of Access.

What does Physiotherapy (Tier 1) offer?	What does Advanced Practice Physio (APP) / ESP (Tier 2) offer?
- Band 5-7 Physiotherapy Team - MSK Assessment & Treatment – personalised care approach: can include manual therapy, exercise prescription, group exercise, advice / education, rehabilitation programmes.	- 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

- Havering and B&D are preparing to go live with a MSK Single Point Access by July 2026
- All Community MSK services are continuing to engage with Primary Care to support collaborative pathway development.
- As BHRUT have gone live with an MSK SPoA, close monitoring will continue, to ensure pathways continue to work effectively