

454,799 people visited our website in February

Be part of our growing online community

# Parents call for action over autism diagnosis

## Watchdog says families also experience barriers getting help

By Polly Albany-Ward

polly.albany-ward@croydonadvertiser.co.uk

PARENTS of autistic children in Croydon have to wait up to 18 months for the condition to be diagnosed.

Patient watchdog Healthwatch published a report on Tuesday calling on the borough's health and social services to cut this time and make it easier for parents to get help after a diagnosis is made.

In 2012 there were 881 autistic children in the borough, the report said, with this number expected to increase to 1,414 by 2021.

According to the report, there are 486 undiagnosed autistic children in Croydon.

### Support

Parents and carers at the launch of the report, at the CVA Centre in London Road on Tuesday (March 15), said even once their child was diagnosed they felt they received no support.

Karen Browne, from South Norwood, has an eight-year-old son with autism.

She said once he was diagnosed "it was like that was it".

"When you have a medical condition you get regular checks to see how you are doing. It should be the same with autism," she said. "My son was diagnosed but then we were just left to deal with it, there was no follow-up."



**DEMANDING MORE:** Cllr Andrew Rendle, Healthwatch CEO Charlie Ladyman and National Autistic Society family worker Linda Townsend

Parents quoted in the Healthwatch report said they had come up against "barriers, barriers, barriers" accessing help, with one parent phoning a social worker ten times in one day with no answer.

Charlie Ladyman, CEO of Healthwatch Croydon, said: "Waits of 18 months have a detrimental impact on the child's development, with consequences for family and carers."

The report said there should be a 'one-stop-shop' for parents so they can access health, council and other services in one place with just one phone number to call.

It also recommended more training for GPs and for more psychiatrists,

counsellors and therapists to be employed.

The report welcomed Croydon Clinical Commissioning Group's Local Transformation Plan, which will see a multi-agency approach to children's mental and emotional wellbeing.

But Healthwatch said the same number of children need diagnosis in Croydon every month as in Richmond, Merton, Sutton, Kingston and Wandsworth combined.

Despite services set to receive an extra £1.2 million in NHS funding, equivalent to 25 per cent, Healthwatch called on the CCG to seek more funding to support services in the long term so they can provide a similar

level of care to neighbouring boroughs. Andrew Rendle, councillor for Ashburton, was appointed at the council's autism champion in May 2014. The father of two autistic sons, he said he was working to influence council policy to make the borough more autism friendly.

Cllr Rendle said he worked with Croydon University Hospital to make sure the new accident and emergency currently under construction will be autism friendly.

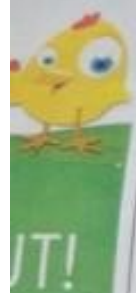
He has also worked with Crystal Palace to create coaching lessons for primary school children with autism.

### Welcome

A Croydon CCG spokesman said: "We welcome the publication of this report and will respond formally to the recommendations once we have considered them fully.

"Improving access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), including Autistic Spectrum Disorder services, is a priority for Croydon CCG. Our 2015/16 Plan includes over £1m of further investment to redesign and improve access to all CAMHS services.

"We are working closely with South London and the Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, Croydon Council and the voluntary sector to improve mental health services for children and young people in Croydon.



forden  
05559  
rtiser,  
ndon  
1NJ  
888  
444  
054  
389  
uk

83  
53  
38  
3  
0  
4  
k

Barnett, v  
colleague  
acted as  
woman v  
became  
All fir  
don Pol  
as deco  
"feroci  
manag  
face be  
On  
in un  
repor  
St  
tion  
gou  
CII  
hid  
wo

by  
V