



### **Statement from the Management Board of Suffolk Parent Carer Network (SPCN)**

The closure of Lark Ward is of concern to SPCN due to the impact it could have on young people aged 18-25 and their parents and carers. Losing the only psychiatric intensive care beds in Suffolk will, inevitably, increase pressure on the remaining beds in Norfolk. This is likely to increase the number of young people who are sent out of area which will mean families having to travel long distances to visit them. This not only places financial pressures on families but the feedback we receive is that the emotional and psychological toll is far greater and the distance they have to travel reduces the frequency they are able to visit. We know that family support is an essential part of the recovery process and this could therefore result in longer inpatient stays. Patient safety is, of course, of paramount importance, but we would hope that NSFT will be working to re-open Lark Ward at the earliest opportunity. SPCN have made clear to NSFT our disappointment that we were unable to provide reassurance to families as we were not made aware of this decision in advance.

In respect of mental health services for children, young people and families, the lived experience across Suffolk is one of intense frustration at a system which is difficult to access and where the quality of services vary widely. The outcomes of both the OfSTED/CQC Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Inspection in December 2016 and the CQC Inspection of NSFT in October 2017 are well documented and accurately reflect the experiences of children, young people and families and we have previously expressed our grave concerns about the quality of those services. SPCN and NSFT recently ran some joint feedback sessions for parents and carers and the same themes and concerns were raised including a lack of care plans, no crisis services, difficulty to access services or being passed from service to service without a response, long waiting times, unable to access the right therapy, care and support, a postcode lottery of what services were available and a system that did not demonstrate care, support or understanding. Some of the issues raised are cultural and will take longer to address and families who reported positive experiences said it was down to individual members of staff going above and beyond to help rather than the service as a whole. The fact that NSFT and SPCN ran these sessions jointly and that Julie Cave, NSFT CEO attended one of these in person, demonstrates that there has been a change in approach and leadership to one of being ready to listen and open to change. Whether NSFT are capable of making the necessary changes across Suffolk to re-design services for children, young people and families to make them fit for purpose and meet the need, will become self-evident when they publish their response to the Feedback Events and whether they implement those changes. SPCN has been working with NSFT, the Clinical Commissioning Groups, Suffolk County Council and other stakeholders to co-design and implement the Children and Young People's Mental Health Transformation Plan which demonstrate that positive, partnership working is possible and this now needs to become a way of working Trust wide to address some of the cultural challenges.

4<sup>th</sup> April 2018