



East Sussex MSK Community Partnership

Our First Year

December 2024 - November 2025

8

The average waiting time (in weeks) for a first appointment within ESMSK services.

45%

of our patients accessed physiotherapy care via our **online self-referral platform** - reducing demand on Primary Care and speeding up access.

97%

positive feedback given by patients across our services.



Delivered in
partnership by:



East Sussex Healthcare
NHS Trust

HORDERHEALTHCARE



WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

December 2024 marked the beginning of the East Sussex MSK Community Partnership (ESMSK), bringing together East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust and Horder Healthcare to coordinate and deliver the NHS community musculoskeletal (MSK) services for the population of East Sussex.

This report highlights the work that has taken place in our first year to support the local population and the teams who care for them.

Our first 12 months have been a time of change and learning. Much of our focus has been on **putting the right building blocks in place - strengthening relationships, improving how we work together, and creating the conditions for high quality care to grow.** I hope this report gives you a clear sense of what we are aiming to achieve for our communities and for the dedicated professionals who deliver these services every day.

Early in this first year, more than **200 colleagues came together to shape our shared ambitions for the future.** Their ideas and experiences helped define the direction we will continue to build on in the years ahead.

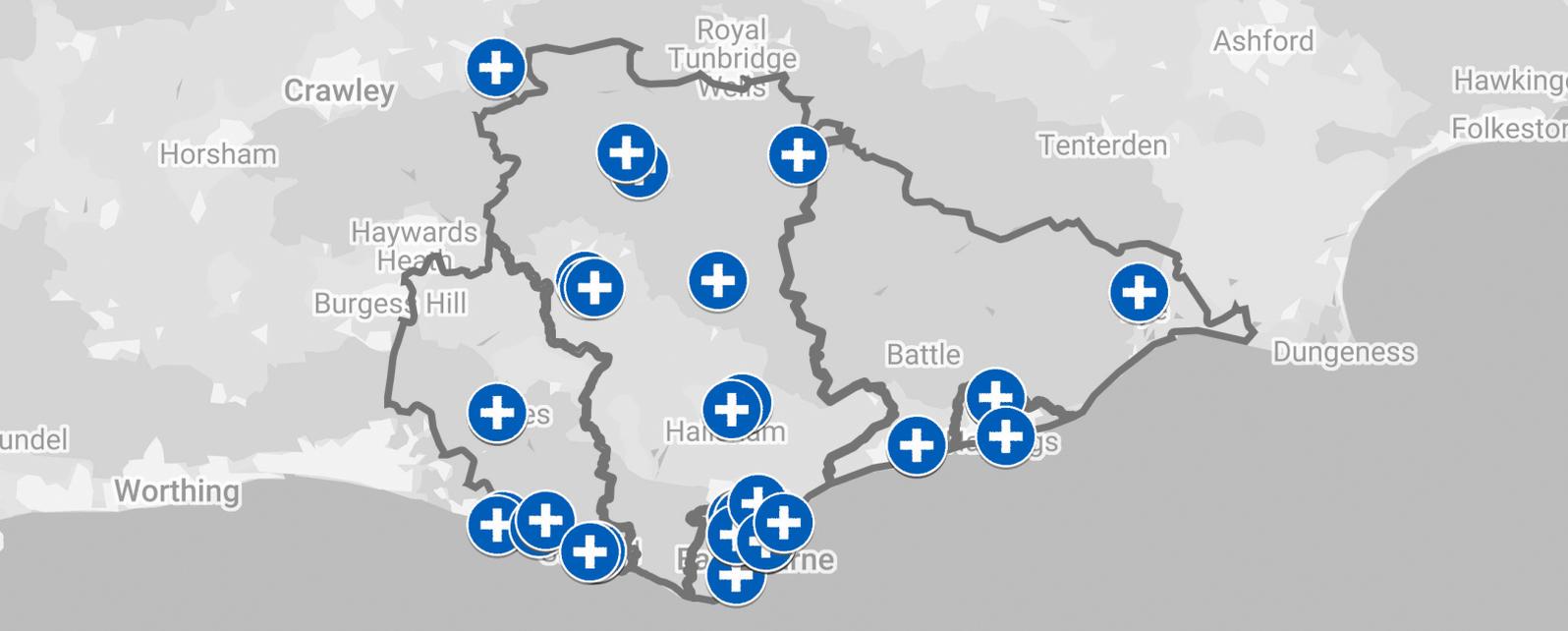
We will put the **patient at the heart of everything we do to:**

- Create a MSK community service we are proud for our family, friends and local community to receive care in
- Ensure East Sussex is considered an exemplar place to practice MSK healthcare
- Contribute to addressing the known health inequalities in our patient population and our underserved communities

It is a privilege to lead a programme that has such a meaningful impact on people's lives. I am grateful to everyone who has contributed to making our first year a strong one. Together, we will continue working through our teams and local communities to deliver care that truly makes a difference.

Matthew Carr - ESMSK Partnership Director





What services do ESMSK Provide:

As core partners of ESMSK, East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust (ESHT) and Horder Healthcare (HH) deliver many of the services provided. However, ESMSK also works with a range of wider partner organisations to ensure East Sussex residents benefit from a comprehensive and accessible range of MSK services. These services include Physiotherapy, Hydrotherapy, Community Assessment Clinics (Advanced Practitioner), Chronic Pain services, MSK Radiology, Community Orthopaedics and Rheumatology.

Our services are provided from **37 East Sussex locations**. Careful consideration has been given to these to ensure locations offer robust access for our communities.

Where our patients require onward referral to alternative or more specialist services, our patient care teams ensure these referrals are managed in a timely manner, and patients feel supported throughout.

PERFORMANCE & ACCESS

There has been a significant growth in demand (of around 20%) for our services. It has been necessary to adapt how we deliver our service to meet this need.

We have expanded the access to our service for patients by increasing the use of self-referral, delivering community outreach programmes and optimising our use of clinic locations.

Our teams have worked effectively and flexibly, to keep waiting times to a minimum. Across all our services, the **average wait for a first appointment is approximately eight weeks.**

Total Referral Demand - Physiotherapy, Community Assessment (Advanced Practitioner) & Community Orthopaedics



We received

60,430

referrals this year across
physiotherapy & community
clinics.

INNOVATIONS

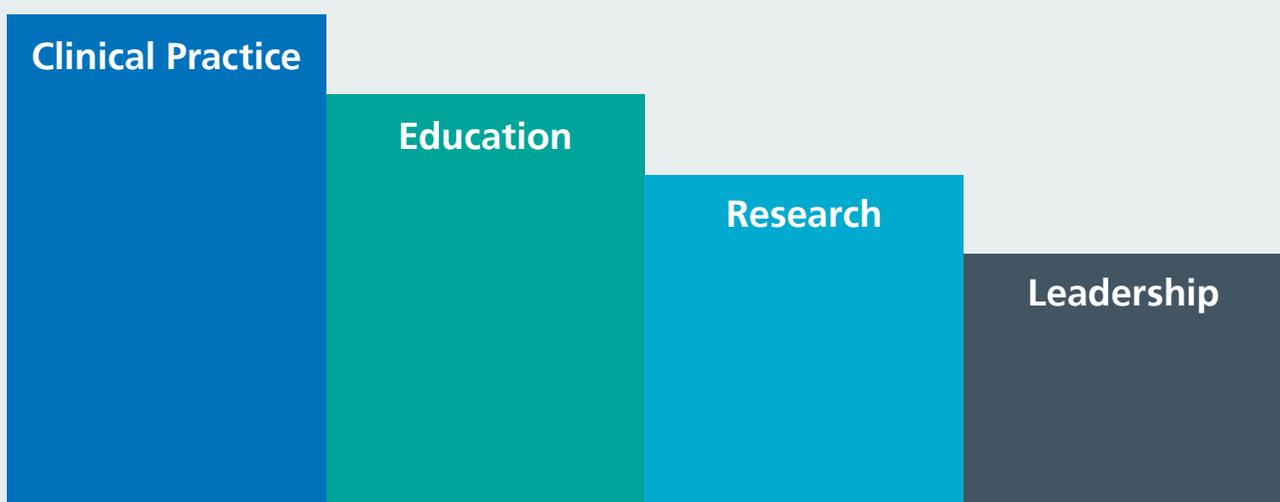
Over the past year, ESMSK has made major strides in transforming MSK care across Sussex using a population-health approach. ESMSK, working in partnership with Sussex MSK Health Brighton & Hove and West Sussex (SMSKH), are using an innovative digital approach to understand and enhance patient outcomes. This tool also enables us to proactively identify patients at higher risk of poorer outcomes and adjust our approach to their care accordingly.

This change has improved access to needs-matched care, improved wait times for those most at risk of health inequalities and increased availability of self-management resources using a patient centred framework. This programme has strengthened the role of care co-ordinators, developed rapid access clinics and improved links with primary and secondary care.

This work closely aligns with the Sussex Integrated Care Board (ICB) five-year plan for **'Improving lives together'** bringing care closer to peoples homes, which will continue into the next year with increased use of digital innovation to reduce barriers, alongside Get it Right First Time's (GIRFT) focus on work and health in the Sussex community.

The Four Pillars

The four pillars of clinical practice are essential components that guide our clinicians in delivering high-quality, safe, and effective care. Using these foundations, we have outlined some good news stories from ESMSK's first year.



Clinical Practice

In 2025, we trialled our first **multidisciplinary triage** session, bringing together practitioners from across services to review complex spinal cases. These sessions created space for shared learning, collaborative problem-solving and a more joined-up approach to care, helping to improve triage decision-making and ensuring patients are seen in the right place, first time.

All clinical pathways were reviewed and aligned with current evidence-base and have been agreed with our local radiology teams. For transparency, the clinical pathways are no longer password protected on our website.

Working in Partnership with SMSKH, ESMSK were successful in securing one of only seven national innovation funds available in 2025 to develop enhanced MSK pathways to support people with MSK conditions to remain in or return to work. This opportunity was made available by the NHS community MSK GIRFT team to allow local MSK healthcare teams to create improvements to how they support patients with work-related MSK concerns. ESMSK are progressing this opportunity through delivery of the following initiatives:

- **Employment-focused health days:** offering physiotherapy advice and rehabilitation, employment support, ergonomic advice, and social assistance through multi-agency collaboration. Small and medium employers lacking occupational health services will be proactively engaged to secure priority access for these staff.
- **Workplace physical health initiatives:** Partnerships with local health providers and employer occupational health teams to deliver workplace events promoting physical wellbeing, identifying employees at risk of MSK sickness absence, and strengthening referral pathways. Large local employers in areas of greatest working age employment absenteeism will be prioritised, including our NHS and local authority employers.
- **Rapid Access Clinics & Enhancing 'Fit-Notes':** Clinics will be established for employed Sussex residents at risk of or recently signed off work due to MSK conditions, providing timely access to MSK care. Our teams will undertake a review of the associated fit note process for these patients to optimise this workplace enabling function.

Education

Our teams continue to progress and strive for clinical excellence through ongoing upskilling, coaching and additional training. In 2025, several members of the team successfully achieved Master's-level qualifications, reflecting our commitment to professional development and high-quality care.

In addition, clinicians have worked with the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) to host two webinars aimed at supporting newly qualified physiotherapists, offering practical advice and tips on finding work in a competitive field. Across the two sessions, 268 people attended, and further sessions are planned for 2026.

At the end of our first year, Our MSK Physiotherapy Consultant, working with the SMSKH's Clinical Director led a Sussex wide GP webinar. This offered the opportunity for Sussex GPs and wider Primary Care teams to learn about the community MSK service's and offered opportunities for questions and learning

Research

Core partners have presented a range of MSK research projects, including two posters, at national conferences, including the national annual CSP Conference. This work helps share learning, promote best practice and contribute to the wider MSK community.

We have also contributed to national research initiatives, including the PANDA-S II study, supporting the continued development of evidence-based MSK care for the treatment of shoulder conditions.



Leadership

Members of the ESMSK team actively lead MSK initiatives and contribute to regional and national professional conversations and activities. This includes representation with organisations such as **British Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society, British Elbow and Shoulder Society and Musculoskeletal Association of Chartered Physiotherapists**. Our leaders also influence personalised care through representation at the **Personalised Care Institute**.

ESMSK also has leadership involvement in wider networks such as the **Q Community, CSP South East Regional Network, CSP Professional Committee and Research Delivery Network**. Through this leadership our teams continue to promote best practice, influence service development and champion MSK care across East Sussex and beyond.

East Sussex Wellbeing At Work

ESMSK Core Partners are an active member of the **East Sussex County Council Wellbeing at Work (WAW) initiative**. The programme recognises that investing in staff wellbeing and workplace culture is just as important as the care provided to patients and service users.

In 2025, **ESHT achieved the Gold award, Horder Healthcare achieved their Bronze then Silver awards, and ESMSK received the Commitment award**, reflecting our shared aims to create and support healthy, inclusive workplaces.

The Wellbeing at Work programme:

- *Offers workplace health and wellbeing resources, training, events and a signposting service for people working in East Sussex.*
- *Operates a free accreditation scheme for local employers, providing a structured framework to improve employee health and wellbeing while recognising organisations that are actively working to do so.*

As part of this work, ESMSK supports WAW members across East Sussex by delivering MSK training, helping workplaces become more **MSK confident** and supporting them to meet accreditation standards.

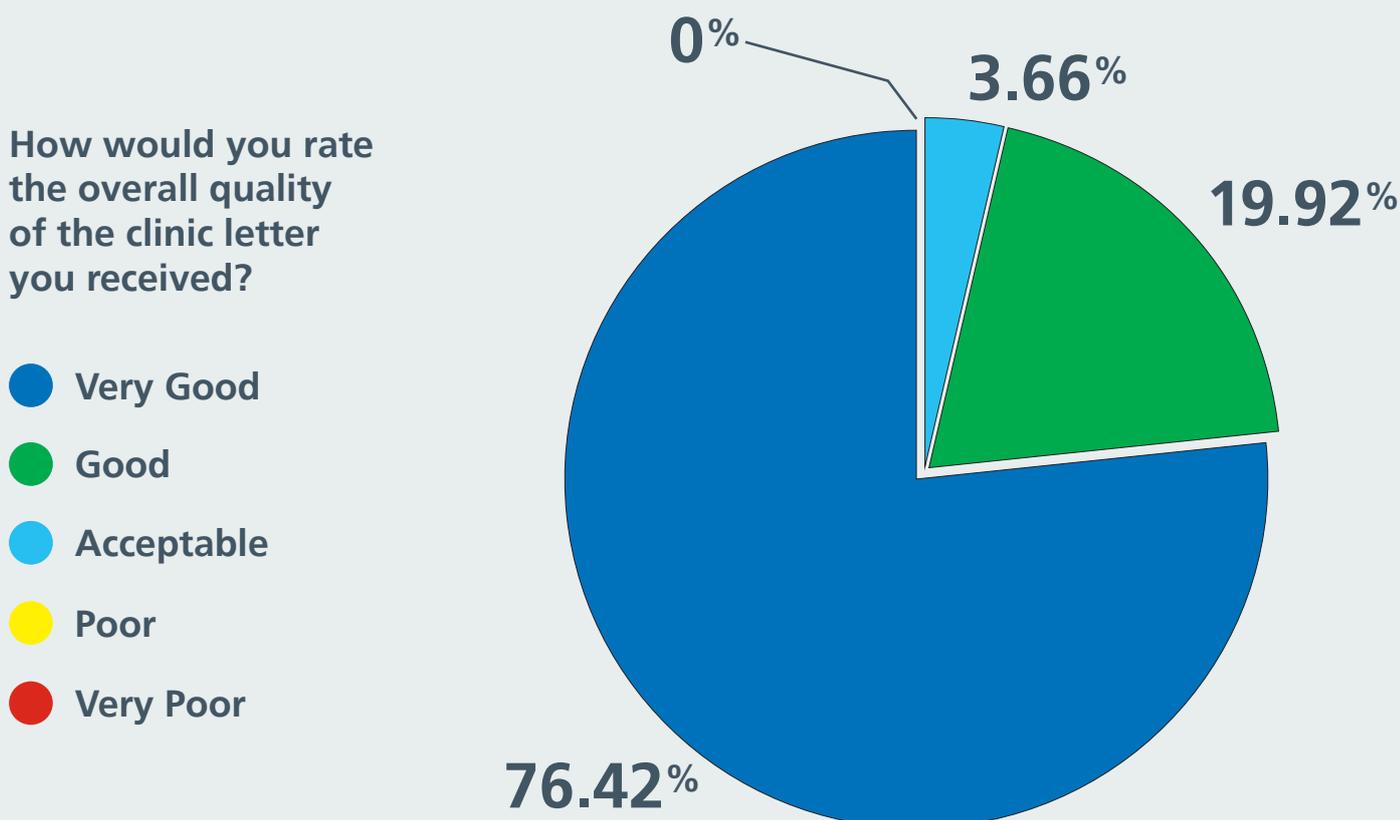


Innovation in communicating with our patients

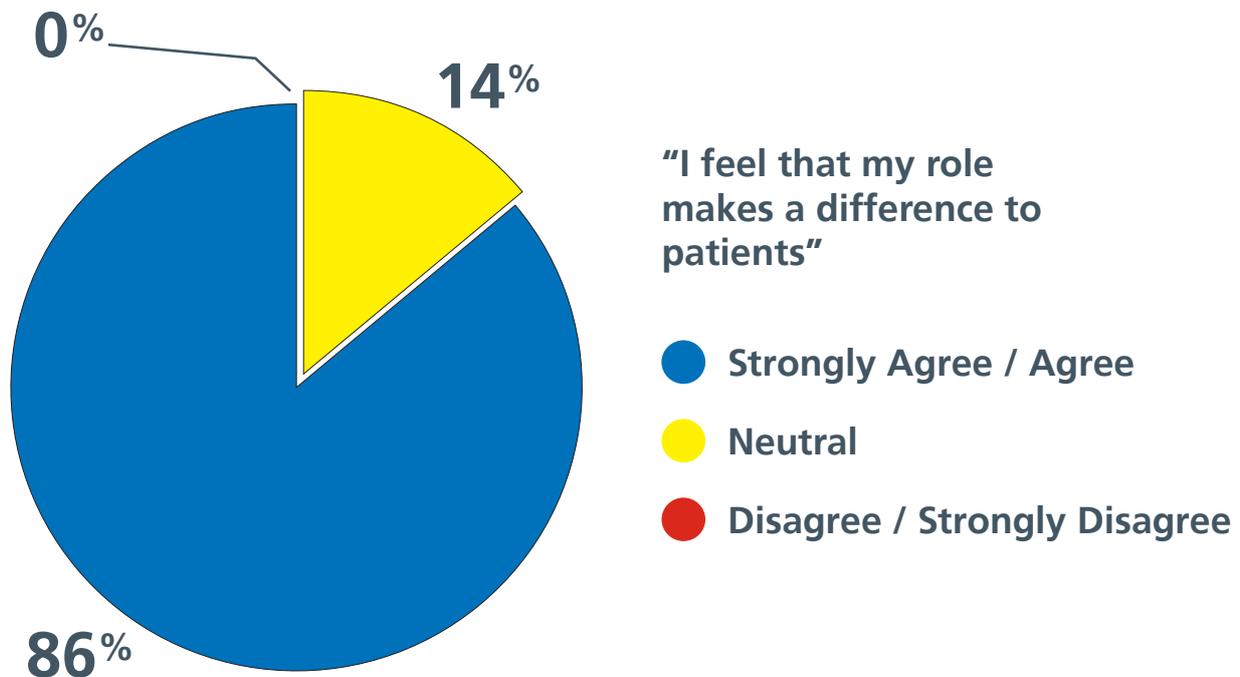
In 2025, ESMSK changed the way clinic letters are written after listening to feedback from patients and staff. **Letters are now written to and for patients.** Patient-centred letters reflect best clinical practice with research suggesting that writing letters to patients improves engagement with their care, resulting in better clinical outcomes and patient satisfaction. It also ensures better understanding as letters are written in plain English and avoid use of medical jargon. There is also evidence to suggest that patients are better informed and are more able to make decisions about their care and consider what is best for them.

Each letter provides a helpful summary of the appointment that patients can refer back to. It explains their condition, what they can do to help themselves, and the treatment options available, supporting them to feel more informed and confident about their care.

These changes have been very well received. **Over 96% of patients who shared feedback rated the quality of their clinic letter as good or very good.** ESMSK will continue to build on this work, making further improvements in collaboration with patients, clinical teams and administrative staff.



REFERRAL MANAGEMENT



ESMSK's referral management team operates across two sites, supporting patients across the whole of East Sussex.

Bringing these teams together has enabled shared learning, stronger collaboration and a more joined-up approach to patient care. This year has seen the introduction of new systems and technologies, alongside pathway improvement and new roles. Throughout this period of change, the teams have demonstrated professionalism, flexibility and a clear commitment to supporting patients. Collaborative working through shared processes, regular communication, and joint learning opportunities has ensured resilience and delivery of care.

A staff survey in 2025 highlighted the strength of this approach, with **86% of staff reporting that their role makes a difference to patients.**

FEEDBACK AND PLAUDITS

Throughout 2025, we received a **high volume of positive feedback and plaudits** from patients. Where concerns or negative comments were raised, these were used constructively for learning and shared with the relevant teams to support improvement.

In total, nearly **3,000 plaudits were received**, with patients frequently highlighting the knowledge and clinical expertise of our clinicians, as well as the care, support and professionalism shown by staff across the service.



"I was treated with dignity and respect"

98%

Answered 'Yes'



WORKING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES

Throughout 2025, our outreach has taken us across East Sussex — building trust, strengthening local networks, and creating lasting links with community services. We've focused on reaching people in areas of both **higher deprivation and rural deprivation**, where there may be more limited transport links and local amenities, as well as **older communities** (those aged 65+) and those who may face **digital** challenges.

Delivery at 30+ events, ESMSK has reached a large and varied public and professional audience. We have promoted physiotherapy self-referral, offered in person advice, resources, and educational materials to help people understand their MSK conditions and take positive steps towards better musculoskeletal health for our population.

This year, we've been at events across East Sussex — delivering MSK health sessions, leading webinars and taking part in healthcare marketplaces, community pop-ups, and collaborative events alongside a vast network of Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises (VCSE) to support collaborative messages on health and wellbeing.

From town centres to rural communities, our aim has been to make **MSK visible, understandable and accessible to everyone.**



With 'Sussex Outreach Support' in Battle



'Bexhill Day' 2025



Priory Meadow, Shopping Centre 'Full Of Life'



Bexhill PCN 'Engagement Day'

Delivered in
partnership by:



East Sussex Healthcare
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