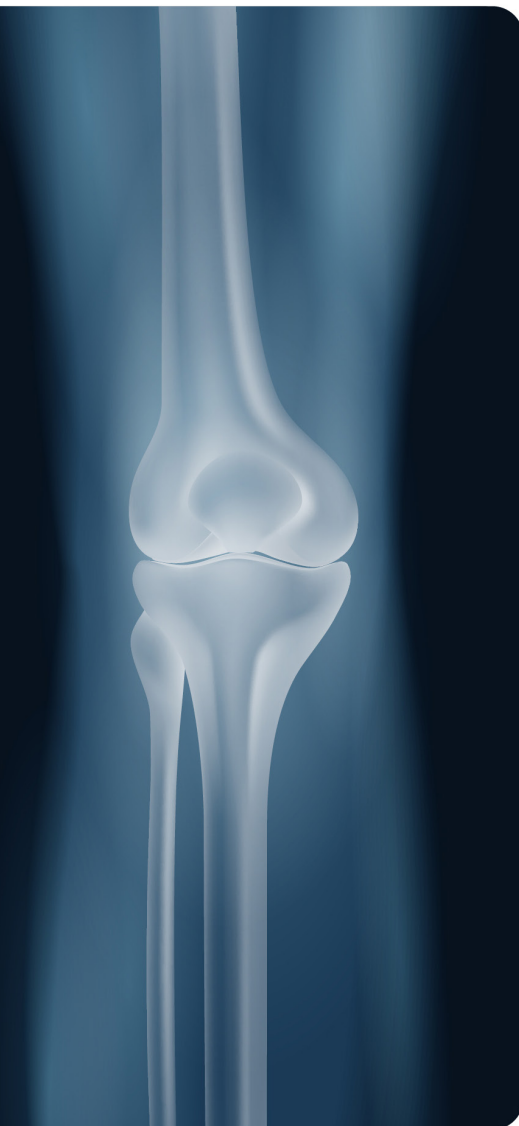




**NHS**



Sussex MSK Partnership  
East

**ANNUAL** 2023  
**REPORT** 2024

# CONTENTS

**03** Introduction  
A Message From Our Chair

**04** Performance

**06** Quality

**09** Plaudits  
Complaints

**10** Health Inequalities & Well-being

**12** Patient Outreach

**13** A Patient's Story

**14** Our People

**16** Our Population  
Physiotherapy Self-Referral

**17** Finance

**18** What's Next?

**20** Contact



## INTRODUCTION

*Sussex Musculoskeletal Partnership East was formed to develop integrated MSK pathways, provide a personalised, evidence-based approach to patient care. In doing so, we have significantly reduced variation in clinical practice and unnecessary spend on surgical and other procedures, worked collaboratively with patients through shared decision making, patient focus groups and co-designed services to improve their experience and that of their families and carers.*

*The team has worked relentlessly to surpass the original aims. I am immensely proud of my team, their unwavering attention to quality, performance and sustainability shines through in all that has been achieved for our patients.*

*The last few years have been tough for all of us. In healthcare it has been particularly difficult; responding to the aftermath of Covid, tackling waiting times and escalating cost. Our service could have focused on spend and targets, but the patient has always been at the heart of what we do and improving the MSK health of communities; our mission. This commitment helped us respond to the challenge by making decisions that strongly aligned with our vision and values. The outcomes detailed in this report, illustrate this and celebrate the talent of the team and the benefits of teamwork.*

**Lorraine Reid**  
Managing Director

## A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR

*On behalf of the Board I would like to thank everyone for their contributions. These have ensured that the improvement journey for MSK services will now continue into the next five years. This report reflects that journey of the past years, it also charts the many improvements made over the last year. It shows that the focus of all MSK services has been what matters to patients. This has been delivered through collaborative working across all MSK teams and Partners. We have seen wider access for patients which in turn reduces inequalities. What has mattered most to the Board is that through improvement, we know from feedback, that lives have been changed for the better with patients managing their own mental as well as physical health successfully in the longer term.*

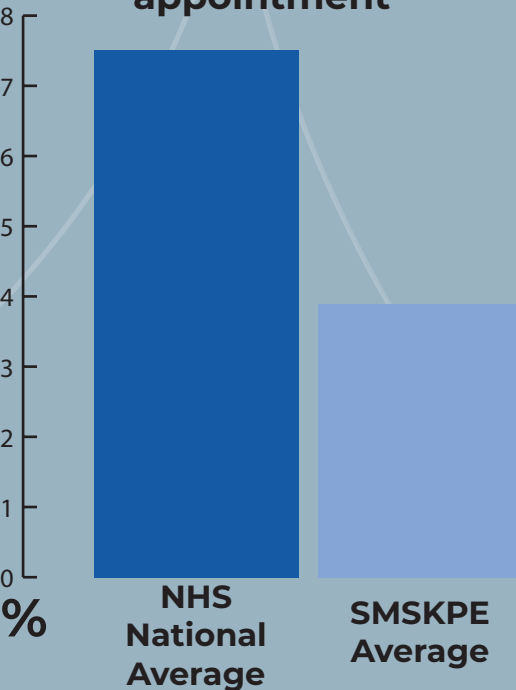
*For me as Chair of the Board it has been a real privilege to be part of this journey of improvement and I would like to thank everyone who has been and is involved in the delivery of our services for their co-operation and hard work as we progressed through both challenges and successes. I wish all involved the very best for the next exciting stage of delivering community MSK services.*

**Annie Ralph**  
Independent Chair

# PERFORMANCE

Our priority for 23/24 was to maintain the high levels of performance established in 22/23, whilst being proactive and ensuring we continue to deliver what matters to patients, make the best use of resources, and build a strong platform for the future.

% of patients who did not attend their outpatient appointment



## Utilising Resources

Improved digital communications have helped us to make the best use of available resources and reduce non-attendance across the service.

In line with the digital transformation of healthcare, we have used technology to communicate more effectively with people, enabling them to access the care they need quickly and easily, when it suits.

We booked over

**99%**

of available community clinic capacity

## Access & Waiting Times

We delivered on our commitment to ensure easy access to our services, and short waiting times for our patients, through a number of quality improvement projects and practical pathway developments throughout the year.

**4 WEEKS**

Average length of time patients waited for **diagnostic imaging**

**5 WEEKS**

Average waiting time for a first appointment with a **consultant**

**6 WEEKS**

Average waiting time for an appointment in the **pain service**

**6 WEEKS**

Average length of time patients waited for a **physiotherapy** appointment

**7 WEEKS**

Average waiting time for a first appointment with an **MSK advanced practitioner**



# QUALITY

During the last year our clinical services exceeded expectations, our clinical teams were able to innovate and be recognised locally and nationally for delivering exceptional MSK services. This brilliant work was made possible due to a consistent collaborative focus to sustain a quality improvement culture and a can-do attitude across all teams delivering Sussex MSK Partnership East (SMSKPE) clinical services. I want to thank all our teams for their hard work and dedication over recent years. Your commitment to excellence is what ensured we were able to craft an exceptional case to continue to deliver community MSK services for the next 5-7 years. I am now looking forward to working to develop our new MSK community partnership and ensuring that East Sussex communities continue to receive the very best MSK care.

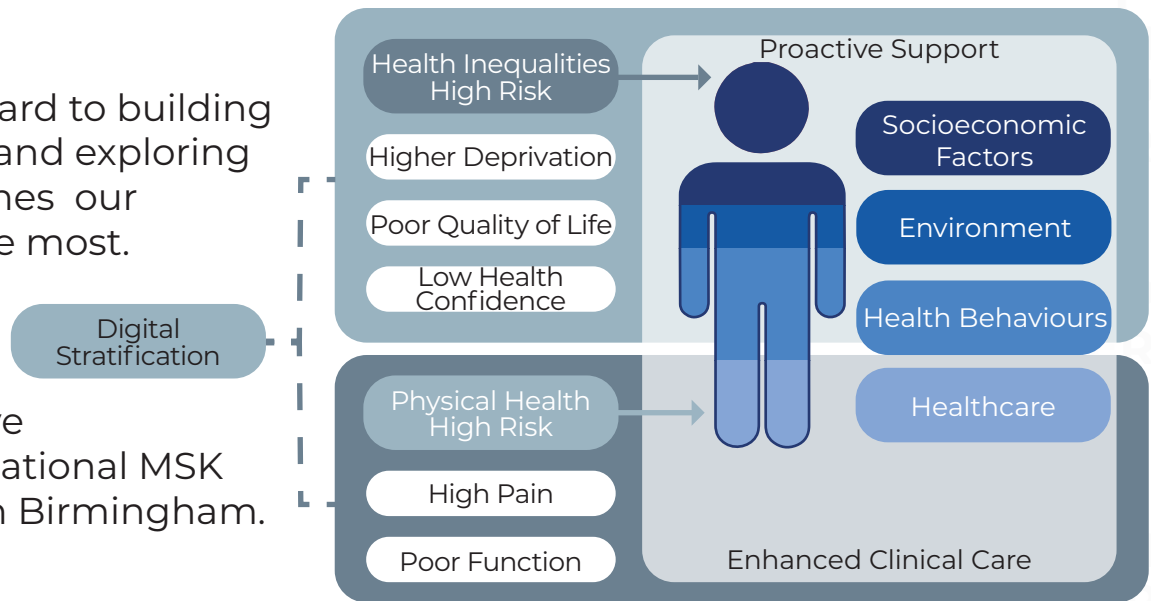
**Matthew Carr**  
Clinical Director

## Tackling Inequalities

A pioneering digital programme has been created across our two largest physiotherapy teams to pro-actively identify the patients who are most likely to need additional support in navigating their health and care needs. These patients are known to be most at risk of health inequalities and poorer health outcomes and are known to benefit from a more personalised and supportive approach to their care. Our teams have tailored a national best practice model to identify these patients at the start of their MSK care journey. We are now exploring various approaches to better meet these patients' needs.

Our focus is on helping these patients navigate where to seek the right support for the non-clinical factors that are impacting on their health, alongside providing expert clinical care. Issues such as housing, confidence in using the healthcare system and access to community support to stay fit and active are known to heavily impact of a person's ability to improve their MSK condition. Our approach in identifying patients needing support with such issues and linking them with local partners to help with these concerns aims to maximise recovery from poor MSK health.

We look forward to building on this work and exploring the approaches our patients value most. In November this year we will present this innovative work at the national MSK conference in Birmingham.



## Physiotherapy – building on what works

Our patients already benefit from quality MSK physiotherapy services, demonstrated by high patient satisfaction and strong clinical outcomes. However, in 2023/24 we were able to build on this achievement and use digital innovation to track which parts of our MSK physiotherapy services help patients the most. We have worked with Cemplicity, an internationally regarded expert in understanding the value of healthcare services, to digitally connect patients to their healthcare teams.

Between April 23 and March 24 our physiotherapy providers involved in this programme received over **23,000** individual patient feedback responses. This data has identified where our services help patients most, specifically looking to understand from our patients which physiotherapy approaches are most affective in improving:

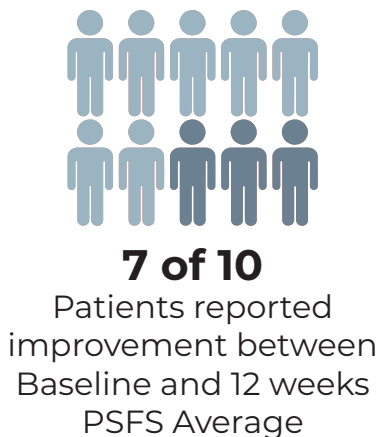
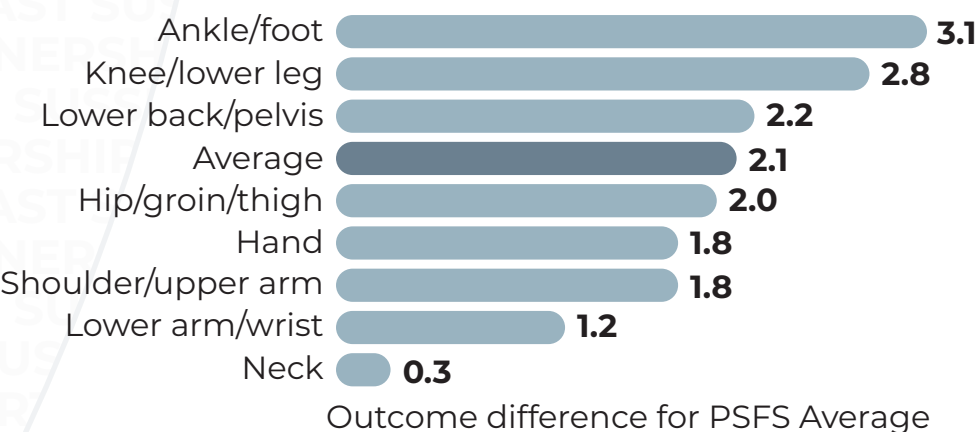
- Patients' levels of pain,
- Patients' ability to complete activities they have been struggling with.
- What changes in quality of life patients feel after receiving care in our services.

Digital innovation has additionally enabled us to understand where to focus our improvement efforts. We have identified two key priorities:

- To promote consistent patient/therapist discussions around patient goals and use these conversations to better personalise discharge planning.
- Provide physiotherapy services that maximise patient confidence in their ability to manage their MSK health.

We look forward to strengthening our physiotherapy services by accurately aligning with the preferences and needs of our patients.

### Patient Specific Functional Scale (PSFS)- difference by body part between Baseline and 12 weeks



# Ensuring a strong foundation

SMSKPE have been delivering services with short waiting times, good patient outcomes and positive patient experiences for many years. To ensure these strong foundations are maintained, digital dashboards were co-created with our clinical teams, giving them access to real time data and live understanding of performance against established baselines.

Our teams monitor important clinical trends such as sub-standard referral levels, onward referral rates, diagnostic request rates etc. Clinical teams proactively review these factors in routine clinical governance forums to monitor standards and prioritise improvement efforts.

## Exceeding patient expectations

Patients feedback has been overwhelmingly positive in 2023/24, with over **90%** of patient feedback reflecting a strong patient experience. This year we introduced a user friendly approach to allow patients to share their views and opinions with us. Patient experience questionnaire response rates increased by **88%**

“Information and directions before the appointment were very clear. The practitioner displayed a good balance of friendly informality and professionalism, sharing the process of diagnosis during the consultation and there was no pretend of medicine being an exact science. Clear summary of what he knew, what the possible diagnoses were and what further investigations were needed. I felt involved in the process throughout.

“I'm glad I have this opportunity for feedback as I was going to write especially I felt about this consultation appointment with the Advanced Practitioner. I felt that the Doctor / patient interaction was of a super high standard - exemplary in fact. I did not feel patronised, rushed or dehumanized (too often this happens in NHS appointments). I was examined, listened to, respected and given accurate, factual and helpful information. Thank you very much!

“I didn't feel rushed. I felt listened to. My questions are answered and worries heard. I feel my whole person/body is being taken into consideration. I am helped to deal with my on going situation (Old age!) and feel more enabled to keep active in the years ahead. The exercises given make a difference.

96%

Of respondents felt involved in the decisions about their care

97%

Of patients had all their questions answered in a way they could understand.

99%

Of respondents had a positive experience in their contact with the Patient Care Advisor team.

# PLAUDITS

An in depth survey is sent to patients on discharge requesting feedback.

5779

Positive comments & feedback

Patients consistently rated speed of access to appointments, timings of appointments and location choices positively.

644

Average monthly Friends & Family Test responses

The responses to this survey evidence the impact of the commitment to personalised care to patients within the service with **1192** responses received in 2023/2024.

## COMPLAINTS

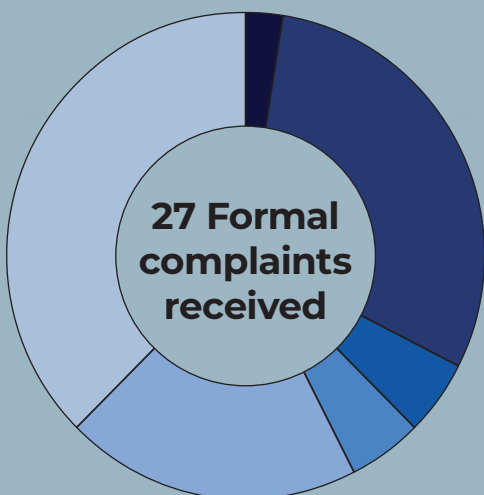
Complaints are investigated to identify opportunities for learning, training needs and other improvements. For example, one patient contacted us because they were unhappy with the referral process, believing it should have included an MRI directly from triage.

The investigation showed a previous referral was rejected due to insufficient clinical details and that this time the referring clinician had not accurately described the process.. We shared our findings with colleagues in Primary Care, resulting in no further issues of this nature from this practice.

To enhance patient experience, and now contact patients when sub-standard referrals are received and explain next steps. To allay this patient's concern about diagnostic imaging, we explained that they would see one of our Advanced Practitioners who would determine if imaging is clinically necessary. This explanation was also shared with the Patient Care Advisor team for future queries.

100%

Of complaints acknowledged within three working days



### Themes:

- Pain Pathway
- Clinical Experience
- Booking Experience
- Waiting Times
- Communication
- Presumptions and expectation Setting



# HEALTH INEQUALITIES & WELL-BEING

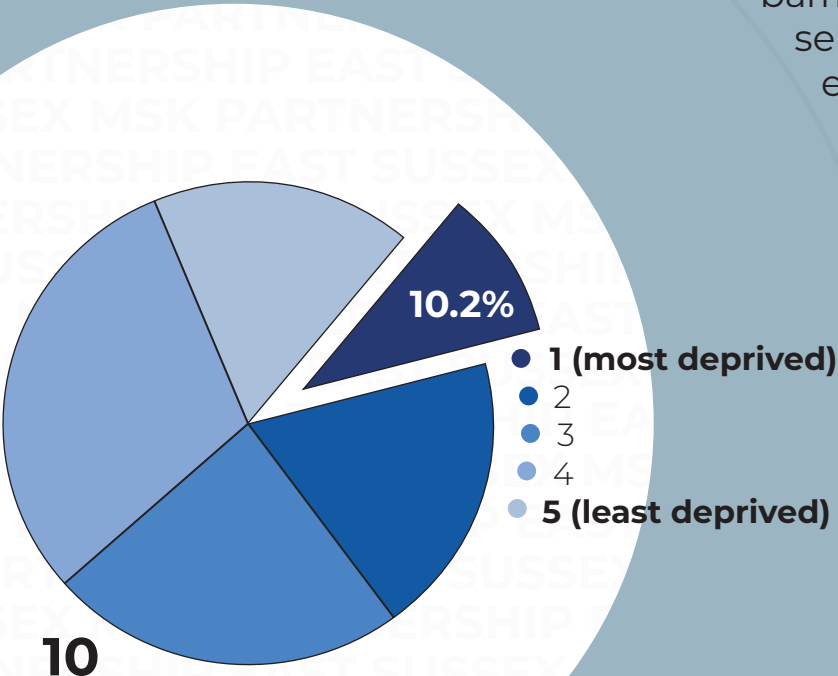


Read the report, and our case study, here: <https://arma.uk.net/msk-health-inequalities-equality/>

In 2023, SMSKPE contributed evidence to the Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance's (ARMA) national inquiry into health inequalities and deprivation. Our evidence was highlighted as a primary case study in ARMA's report.

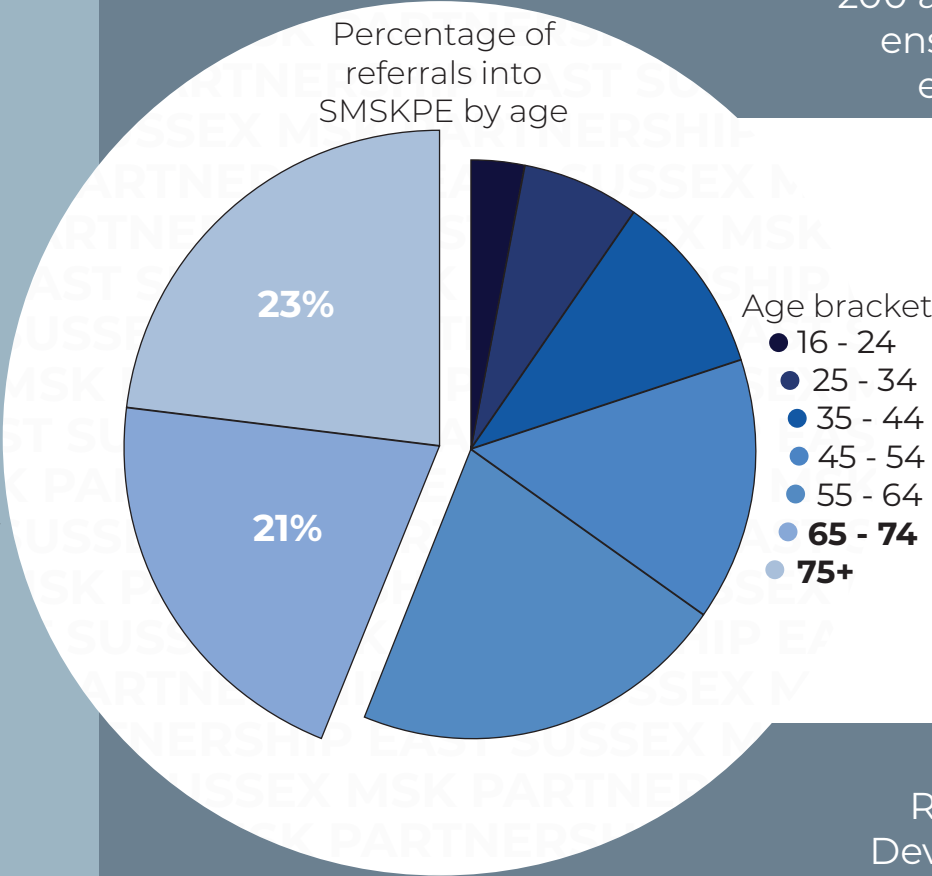
'Act Now' shows that individuals living in CORE20 postcodes: the most deprived 20% of the national population as identified by the national Index of Multiple Deprivation, face significant health inequalities related to MSK conditions. They tend to develop these conditions earlier and are more likely to have multiple complex conditions, yet are less likely to receive necessary treatments like joint replacement surgeries. These disparities are not biologically determined but are driven by social and economic factors such as poverty, education, employment, and environmental influences that discourage physical activity and healthy diets.

ARMAs inquiry highlighted that only a small fraction of health outcomes relate directly to healthcare provision; the majority are influenced by broader determinants of health. Effective strategies to address MSK health inequalities include community-based service delivery, fostering community engagement and co-production, utilising data to identify and tackle barriers, implementing tailored self-management support, enhancing service accessibility and improving the quality of clinical encounters. East Sussex faces significant socioeconomic challenges, with 10% of its postcodes ranking among the most deprived nationally. Our outreach efforts concentrate on these areas and **10% of all referrals to SMSKPE originate from 'CORE20' postcodes.**



Strong links with local Voluntary Community Social Enterprises (VCSEs) help to share learning and resources, and build trust with patients of different backgrounds. We work closely with Care for the Carers to support a local community of 69,000 unpaid carers, providing materials and advice to individuals who might not be ready to engage with their own care. Together, we guide service users to nearby opportunities and encourage them to prioritise their own care needs. We introduced a dedicated carers policy to support our employees who are carers and **became recognised as a carer-friendly service.**

Working with Diversity Resource International and Sussex Interpreting Services we support patients from diverse backgrounds and with varying needs, such as enabling support materials in a preferred language. A language toolbar (ReciteMe) on our website allows all articles and information to be viewed in any language, including the self-referral form, which helps us support non-English speaking patients and gather valuable feedback from their experiences. This year, we scheduled more than 120 patients for over 200 appointments with interpreters, ensuring effective communication and enhancing patient care.



26% of East Sussex is aged 65 and older, compared to only 19% nationally. SMSKPE regularly links up with East Sussex Seniors Association and Age UK so that these services can better advise users about MSK health and accessing services. **44% of referrals to SMSKPE are for patients aged over 65.** 30% of physiotherapy self-referrals were for patients aged over 65, showing good utilisation of this service.

Collaborating with Reed Recruitment, Sussex Community Development Association and East Sussex County Council's Wellbeing at Work (WAW) programme, we've assisted individuals seeking to return to work, or looking for employment opportunities, to help them consider their MSK health and the importance of both physical and mental health in the workplace setting. In 2024, we presented at the WAW Awards, delivering a talk on healthy practices in the workplace and how to support colleagues and employees. This has also helped position our service and Horder Healthcare towards receiving their Bronze awards in next years event, accrediting us as employers who are focused on well-being and support.



# PATIENT OUTREACH

**In the community:** Our outreach efforts are centred on building trust, sharing resources, and guiding people to the services they need. We understand that a person is more than their MSK condition; we want to encourage individuals to consider their overall health. Our focus has been on the most under-served populations, where access to healthcare is limited and people may be less likely to seek help. By collaborating with Primary Care Networks in these areas and building strong relationships with neighbourhood and VCSE teams, we have been able to share knowledge, resources, and make healthcare more accessible and appealing locally.

We have partnered with One You East Sussex, Health in Mind, and Arthritis Action to host events. These events create opportunities for conversations about MSK health, to offer advice on self-management, and connect people with local support services.

**The Patient Participation Group :** Over 2023/24, the PPG played a significant role, rising to the challenge of sharing their experiences and perspectives during the re-tender process for community MSK services that took place throughout the year. They helped ensure that the patient remained at the heart of all discussions.

**Website and social media:** There has been a notable increase in website visits, with refreshed accessibility, signposting, and educational resources. The most popular pages include: average waiting times, frequently asked questions, self-help materials, and self-referral links. In the last year there has been an **220% increase** in activity.



Patient outreach and flu jab event with Bridgeside Surgery with support from local Patient Partners and Hailsham's MP.



MSK Health in the workplace presentation at the 'Wellbeing at Work Awards' event hosted by East Sussex County Council



Community outreach with One You East Sussex and Arthritis Action at Gather in Eastbourne



Marketplace event with Care for the Carers for "Carers Voices" week

## A PATIENT'S STORY

*I had struggled with back pain for years, seeing several physiotherapists who all gave me the same advice: avoid activities that cause pain. This approach was impractical and frustrating, especially given my active lifestyle and career as a ski instructor, where physical activity is essential. The lack of effective solutions left me in increasing pain and mental distress.*

*In desperation I self-referred to physiotherapy and this turned out to be the answer to my prayers. Not only am I now able to stay active with significantly less pain, but my mental health has also improved dramatically. The physiotherapists and movement specialists at Sussex MSK provided me with tailored exercises twice a week, ensuring I never felt overwhelmed.*

*Now, I can perform these exercises independently every other day, which has been instrumental in my recovery. Their holistic approach was remarkable. They didn't just focus on my physical ailment but also took great care to ensure my mental well-being. Their consistent kindness and check-ins during each visit made me feel genuinely cared for, which positively impacted my pain levels more than I could have imagined. While they didn't provide direct therapy, their support helped me improve my mental health on my own. Thanks to Sussex MSK East, I'm now on a six-month self-management window, managing my exercises independently but with the reassurance of a reliable safety net if needed. After spending hundreds on private care, chiropractors, and other physiotherapists without success, I am finally healing. I can never thank the team enough for their exceptional care and support.*

**Hazel**  
Physiotherapy pathway



# OUR PEOPLE

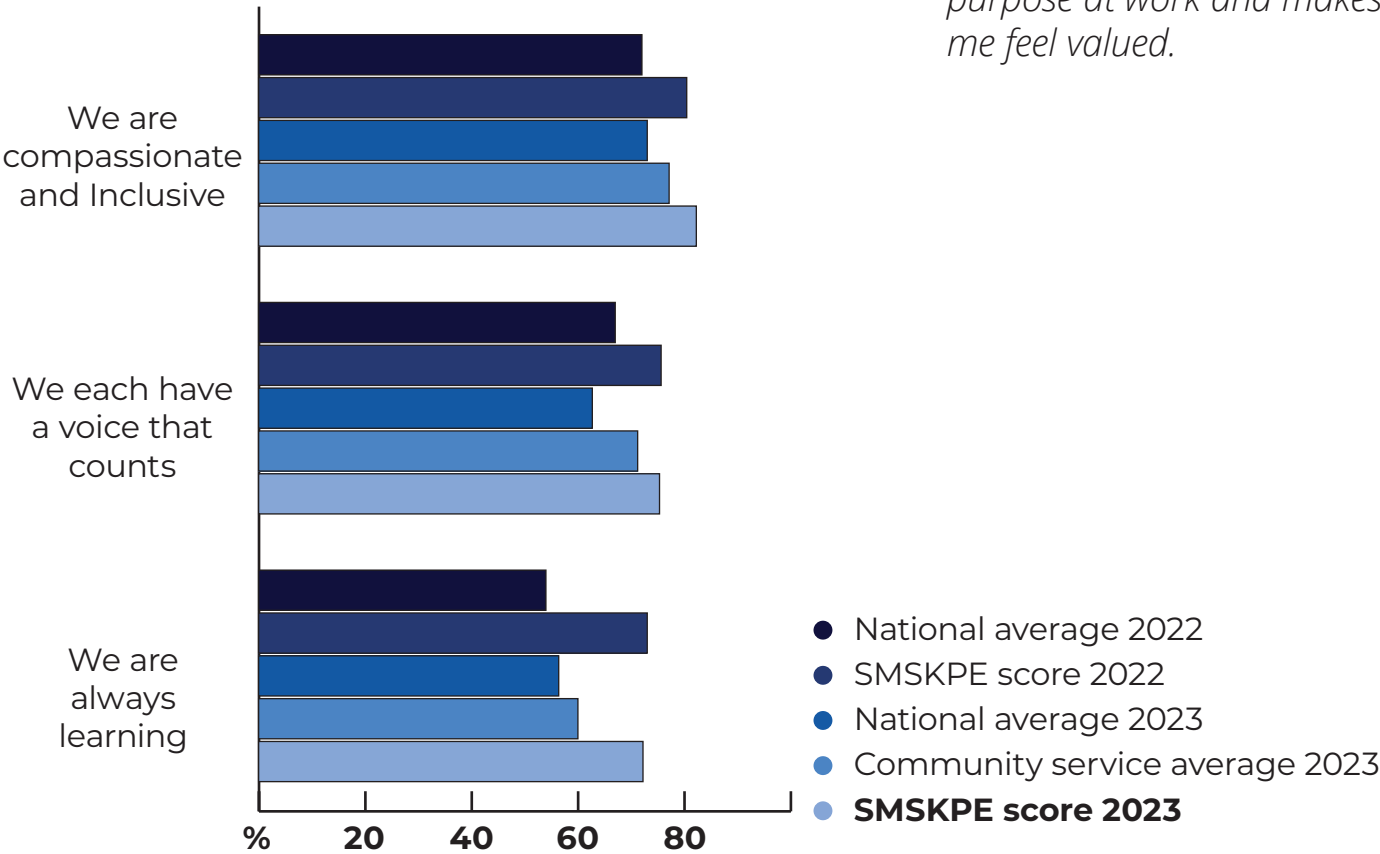
“ It feels like a great place to work. The team are friendly and all have a common goal to help patients.

“ Positive atmosphere, supportive colleagues and updates on the future direction of the service are much appreciated.

“ SMSKPE is a great working environment with a supportive and friendly team culture. Flexible working enables a good work life balance. Learning and development opportunities are available and accessible to those who want it. Staff wellbeing is always at the forefront of decisions that impact the wider team. It's a great place to work and I feel that I'm given the autonomy needed in my role to really make a difference to patients which gives me a sense of purpose at work and makes me feel valued.

“ Rewarding, motivating and I am comfortable in my work environment.

2023 Staff Survey



We're a busy team.  
Over 2023/24 we:

received > 24,000 e-mails	took > 34,000 calls
---------------------------------	---------------------------

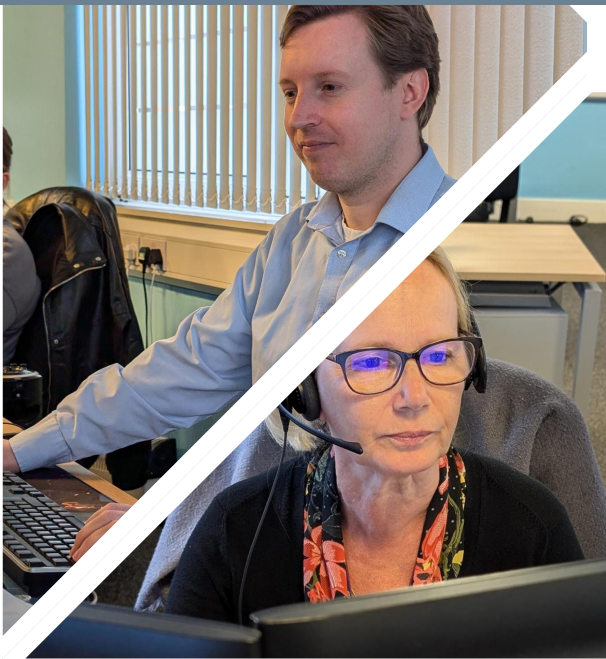
## Team Development and Wellbeing:

We strongly encourage personal development and team opportunities for the whole team to train together. We regularly deliver in-house group training sessions and provide external training, alongside courses for individuals to enhance specific skills. Clinician-led sessions, where admin staff can observe within a clinical environment, remain a popular feature of our programme, providing valuable service insights and opportunities to meet with patients..

The 2023 staff survey reveals a highly motivated and engaged workforce, with scores exceeding the national average compared with the NHS. Notably, **80%** of team members are satisfied that we have sufficient staff to carry out their roles, and **82%** value the support they receive from their line manager. Despite ongoing changes and the re-tendering process, our team remains positive, with strong recruitment and retention rates that we are proud of.

The health and wellbeing of our team is a key priority. Recent additions, include Pilates to promote a healthy and supportive work environment. A team that feels encouraged and well-supported is essential to keeping patient care at the heart of everything we do.

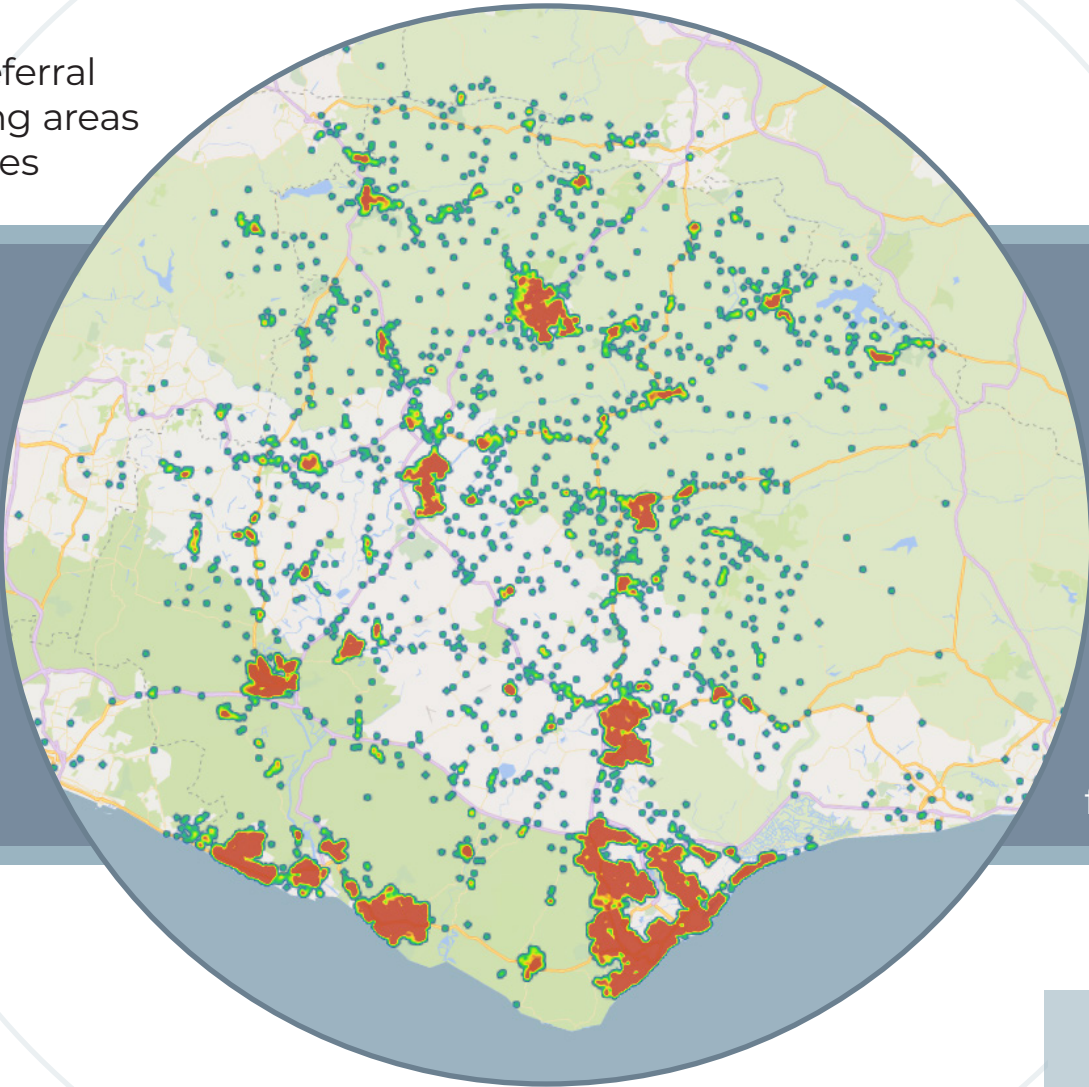
The admin team play a crucial role in ensuring a seamless journey for patients, communications, booking appointments, and coordinating every step from referral to treatment.





# OUR POPULATION

This heat map shows our referral activity this year, highlighting areas with the highest referral rates



- SMSKPE serves a population of about **365,000** people.
- We received **39,080** referrals over 23/24, that's **15%** of our population!
- **33%** of incoming referrals were for physiotherapy



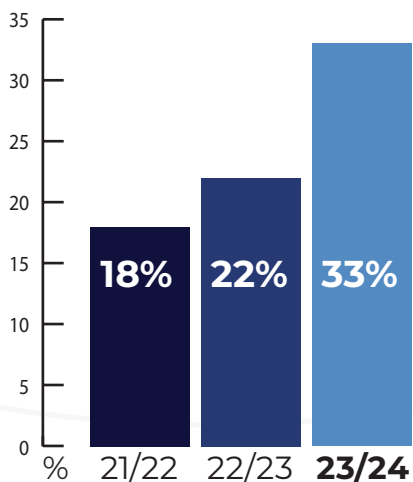
**1 in 3** physiotherapy referrals entered the system via

# PHYSIOTHERAPY SELF-REFERRAL

Changes to the website and targeted promotion to under represented communities and those at risk of health inequalities has improved the uptake of self-referral.

The self-referral link is now signposted on 20 of our GP practice websites and posters have been sent to all local pharmacies, GP practices and community centers.

% of physiotherapy self-referrals entering the MSK service



# FINANCE



SMSKPE2 Ltd achieved a £60k surplus. This was in line with budget. Profitability, Net Asset and Solvency Tests were met consistently with SMSKPE2 Ltd trading as a Going Concern. A contract variation agreement supports the going concern assessment for the contract extension period from 1st April 24 - 30th November 24.

Description	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Income	35,816	24,961	38,363	40,492	41,400
Expenditure					
Block Physiotherapy Contracts	2,540	2,480	2,507	2,590	2,652
Secondary Care Contracts	26,414	15,683*	28,871	31,222	31,036
Integrated Care Contracts	3,479	3,619	3,961	3,861	4,838
Overheads	3,365	3,132	2,759	2,759	2,814
	35,798	24,914	38,303	40,432	41,340
Surplus	18	47	60	60	60

\*Independent provider spend was centrally funded during 2020 - 2021

# WHAT'S NEXT?

## East Sussex MSK Community Partnership

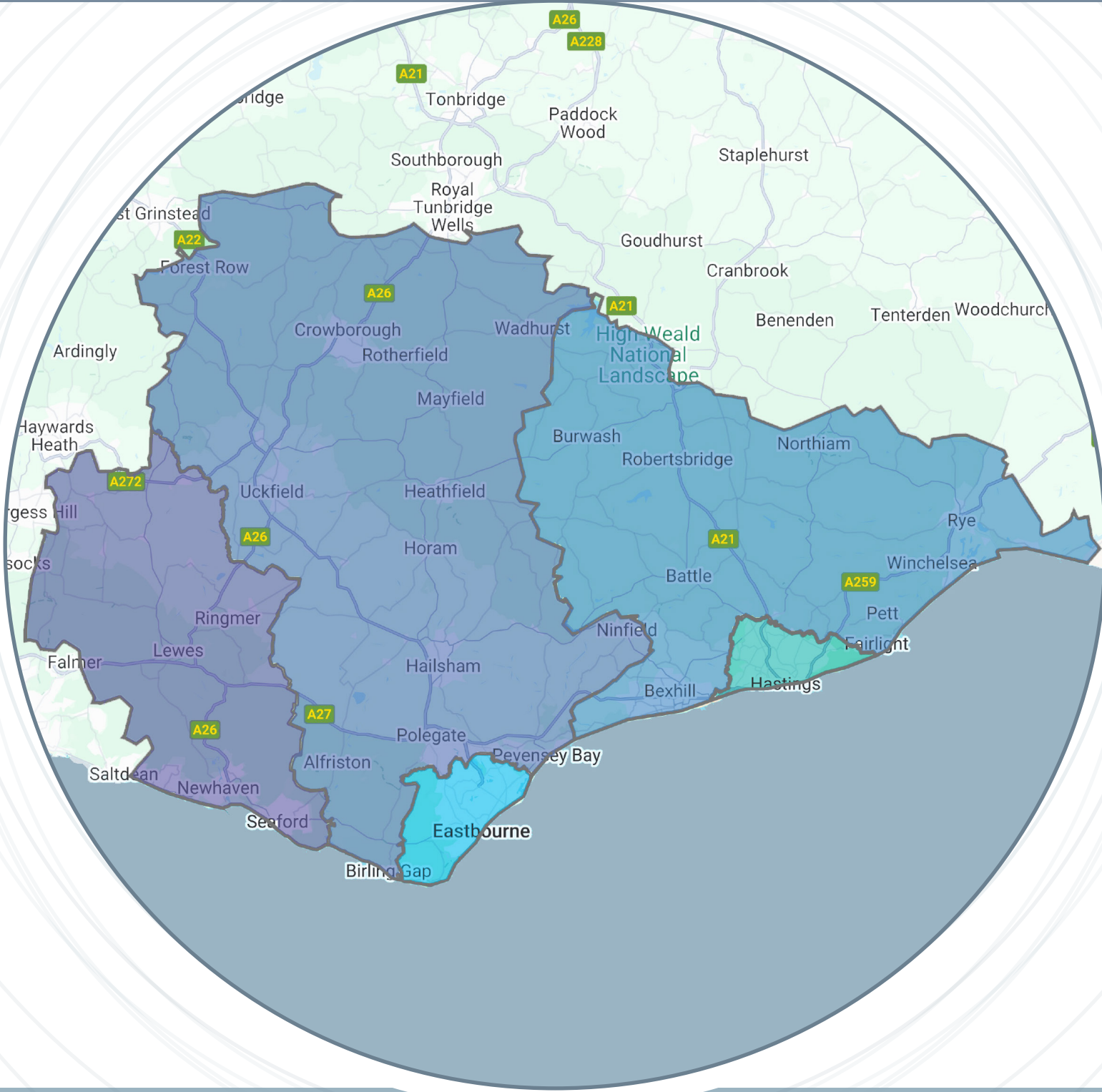
The current arrangements for delivering MSK services in Sussex are changing. From the 1st December 2024, a partnership of East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust and Horder Healthcare will deliver community MSK services for the population of East Sussex and work collaboratively to oversee the entire MSK pathway from Primary to Secondary Care. SMSKPE is proud to have collaborated to secure this new contract, of the strong foundations the company has built, and legacy of high quality, highly valued MSK services in East Sussex.

The future of MSK services in East Sussex is bright, we have developed brilliant teams who have enabled and leading models of care, integrated pathways and always put the patient first.

Looking ahead, it is important the service is aligned to the strategy for healthcare in Sussex and one of the key priorities is to address the needs of under-represented communities, ensure they are supported and can access MSK services that understand and are responsive to their needs. The digital innovations, outlined in this report, will be embedded within the new service model to optimise the impact and accessibility of services. Care pathways will continue to be refined and co-developed with our patients to deliver even stronger personalised and preventative models of care.

The aim is to be part of a more joined up local community approach to healthcare. We know that patients with MSK presentations require expert clinical care but often need support with wider determinants of health such as social and environmental factors to recover from or live well with their conditions. The new MSK services will be integrated with local community teams to make referral and access easier and better coordinate patients' needs, particularly those with other conditions.

Our people look forward to providing the very best MSK care to our local communities.



"The patient is at the heart of everything we do."

Covering  
**5**  
Integrated  
Community Team  
footprints

Serving a population of  
**546,000**

Working with  
**99**  
Primary care  
practices



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