

## **‘MAKING THE COUNCIL MORE AUTISM FRIENDLY’ REVIEW INCLUDING RESULTS OF MANAGERS’ AUTISM QUESTIONNAIRE**

<b>Committee name</b>	Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee
<b>Officer reporting</b>	Steve Clarke, Democratic Services
<b>Papers with report</b>	Appendix A1/A2 – ‘Making the Council more Autism Friendly’ Questionnaire Results Appendix B – Review Scoping Report ‘Making the Council more Autism Friendly’ Appendix C – Autism Review: Minutes from previous meetings
<b>Wards</b>	All

### **HEADLINES**

This is an opportunity for the Committee to receive feedback from the managers of the Council’s various public facing service areas on the steps taken to facilitate an autism-friendly environment.

In addition, for the Committee’s information and to aid in the formulation of future recommendations arising from the review, attached as appendices are the review’s original scoping report (Appendix B) and a timeline with the relevant minutes from the Committee’s meetings (Appendix C). Members are asked to explore any early findings or ideas for possible future recommendations to form the basis of the Committee’s report into making the Council more autism friendly.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**That the Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee:**

- 1) Note and comment on the results of the autism questionnaire directed at managers of the Council’s public facing service environments; and**
- 2) Note the Committee’s review into making the Council more autism friendly and explore findings and ideas for future recommendations arising from the review.**

### **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

#### **Autism Questionnaire**

The Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee are undertaking a review into how the Council can facilitate more autism friendly public facing services. The review, when completed, will come forward with recommendations to the decision-making Cabinet.

Part of the Committee's review is to establish the level to which the Council's public facing service environments, e.g. receptions, facilities, venues etc., are made accessible for residents with autism. A questionnaire was distributed to the managers responsible for the Council's

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Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee – 19 January 2021

service areas with a public facing environment (Appendix A1). Managers were asked to respond in a manner that reflected the delivery of their service area before the onset of the coronavirus pandemic i.e. before March 2020, unless they deemed the response specifically relevant. 13 responses were received (see appendix A2) and have been summarised below:

### ***Summary of responses***

Respondents managed a variety of the Council's public facing service environments and engaged with residents on a regular basis.

Pre coronavirus pandemic, face to face interaction with residents took place in a variety of settings; including publicly accessible areas such as reception areas and leisure centres as well as private settings such as schools, young people's centres and interview rooms. Telephone and email contact with residents were also a primary means of communication. It was noted that there was no uniform guidance or checklist from the Council ensuring that public facing environments were autism-friendly; however, there were instances of public spaces being reviewed by a Speech and Language Therapist.

Respondents were asked about the considerations taken to ensure their public facing service environments were accessible for residents with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), specifically in relation to potential levels of sensory stimulation i.e. noise levels, harsh lighting, strong smells and colour schemes. Although responses varied, it was noted that where there was an element of control over the aesthetics of the space, surroundings were tailored to facilitate muted colours and natural light where possible; this was found to foster a calming environment. There were several environments where responsibility for aesthetics lay with other departments, namely Facilities Management.

There was promising engagement with regard to considering the extent to which public information boards, notices, signage etc. were supported by the use of easily understood symbols, pictures, photos or objects. There were examples of managers and specialists reviewing correspondence templates, literature and signage with a wide range of service user needs in mind, including autism; however, this was an area where some managers requested further support and advice. Furthermore, there were few instances where a formal procedure was in place should a person with autism need to leave an environment unexpectedly.

There was a willingness to engage staff with the Council's latest Autism Awareness Training, some service areas had already taken the training and even expressed an interest in refresher training in future. Some respondents noted that simply by taking the survey, their attention had been drawn to areas where they could improve an autistic person's experience with their service. It was also noted that where reception areas were open to all residents, consideration should be given to ensure the safety of officers and offer a professional and welcoming area for visitors.

Multiple respondents expressed a readiness to receive ideas and recommendations for improving public facing service areas in an effort to become more autism friendly, particularly as many avenues of physical interaction were closed off currently due to the coronavirus pandemic.

## **Timeline of the review and minutes**

For the Committee's information and to aid in the formulation of recommendations arising from the review, attached as appendices are the review's original scoping report (Appendix B) and the relevant minutes from the Committee's meetings (Appendix C).

## **Implications on related Council policies**

The role of the Policy Overview Committees is to make recommendations on service changes and improvements to the Cabinet who are responsible for the Council's policy and direction.

## **How this report benefits Hillingdon residents**

None at this stage, pending any findings approved by Cabinet.

## **Financial Implications**

None at this stage.

## **Legal Implications**

None at this stage.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

NIL