

REVIEW BY THE SOCIAL CARE, HOUSING AND PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE - MAKING THE COUNCIL MORE AUTISM-FRIENDLY

Cabinet Member(s)	Councillor Jane Palmer
Cabinet Portfolio(s)	Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care
Officer Contact(s)	Steve Clarke, Democratic Services
Papers with report	Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee's review on 'Making the Council more autism-friendly'

HEADLINES

Summary	To receive the Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee's review into 'Making the Council more autism-friendly'. To give consideration to the recommendations of the review.
Putting our Residents First	This report supports the following Council objective of: <i>Our People</i> .
Financial Cost	The recommendations proposed as a result of this review do not in themselves have a direct financial impact on Council finances.
Relevant Policy Overview Committee	Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee
Relevant Ward(s)	All

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet welcomes the review by the Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee and agree the recommendations made by the Committee set out below. Furthermore, delegates their implementation to the Corporate Directors in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Health & Social Care:

1. That the Council's public facing service environments adopt a practical corporate standard (checklist) to ensure a consistent approach to making these areas more autism friendly;
2. That Cabinet notes the rollout of training for front-line staff thus far and recommend that this becomes embedded in the new starter induction and ongoing learning and development targets for key front-line staff in reception-based areas;

3. That Cabinet explore the feasibility of improving online accessibility for residents with autism by providing further access to, and information about, Council autism services on the Council's website;
4. That Cabinet consider the merits of seeking Autism Accreditation for eligible Council services through the National Autistic Society;
5. That Cabinet welcome the culture of continuing improvement and such improvements as the appointment of Advanced Social Work Practitioners with a focus on autism, the development of e-learning training, and clear Council-wide guidance on reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010;
6. Note the impending publication of the National Autism Strategy review and forthcoming changes to legislation with a report back to the POC at an appropriate juncture covering progress on the recommendations and Hillingdon's approach to meeting these requirements;
7. That appropriate front-line managers review their service's procedures whereby in formal contact environments, should a resident with autism unexpectedly remove themselves from a meeting or proceeding, it should not be taken as a withdrawal from the process in question, and that steps are taken to continue such formalities in a more appropriate or suitable matter; and
8. That Cabinet recognises all the Council's strong partnership relationships with organisations and providers supporting people with autism in Hillingdon.

Reasons for the recommendations

To consider the report of the Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee's review into 'Making the Council more autism-friendly'.

Alternative options considered / risk management

The Cabinet could decide to reject some or all of the Committee's recommendations, or pursue alternative routes in which to progress the objectives of the review.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

At the Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee's meeting on 23 October 2019, it was unanimously agreed to undertake a review into the way in which autistic residents interact with Council services and how the Council can become more autism friendly. The Committee have now concluded their review and a report, supported by eight practical recommendations, has been endorsed by the Committee at their 25 March 2021 meeting for submission to Cabinet.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is being increasingly recognised within our society, with many organisations now being obliged to have proper awareness and support in place. A steady cultural shift has been taking place to help transform people's attitudes, understanding and perceptions

of autism; this shift has been facilitated by the introduction of the Autism Act 2009 and the subsequent National Autism Strategy 2010. By increasing understanding and acceptance of autism, progress can be made to reduce health, education and socio-economic inequalities and improve positive life outcomes for autistic people.

The following Terms of Reference were agreed by the Committee from the outset of the review:

1. To understand the different types of autism and how residents' lives can be impacted by autism, including the direct views of local residents with autism;
2. To understand national legislation and guidance about autism and consider how the Council is currently complying with this;
3. To assess the work already taken across front-line services and other all-age Council services areas, to be aware of and support autistic people when they access our services;
4. To review autism friendly actions and initiatives across the voluntary, private and public sector to improve customer experience when accessing services;
5. To consider feasible, practical ways the Council could, going forward, make its front-line services more autism friendly;
6. To influence or propose any emerging Council plans, guidance or policies with respect to autism;
7. Subject to the Committee's findings, to make any conclusions, propose actions, service and policy recommendations to the decision-making Cabinet.

It should be noted that progress of the review was hindered by the onset of the Coronavirus Pandemic and nationwide lockdown in March 2020. When the Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee resumed meetings in September 2020, Members embraced new methods of investigation through virtual means. As a result of the review's hiatus, the timeframe for completion of the review was pushed to Spring 2021.

Through a range of information gathering sessions, as outlined in the report, the Committee sought to understand the views of expert witnesses by exploring the current work being done with regard to autism in the Borough and how further initiatives could enhance the way the Council works to become autism friendly.

Officer Comments on Recommendations

The recommendations have been reviewed by the relevant senior officers in Social Care. Officers are supportive of the recommendations and have raised no issues regarding their feasibility.

Financial Implications

The recommendations resulting from this review relate primarily to process and partnership improvements, and exploration of ways to improve access to public facing Council services for residents with autism. On the Council's part, they will not require any additional resources.

RESIDENT BENEFIT & CONSULTATION

The benefit or impact upon Hillingdon residents, service users and communities

The recommendations will further strengthen the accessibility and interaction with the Council's public-facing services by residents with autism.

Consultation carried out or required

The Committee sought a wide range of external witness testimony as set out in its report.

CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report, noting that there would be no direct financial implications of the Policy Overview Committee's recommendations in respect of processes and joint working with partner organisations.

Legal

Legal officers have confirmed that there are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL.