

Making the Council More Autism-Friendly (1 year on)

Committee name	Families, Health and Wellbeing Select Committee
Officers reporting	Carole Lewis, Graham Puckering, Poppy Reddy, Social Care and Health
Papers with report	Making the Council more autism-friendly report 2020/21
Ward	All

HEADLINES

This report provides an update to the recommendations made in the Making the Council more autism-friendly report 2020/21, which were approved by the Cabinet on 22 April 2021.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:

- 1. Notes the work being undertaken by the Council and partners to address the recommendations made in the Making the Council more autism-friendly report 2020/21.**
- 2. Question officers and partners on the content of the report.**

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The Social Care, Housing and Public Health Select Committee completed a report on “Making the Council more autism-friendly” in April 2021. The outcome of the report included 8 recommendations to Cabinet that were made by the Committee. Updates on each of the recommendations made in April 2021 are included below.

Recommendations

- 1. 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.**

Updates since April 2021

The Council have used several checklists across a range of council service areas in the past year. These checklists are all broadly similar, and all are based on NICE guidelines.

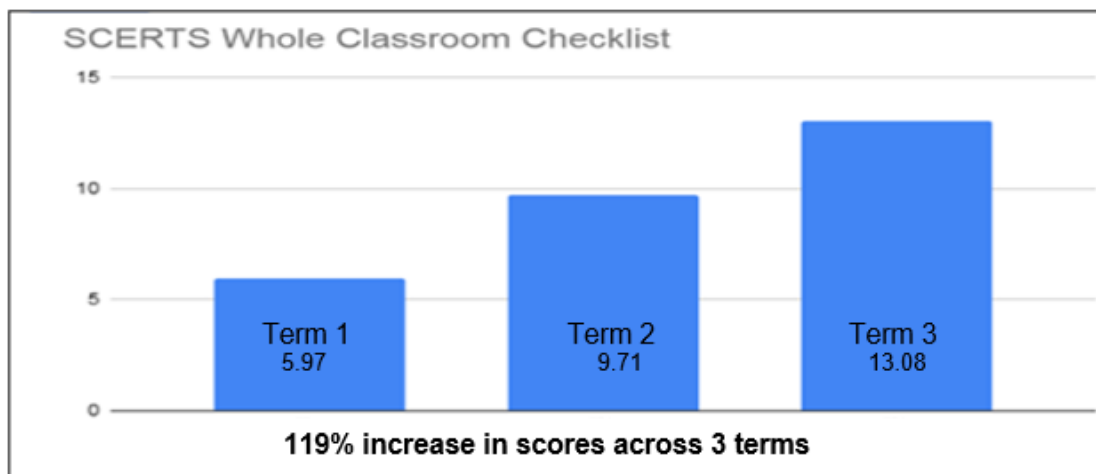
- Education-based settings use a checklist on a frequent basis, specifically within schools.
- The two-day Understanding Autism training available across the Council and to partner agencies, also includes completion of an environmental checklist. Participants complete a

checklist for their work environment areas and take these back to their base to action.

- An extended version of the sample checklist contained in the Select Committee report has recently been trialled in the Civic Centre (main reception and housing reception). These were undertaken jointly with social care, facilities and experts-by-experience. Feedback evaluations have been sought.
- Checklist completion is also planned across libraries, museums and theatres.

A recent Department for Education (DfE) project was implemented across 28 schools in Hillingdon. One of the aspects of the project was to use a Social Communication, Emotional Regulation, and Transactional Support (SCERTS) approach to review the school environments and their impact on children and young people with autism. The SCERTS approach provides a framework for supporting children and young people with social communication and emotional regulation difficulties. One of the key assumptions is that an autism friendly environment and the quality of transactional support provided by supporting adults, significantly contributes to positive outcomes. Following school training and follow up support, data showed a significant increase in environmental factors identified as having a positive impact on active engagement in the classroom

Table 1: An audit of how many positive environmental factors were present in the classroom (max 18). Measured across three terms



An example of the environmental audit section from the learning walk document can be found in Appendix 1

This audit (and Ordinarily Available Provision expectations) has now been embedded into the learning walk documentation which is used when the SEND Advisory Service support schools through the Inclusion Commitment process.

Future Plans

In the coming months, officers from across the Council will use data from the checklist pilot and

other sources to agree a single corporate version to adopt across the Council. Additionally, a policy will be developed, which will include the checklist, areas for review and the frequency of when these should be completed, using a Microsoft form for data collection.

SCERTS training was recently offered to Early Years settings. SCERTS documentation will be embedded into the operational delivery of support through the SEND Advisory Service in the Early Years settings.

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 areas.

Updates since April 21

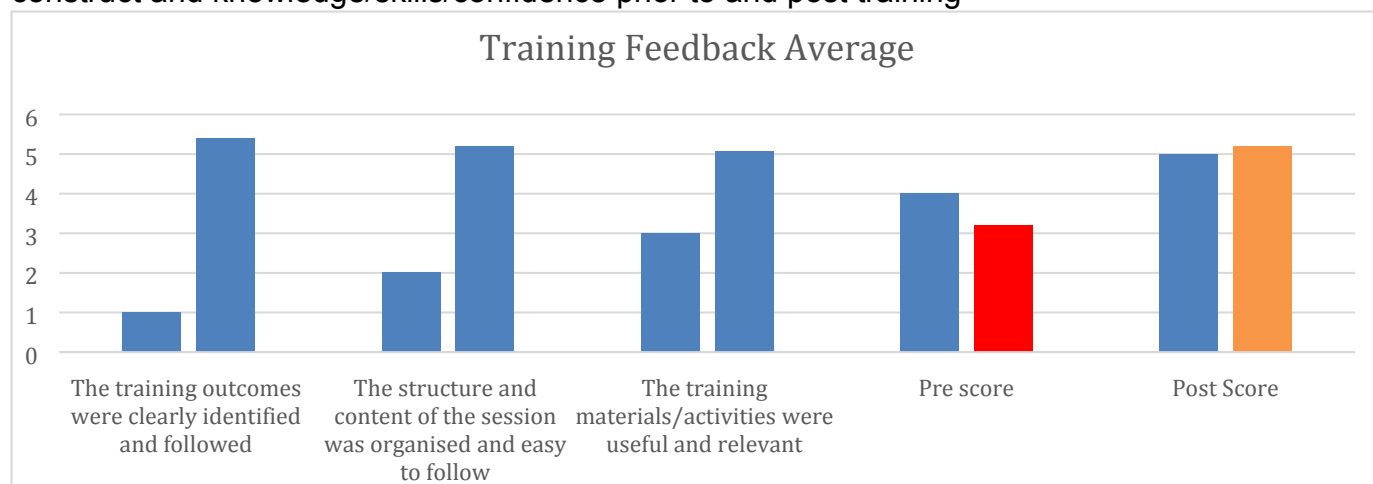
The Autism Awareness eLearning training was reviewed by the experts-by-experience. Autism Awareness eLearning training continues to be promoted and has been undertaken by a range of officers from across the Council (211 to date). From April 2022, it will be included in mandatory induction for all new starters.

A two-day Understanding Autism course, which is accredited by the National Autistic Society, has run additional courses in the past year. 140 people have completed the two-day course with a mix of attendees from the Council and partner agencies. The frequency of this in-house training has been increased from three to four times per annum.

During the World Autism Acceptance Week an article was shared to the All-Staff Email with a link to the online video about neurodiversity its impact, and how to work with autistic people.

For education settings, borough wide Autism training is available through the SEND Advisory Service, to any professionals. Settings identify specific staff who require training and register for the centralised training sessions (available to reception staff also). There is also an offer of a single, targeted training, or the one-year support of the Inclusion Commitment, which is delivered to whole school cohorts, where ALL staff are encouraged to attend. Centralised training is evaluated through a feedback form; targeted training also incorporates a learning walk and the Inclusion commitment is evaluated through a workforce pre/post audit of competencies. Training delegates are asked to rate themselves on 10 questions relating to knowledge/skills/confidence, prior to and after training.

Table 2: Centralised and targeted training scores (averages), measuring effectiveness of training construct and knowledge/skills/confidence prior to and post training



Future Plans

There is ongoing work to ensure that staff continue to access autism training, appropriate to role, and to develop mechanisms to capture learning.

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

Updates since April 21

Webpages have been reviewed. To date activity has:

- Raised the prominence of the Autism page within the SEND local offer...

[What are special educational needs? - Hillingdon Council](#)

Home > Children, young people and families > SEND local offer > I think my child has special needs

I think my child has special educational needs

Information about special educational needs (SEN) and what to do if you think your child has SEN and/or a disability.

In this section:

- What are special educational needs?
- Autism and Asperger's Syndrome**
- Where do I go if I think my child has SEN or a disability?
- What is the SEND local offer?
- Further support for parents and carers

What are special educational needs?


Many children and young people have special educational needs (SEN) at some point during their education. A child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability that calls for special educational support or equipment to be provided for him or her.

Learning disabilities

Learning disability is a general term that refers to individuals who find it harder to learn, understand and communicate than most other children their own age. Other terms used to describe an individual's situation include complex needs, high support needs and intellectual disability.

Although autism is not a learning disability, around half of autistic people may also have a learning disability.

[Read more about autism](#) →



Physical disabilities

- Added keywords to the search for this page, so it comes up when users search within our website
- Added a link to the Autism page from [Social care and wellbeing - Hillingdon Council](#)

Update my financial information | I need help staying independent at home | Visit the care and support directory

Social care and wellbeing topics

Social care, eligibility and assessments →	Autism and Asperger's Syndrome →
Carers →	Visual impairment, deaf or hard of hearing information →
Disability and mental health →	Blue Badges →
Getting older →	Advocacy services →
Staying healthy and well →	Disabled Facilities Grant and other housing assistance grants →
Information for professionals →	Activities for people with disabilities →
	Assembly for people with disabilities →
	Queens Walk Resource Centre →
	Your mental health →

The autism page is also reachable from [Health advice and support - Hillingdon Council](#)

The SEND local offer for children and young people aged 0-25 has undergone a review and

accessibility has been improved, however this is still a work in progress. In order to improve accessibility for people with autism, the Widget 'Point' package is being reviewed. This product converts printed keywords to symbol.

There is a local offer steering group in place, which is chaired by the Family Information Service (FIS). The pages have been reviewed by some of Hillingdon's Project Search interns who are experts through experience.

A new post in FIS has been created, which primarily focuses on the development and upkeep of information. The new officer joined in early March and has commenced work on the accessibility of the care directory and enhancing navigation.

The SEND local offer children, young people and families page includes information directly relating to autism. Information includes the following:

- SEND Advisory Service training – Cygnets and Early Bird
- HACS monthly support Group, activities for children,
- CAAS Support
- HPCF
- Community Connex – Harrow Mencap run this for Hillingdon
- Supporting Autism, parent sessions – Children's centres
- Autism and Asperger's Syndrome - Hillingdon Council
- Find out more about getting diagnosed and what happens during an assessment
- Search our directory for activities for children and young people with autism

Future Plans

The FIS will continue to improve the functionality and search and filter options on the Local offer website and add the following information:

- Referral process for CDC assessment
- ASD Pathway – broken down into age groups
- More information about local groups
- Arts for life project
- Links to CITS website
- Stepping Stones workshops

Further updates to the websites are planned in May 2022 when the remainder of the recommended changes will be implemented.

Work on the links for professionals is to take place, with a more concise list of key websites/resources being drawn up.

Going forward the development of a statement is to be completed about neurodiversity, including autism, where the focus on individual approaches to adjustments will be made clear. This will be

promoted through the council websites. This will also be shared through the all-staff newsletter to raise awareness further.

4. That Cabinet consider the merits of seeking Autism Accreditation for eligible Council Services through the National Autistic Society

Updates since April 21

The National Autistic Society are not currently accepting applications for accreditation and the Autism Friendly Award has also been closed to applications. It has therefore not been possible to pursue the accreditation at this time.

It is of note that various schools and education establishments have a recognised accreditation in Autism for various elements of their service.

Hedgewood School, a maintained special primary school do provide AET (Autism Education Trust) training to other education settings. The AET programme is an accredited programme developed by autism education experts and is supported by the DfE. The programme is the largest national training programme for education-based staff to support them in providing an education that enables children and young people with autism to experience a meaningful education and reach their potential. The SEND Advisory service are working in collaboration with Hedgewood School and will incorporate AET training into their service delivery.

The AET programme for Schools (5 to 16 years) is delivered through a themed approach of:

- The individual pupil
- Building relationships
- Curriculum and learning development
- Enabling environments

The school provide training through twilight or daytime sessions and offer peer support and networking for practitioners working children with Autism.

Future Plans

Services will continue to review the accessibility of the national accreditation and will apply when this is available. There is an awareness of the criteria needed to be evidenced to achieve accreditation and these are being looked at to enable a swifter application when they reopen to applications. Work is being completed to develop evidence around a range of areas including:

- Consider all LBH (London Borough of Hillingdon) sites having a record of environmental suitability
- Record the percentage of staff trained in autism
- Service pathways need to be clear and accessible for departments with front line responsibilities to consider autism.

- Develop formats of correspondence and ensure they are accessible
- Be active in obtaining autism specific feedback
- Demonstrate effective networking with relevant partner organisations

5. The Cabinet welcome the culture of continuing improvements 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

Updates since April 21

The Reasonable Adjustment Guidance is the overarching guidance across all areas of the council. This reflects the need for all areas to take reasonable steps in the way that we work with disabled people to ensure they are not disadvantaged in comparison to people who are not disabled. The guidance is in place to cover all disabilities including autism. The council has taken an individual approach to the adjustments needed for any autistic person as they do with all disabilities.

The learning disability service in adult social work has developed a Social Work champion for autism in addition the lead Advanced Social Work Practitioner role. This Social Work champion has a wide understanding and knowledge of Autism and leads on the two-day training events.

The Hillingdon Ordinarily Available Provision document, for educational settings, advocates an ethos that all children should have an equal opportunity to succeed in education. This is regardless of their background, academic ability, and cognitive level. Inclusive settings value and embrace diversity and individual differences, promoting inclusive practice in both their teaching methods and educational activity. There is a specific section in this documentation which relates to autism and social communication. Guidance on specific strategies, tools, and resources available to make reasonable adjustments are outlined in this document.

Borough wide Autism training is also available through the SEND Advisory Service, to any professionals working in educational settings. Expectations about reasonable adjustments are embedded into relevant trainings and examples of specific adjustments are offered.

New achievements in 2021/22 include an update to the Housing Strategy of '*Adopting and autism friendly approach across housing services*'. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessments covering autism has been completed/agreed and of particular significance, the Expert Reference Group (ERG) was launched (see Section 8).

Future Plans

To update the Ordinarily Available Provision Documentation to be more explicit that the provision outlined is the expectation of 'reasonable adjustments which should be implemented in line with 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 the appropriate juncture covering progress on the recommendations and Hillingdon's approach to meeting these requirements

Updates since April 21

In July 2021, the Department of Health and Social Care published *The National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People and Adults: 2021 to 2026*. The extended scope of the new strategy includes support for autistic people of all ages and is a significant change from previous national strategies, which were focused primarily on adults.

The new national strategy identifies six priority areas which are:

- Improving understanding and acceptance of autism within society.
- Improving autistic children and young people's access to education and supporting positive transitions into adulthood.
- Supporting more autistic people into employment.
- Tackling health and care inequalities for autistic people.
- Building the right support in the community and supporting people in inpatient care.
- Improving support within the criminal and youth justice systems.

Officers and partners are currently developing an all-aged autism strategy for Hillingdon that is aligned to the priority areas within the national strategy. The aim is to consult on its content in the autumn.

Key strands of work have already been initiated for the children's element of the national autism strategy. There is a multi-agency workstream which is developing the efficacy of support for families with children and young people on the pathway for an autism diagnostic assessment. Three new initiatives: Workshops led by HACS, Stepping Stones parent courses and the Arts for Life café have been launched to support families, and a directory of pre-diagnostic support is being developed.

A survey of key developments towards meeting the outcomes of the national strategy has been undertaken in children's services. Areas for development have been identified and this will form a gap analysis which will feed into Hillingdon's all age autism strategy.

Future Plans

It is proposed that the draft strategy be brought to a future meeting of the Committee for its consideration as part of the consultation process.

- 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 a 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.**

Updates since April 21

The Reasonable Adjustment Guidance specifies that the Council must make changes to the way that we usually do things to ensure that we treat people fairly. This is overarching guidance that effectively applies to all service procedures. The Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager continues to offer training to managers in regard to Reasonable Adjustments, which is also covered in the Autism Awareness eLearning training.

Future Plans

The Reasonable Adjustment Guidance is due to be reviewed by Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager in the next three months. The focus of adjustment will continue to be based on the need to meet the needs of people on an individual basis, rather than around a generic condition of disability.

- 8. That Cabinet recognises all the council's strong partnership relationships with organisations and providers supporting people with Autism in Hillingdon.**

Updates since April 21

Since April 2021, strong partnerships have continued to grow and develop through a range of forums including the Adult Autism Partnership Board (AAPB). The AAPB Board has consistent attendance from a range of organisations with increasing participation from the experts by experience.

One significant development is the formation of the Expert Reference Group (ERG). The ERG ensures that autistic adults and their supporters in Hillingdon can have their voice heard at the AAPB and other forums and contribute to future projects and developments. The ERG is jointly supported by HACS and CAAS.

The board and partners have supported a change in terminology identified by the experts by experience from the ERG. The agreed term 'Autistic People' is now used, and documentation has been amended to reflect this change.

The SEND & Inclusion Service have developed a clear governance structure for the local area, which includes key stakeholders at every level, including Health, Social-Care, Education, Hillingdon PCF, HACS and CAAS. Representatives from Nurseries, Mainstream and Special Schools and colleges are also central to relevant groups. Governance arrangements for the

SEND & Inclusions service include the following Board and Groups:

- SEND Strategic Partnership Board (oversight of work supporting autism in children's services)
- SEND Operational Group
- Priority Group 1 - Early Intervention and Inclusion
- Priority Group 2 - Co-production
- Priority Group 3 - Transition
- Priority Group 4 - Health and Social Care engagement
- Priority Group 5 - SEND sufficiency

A dynamic risk register, specifically for autism has been developed by the CCG. Key partners meet regularly to discuss holistic support for children and young people identified as at risk of crisis or in-patient care. A dynamic risk register is also in place and well-established in adults.

Future Plans

Partners at the AAPB have agreed to a rotational chairing arrangement amongst statutory agencies. The CCG will chair the board through 2022/23. The AAPB will continue to contribute to the all-age strategy.

PERFORMANCE DATA

There is no specific performance data associated with this report

RESIDENT BENEFIT

Autistic people and carers will benefit from changes underway/undertaken. Some of these benefits include learning across the council which will equip those with front facing roles to better engage and respond to autistic people they have contact with. The improvement in the environment and developments of the checklists will also improve the experience and the outcomes for autistic people accessing services.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications arising of this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Making the Council more autism-friendly report 2020/21

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 An example of the environmental audit section from the SCERTS learning walk document for educational settings

Fostering Inclusive Environments Section of Learning walk document for educational settings Example

Creating a welcoming environment

T1 T2 T3

Ensure a visual of the class name, teacher and other adults are on the classroom door
Display a visual of 'safe circle' i.e. sources of support e.g. SENCO, First Aider, Safeguarding officer

Each table to have core visuals i.e. symbols, pictures or written available e.g. help

Create a structured environment

Visual timetable - where applicable

Daily use of 'Help Box' for all lessons

Ensure whiteboard is clear from visual distractions e.g. pictures and visuals displayed around the whiteboard

Visuals and/or pictures on display boards should be organised in curriculum areas

Display board backing paper, borders and mounts for work should use harmonious colours not contrasting colours

Teacher desks, storage areas and free spaces to be tidy and clutter free

Where applicable, label areas within the classroom to promote independence e.g. Whiteboards, pens etc

Staff to have portable visuals i.e. lanyards with key symbols and pictures

Low arousal learning station in each classroom

Calm area or 'safe place' within the school

Create a person-centred environment

Promote emotional regulation by using visuals such as:

- 5-point scale,
- zones of regulation (as whole class and individual level)

Where applicable, provide visuals to define steps within an activity for e.g. first and then board, task management boards

Where applicable, provide visuals i.e. symbols, pictures of written words to support CYP's expressive needs e.g. toilet, time out

Sensory regulation activities are accessible at all times

Use of 'Volume Meter' during all teaching opportunities or lessons