

REPORT TO:	GWYNEDD COUNCIL CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE:	20 APRIL, 2023
REPORT BY	COUNCILLOR ELIN WALKER JONES/COUNCILLOR DILWYN MORGAN (SUPPORT OFFICERS – ALED GIBBARD and HELEN FON OWEN)
SUBJECT:	UPDATE ON THE GWYNEDD AUTISM PLAN

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- The Code of Practice for the Delivery of Autism Services came into force on 1 September 2021, providing clarity on the responsibilities of local Health boards, local authorities and Regional partnership boards on their responsibilities and services required to support autistic people.
- The Autism Plan for Gwynedd was presented to the Care Scrutiny Committee in November 2021.
- This report therefore is to provide an update on progress.

2. STAFFING UPDATE

- The plan originally included the appointment of a Co-ordinator and transition age Social Worker working alongside the Health Board and Ynys Mon County Council. As the Integrated Care Fund (ICF) was coming to the end of its 5 year programme in March 2022, a new 5 year programme was being introduced under the Regional Integrated Fund (RIF). When the new guidelines were published, the ongoing projects within the ICF programme were reviewed, and an opportunity arose as part of the new funding arrangements to bid for additional funding for the autism plan.
- The bid for this funding was successful and consequently means that Gwynedd 's staffing resources in relation to developing Autism Services across the county can be significantly increased. This additional funding allows for a Project Lead, transition age Social Worker as well as 4 Key workers. Ynys Mon County Council are also employing a Key Worker and we will continue to develop our compliance with the Code of Practice in collaboration. In addition, the Health Board are also currently recruiting for a Social Worker post to be part of the Neurodevelopmental Service and the interview process is imminent.
- An Autism Practice Lead has now been appointed and will take up her role in May 2023. This post will co-ordinate the development of Autism services in Gwynedd and will act as the line manager for the other posts. The Social Worker post has been advertised for the second time, with no applicants responding to the first advertisement. Interviews for the post are currently being arranged. The Key Worker posts are due to be advertised shortly. The temporary arrangement for the part-time project Co-ordinator continues to be in place until appointments have been made to the full-time posts.

3. RAISING AWARENESS

- The Code of Practice requires the need for an understanding of autism across the community, providing general awareness information and providing information to autistic people, their families and their carers.

- The National Autism Team through their website, autismwales.org, provides a wide range of information as well as contract details and useful links to other organisations. It includes information about autism, how it affects individuals and their families as well as useful resources for autistic individuals, parents and professionals.
- The Project Co-ordinator, in conjunction with Gwynedd Council's Family Information Service, has updated the Council's website to include information in relation to autism and includes links to the Autism Wales website as well as more local information. The intention is that this website is kept updated and will be developed further to include local events. It also includes contact information through a dedicated email address and will include the telephone number of the Autism Team once established.

4. TRAINING

- Through the National Autism Team (NAT) a multi agency workforce group was established and the training framework for Autism has been reviewed as part of this work. E Learning modules have been developed and the first, "Understanding Autism", is available on all Local Authority, Health Board and Police learning platforms. In Gwynedd, over 300 members of staff have now undertaken this training. So far, this mainly includes staff from children and adults social care, but also includes a significant number from Byw'n lach. Discussions are ongoing on a corporate level in relation to rolling this training out to every member of staff across the various departments and to include the training as part of induction programmes for newly appointed staff.
- The second module, "Effective Communication", has also now been distributed to all Local Authorities and Health Boards. This training is aimed at those members of staff, who, as part of their role, are more likely to come across autistic individuals. This training is currently being rolled out, starting with social care staff in children and adults services (who have already undertaken the Understanding Autism training module). This training is to be provided to front line staff across children and adult services initially and will also be provided to those staff in other departments who have a front facing role e.g. the Housing Department and leisure staff in Byw'n lach amongst others.
- 3 other modules are currently being developed through the NAT, and, for the Local Authority, this training is targeted more towards social care and Social Work practitioners in community roles. Further work is required to identify all the appropriate roles within the local authority who require this training in preparation for the completion and introduction of the modules.
- During March 2023 the Autism Bus training was provided in Gwynedd. This was an opportunity to receive an interactive sensory training session called the Autism Reality Experience, where non autistic people can experience some of the sensory processing difficulties faced by individuals on the autistic spectrum. The training was provided over 3 days in different locations across Gwynedd. Over 70 members of staff attended and the feedback on the training has been very positive. Due to the feedback, discussions are ongoing to arrange further sessions on the Autism Bus later in the year.

5. THE NATIONAL AUTISM TEAM

- The National Autism Team has an overarching role in the development of services across Wales. As a Local Authority we have already forged strong links with the team and regularly

attend the National Autism Leads meetings. These are held on a quarterly basis and gives the opportunity to share relevant updates from Welsh Government , the National Team and to share local updates. It has also been a forum to nominate appropriate individuals to participate in working groups e.g the Project Co-ordinator and a representative from Gwynedd's Workforce Development Unit were part of the working group that reviewed the Autism Training Framework and subsequently closely involved in the rolling out of the first two training modules.

- The NAT have also developed a Community of Practice, where professionals working in the field of neurodiversity and who want to upskill their knowledge are able to attend virtually. Some of the topics covered during the year have included Sensory Processing, Autism and Identity, Assessment, autism and eating and Missed and Misdiagnosis in females. Flyers for these events are distributed from the NAT to local authorities and Health Boards and then shared with relevant teams. Staff in the local authority have attended some of these sessions.

6. NORTH WALES INTEGRATED AUTISM SERVICE

- The North Wales Integrated Autism Service is hosted by Flintshire local authority, and as part of this arrangement, there is a link worker for Gwynedd. The NWIAS holds regular information events and coffee mornings in venues across the whole of Gwynedd and these events are well advertised using social media. The Council has also been promoting these event through their own social media platforms as well as through individual teams. These are open events, with varied attendance, but does give the opportunity for autistic individuals to meet or where parents can share experiences.
- Meetings are held with NWIAS on a quarterly basis to share information and developments.

7. PARTNERSHIP BOARD

- The Regional Partnership Board has responsibility to gather information about the degree in which outcomes are improved and quality of services provided to autistic people and their family or carers.
- On a local level, meetings have been held to discuss progress against the Code of Practice and currently each local authority in the North Wales Region, as well as the Health Board, are responding individually to a request to provide information in relation to progress as part of the implementation of the Code of Practice.
- The Implementation Plan is to be completed by the end of May. This information will be used to form a baseline assessment to be presented to the Regional Partnership Board and included in an evaluation currently being undertaken by an independent organisation on behalf of Welsh Government.

8. PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT 6 MONTHS

- Induction plan for the new team and launch of the new service to raise awareness.
- Establish clear processes and arrangements for the team to work across children and adults services in the county. Link in to existing forums such as the transition age forum and vulnerable adults forum. Establish links across all social care teams.

- Further strengthen the links with the regional Integrated Autism Service, attend their local information events and seek opportunities to work alongside their Gwynedd link worker to develop support for autistic individuals and their families.
- Engage with autistic individuals and their families as well as partners locally in order to move towards co-production of local services and information for autistic individuals.
- Establish a working relationship with the neurodevelopmental service and offer support at the early stages of assessment and diagnosis.
- Complete the implementation update as part of the baseline assessment for North Wales by the end of May. On completion of this work, revise Gwynedd's autism plan based on the information included in the baseline assessment.