

MMEETING	Care Scrutiny Committee
DATE	03.04.25
TITLE	Progress Report on the Autism Team's Work Programme
REASON FOR SCRUTINY	Reccommendation arising from the work of the Task and Finish Group. / Council Plan 2023-28 – A Caring Gwynedd
AUTHOR	Aled Gibbard, Assistant Head of Service, Children and Family Support Department
CABINET MEMBERS	Councillor Menna Trenholme/ Councillor Dilwyn Morgan

1. Why does it need scrutiny?

A report was submitted to the scrutiny committee in 2023 on the Autism Plan. As a result, a Task and Finish Group was established to look more closely at the plan. The report of the Task and Finish Group was presented to the Scrutiny Committee in April 2024 and it was decided to request a progress report in one year's time.

2. What exactly needs scrutiny?

1. Progress on the work programme since last year
2. Continuation of service following the end of the grant.

3. Summary and key issues

The main message of the report is that the Autism Team is now well established and has made significant progress during the last year.

The Code of Practice is relevant to the whole local authority, as well as the Health Board. The Autism Team was established in Gwynedd in order to tackle a gap in service where autistic individuals did not necessarily meet the criteria for some services. The team's purpose is not to duplicate any other service. Where autistic individuals already receive a service, they do not transfer to the team. However, the team has expertise, and they are available for consultation or to do joint work with other teams. They have a clear focus on offering a service to those individuals who are not already known to other services.

The Autism Plan remains a priority in the council's Plan 2023-28..

The priorities for action over the past year were:

- *Establish links across all social care teams and establish clear processes and liaise with transition age forums and vulnerable adults.*
- *Strengthen the link with the Regional Integrated Autism Service and work alongside them to develop support for autistic individuals in the County.*

- Strengthen the relationship with the Health Board's Neurodevelopmental Service and offer support during the assessment and diagnosis period.
- Engaging with autistic individuals and their families or carers in order to move to co-produce information and local services.
- Continue to promote and implement the multi-tiered training scheme across the Council. Conduct an audit of staff training needs, considering individual roles from the point of view of contact with autistic people.
- Continue to work in partnership with the National Service.

4. Background/Context

For the purpose of reporting on progress in this report,, this will be done on the basis of the specific areas within the Code of Practice.

4.1 Access To Information And Advice On The Services Available

- 1. The Local Authority website has been developed and provides clear information about local and national services and resources (such as the National Neuro Service Website). The "Awtistiaeth Gwynedd" web page contains clear information on how to contact social services for help and support. It also includes a link to the Welsh Government's Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 Essentials Guide, which provides information about people's rights.*
- 2. The web pages have been shared and promoted with others, such as Information, Advice and Support (IAA) teams, diagnostic assessment services, local third sector organisations, parent support groups, and schools, surgeries, leisure centers and community groups, and through social media and information days, to help ensure that the information is accessible to those who do not have access to digital information*
- 3. A Directory of Autism services has been developed and the autism team is mapping what is available locally. An online app "Niwro Gwynedd", to bring local information and resources together, is also being developed. It has been developed in consultation with autistic individuals and their families and is expected to be available by the end of April 2025.*
- 4. Information about local services is also available through Dewis Cymru. Efforts have been made to raise awareness in Information, Advice and Support teams of autism or neurodiversity web pages and local directories, to complement the use of Dewis Cymru.*
- 5. Gwynedd family centres offer information, advice and initial support and referral to families where staff have received specific training on autism and a post funded by NDIP is being piloted in their service.*
- 6. The Autism Service provides an Advice and Information service for adults. This service works closely with the Adult Health and Well-being Department. A review of the front door arrangements of the Adult Health and Well-being service is*

currently underway to facilitate access to the service and improve collaboration between services.

- 7. BCUHB's Neurodevelopmental Service has developed a padlet explaining what support is available and a variety of information for parents and carers is available on the BCUHB Website.*
- 8. The North Wales Integrated Autism Service is an important source of information and advice for autistic adults and parents and carers, and will provide face-to-face support.*
- 9. The Neurodiversity Roadshow was arranged by the team, and held in 2 different locations in Gwynedd during February and March 2025. A total of 566 individuals attended these events. 256 of those who attended were on the waiting list for the neurodevelopmental service. 38 different services had information sharing stands at the event. Workshops were also held on ADHD, PDA and Sensory Integration (these workshops were all full). The Autism Bus experience was also available in both events, with a total of 181 individuals attending. Overall there was very positive feedback on the whole event.*

4.2 Support

- 1. Support is available from IAA Services, Families First services, Family Information Services, and early support services, regardless of diagnosis.*
- 2. There is a pathway for an Autistic child with, or suspected of having, a co-occurring learning disability to access Derwen services and is clear, and works well.*
- 3. The Integrated Autism Service does outreach work across North Wales. They hold surgeries and open days for services and the public to promote the service in Gwynedd - these can be coffee mornings, drop-in sessions and they provide services that work with autistic people with networking opportunities. These events help to ensure that everyone knows what is available and can refer people appropriately. High levels of referrals to the Integrated Autism Service suggest a good awareness of the referral pathway. A member of the Autism Team also usually attends these events.*
- 4. Work has begun to review the Council's transition age policy to ensure clarity on the procedure and improve collaboration between services in the transition age forums. As part of the work, support is provided by the North Wales Learning Disability Partnership Group to collaborate with people and families to produce 'easy to read' information about the process.*
- 5. The Council's Autism Service and the Health Board's Neurodevelopmental service continue to work closely together, sharing information to meet the needs of families. The focus is on providing support and referral to understand and meet needs. Although referrals for AD and ADHD assessments continue to be made, there has been a 10% reduction in the last year. The reason for this appears to be the increase in earlier support and referral to services in the local communities.*
- 6. The Regional Partnership Board (RPB), which now has ND as its strategic priority, supported a project in the west to increase support at the front door before referrals are*

made for assessments. This has enabled the use of "What's Matters" conversations early on. The practitioners are available to provide an assessment of what is important and can give advice on assessing the needs and assessments of carers before and after diagnosis.

7. 'Support' groups for parents who are carers (Cuppa and a chat) are held in partnership with the Health Board. A number of parents attend across the county (5 locations in total). The fact that they continue to attend and see new faces monthly is testament to their value. Parents and carers attend to receive information, advice and support (IAA) and to be supported on the right path when navigating services can be difficult especially when they are under stress. It is particularly useful that local authority and health professionals regularly attend to offer IAA. In addition other professionals are invited to talk to parents about specific topics e.g. sleep hygiene, sensory, advocacy etc.

8. We offer a "Cygnet" parenting support programme in Gwynedd, which has received very positive feedback from parents and professionals who have attended. This has led to parents feeling much more confident when parenting and when advocating on behalf of their children.

9. Awtistiaeth Gwynedd provides a consultation service for professionals and works together with children's and adult department teams to ensure that assessments and plans are holistic and inclusive and clearly reflect the needs of autistic individuals and their families. Consideration is given to reasonable adjustments so that individuals and their families can contribute and be central and fully engaged with the care and support needs assessment process.

This proposal also reinforces our work around raising awareness and acceptance of autism. Through consultation workers and teams learn and develop skills and methods of engagement that are neuropositive.

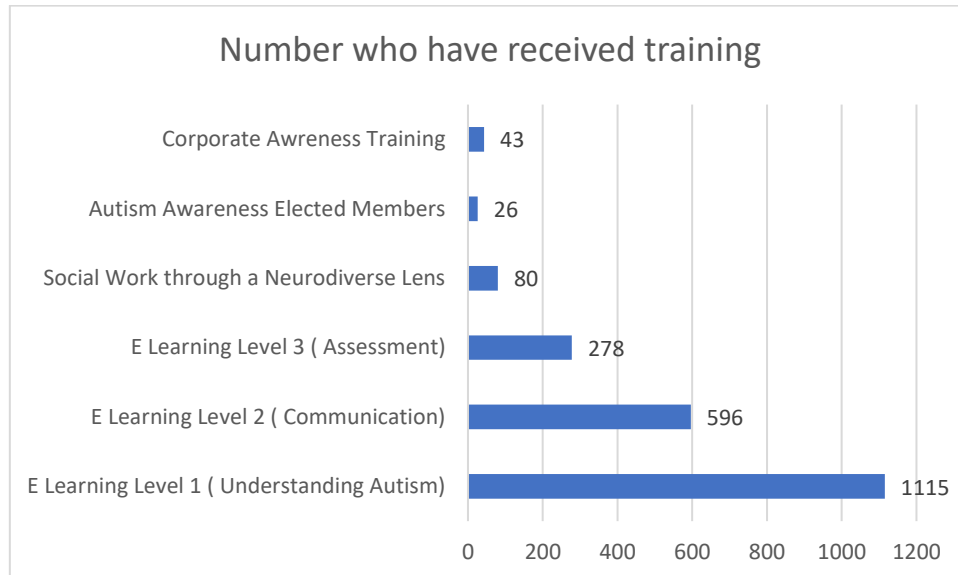
10. Gwynedd Autism provides a direct service by supporting as a secondary worker within social services in order to support autistic individuals with complex needs. We provide a programme of work based on need eg. Identity development, understanding and managing emotions, DBT and more. This helps to move individuals forward following a difficult period. Developing a relationship and trusting a worker is a key part of the work so the team's key workers work for a period in order to achieve results that are desirable for the individual and family. This work has proven to be very successful.

11. As the team has developed it became clear that sensory needs were an element that needed to be strengthened. A sensory integration role was needed to focus and to develop the work. We succeeded in attracting additional funding through the Welsh Government's Neurodevelopmental Programme and a sensory key worker was appointed. The officer receives supervision from an Occupational Therapist.. The team can now offer sensory education and advice to parents/carers and professionals can request a consultation on cases that may have sensory integration difficulties. The team can also offer sensory profiles, working with autistic individuals and their families to get a clearer picture of a person's sensory needs and thereby offer support and guidance on how to meet a need. A sensory resource library has been developed, which is available to professionals to support the families they work with. The resources are available to develop sensory circuits and to identify an individual's sensory needs. It is expensive for families to buy sensory equipment that may not be suitable, so the library is available on a 'try before you buy' basis.

4.3 Workforce Issues/ Training

1. Autism awareness training is compulsory for all members of social care staff, using e-learning resources from Neurodiverse Wales. It is also offered across all Council departments. This focuses on levels 1 (autism aware) and Level 2 (Communication).

2.



3. Autism champions are part of a practice development peer group where they could be informed about new developments, legislation, research and have the opportunity to discuss case examples in order to develop good practice. This enables the information to be shared within the teams.
4. An advanced training programme 'Social work through a neurodiverse lens' (SWthNDL,) is provided by the Gwynedd Autism Team. This training was co-produced with autistic individuals to support workers within social care to understand and accept autism and to develop knowledge and confidence when working with autistic individuals and their families. The workshop training has arisen out of the need to shift attitudes and understanding within the workforce from a pathological pattern over to a social model or a neurodiverse pattern to foster a practice model that focuses more on the individual and based on strengths. It focuses on ensuring that workers have the knowledge and skills to effectively assess care and support needs and provide person-centred outcomes and deliver person-centred outcomes effectively and holistically.
5. As part of the training framework, Gwynedd's aim is to become an autism aware local authority. We promote the online modules offered by the Welsh Government and carry out regular training needs analysis to keep a record. In addition, we are now working with third sector organisations to ensure that services in Gwynedd are autism aware and accept it. It is important that organisations that provide a service to the public can physically demonstrate (a badge in a building window) that it is an organisation that affirms autism/ND and can provide adaptations to meet a need. This is in response to the voice of the autistic neurodevelopmental community who feel they do not have equal access to 'certain' services at the moment or feel they are not understood when contacting professionals..

6. *The National Neuro Service has provided training to Information, Advice and Support (IAA) teams in Gwynedd to raise awareness of their duties under the Code of Practice.*

4.4 Partnership Working

1. *The North Wales Regional Neurodevelopment Group is active. The purpose of the group is to improve working in partnership and make joint decisions for services that support neurodevelopmental individuals in accordance with the implementation of the Code of Practice. This group has been proactive in assessing compliance with the Code.*
2. *Other regional groups, such as the IAS Regional Board, have also been established and include autistic individuals.*
3. *A local stakeholder group in Gwynedd is a recent development with the presence of relevant partners and its aim is to include individuals with lived experience over the coming months.*
4. *Through the Regional Partnership Board a Regional Stakeholders event was organised in Llandudno during March 2025. There was a good attendance from Gwynedd and the purpose of the event was to develop priorities for a regional action plan.*
5. *We have co-produced 'Llwybrau ni', a group for young people aged 14-25, with autistic/ND young people, in north and central Gwynedd. In addition, small focused groups have also been developed across Gwynedd to look at developing autistic identity and psychoeducation.*

4.5 Finance

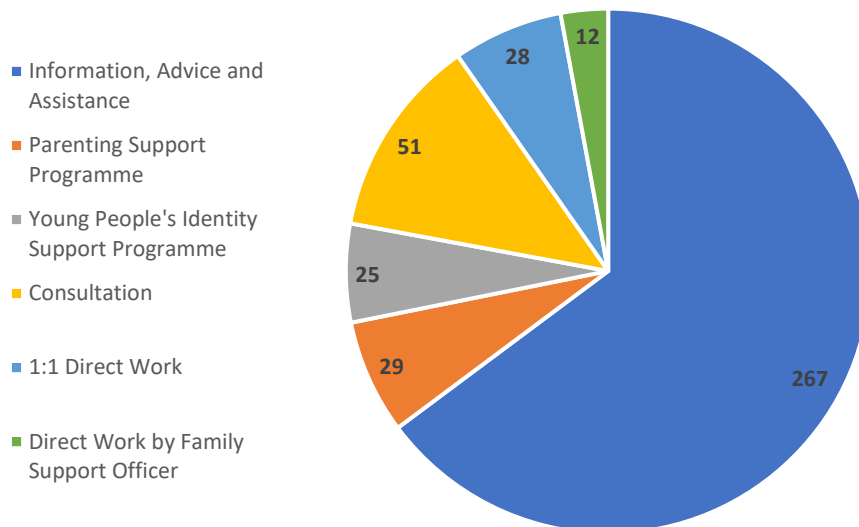
1. *Concern was expressed 12 months ago in the Committee that the plan was funded through a grant. There is no change to that situation during the preparation of this report.*
2. *The team's budget is derived from:*
Regional Integration Fund £240,000
Welsh Government Neurodevelopmental Program £40,000
Gwynedd Council £85,000
3. *The Council's funding is on a permanent basis. However the Government Programmes are over 5 years. At the moment the RIF programme runs until 2027. The Neurodevelopmental Program is funded from year to year. The*

development of Neurodevelopmental services is a priority for the Welsh Government. However we will not know about any subsequent programmes until the current ones are much closer to the end of the plans.

5. Members have asked some specific questions and the answers are provide below:

Question 1:How many people receive a Service each year?

Number of people who have received a service



Question 2: How many people are on a waiting list for the service?

There is no waiting list to receive a service form Gwynedd Autism Team.

Question 3: Do some people who get in touch not receive a service or get refused a Service?

The Team has not refused a Service.

5. Consultation

In preparing this report we have consulted with education and health services related to the autism field. The group work we have is an opportunity to hear the voice of people who have experience of autism and they contribute to and influence the team's work programme when developing services.

6. Future Generations Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2015

We have considered the relevant well-being goals under this act. We already include residents and service users when developing work in this area. In addition, collaboration at a multi-agency level internally and externally is already taking place.