



To: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)

Date: 20 April 2023

Subject: Autism in Schools Task and Finish Group – interim report

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 To inform the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) of the work progressed by the task and finish group established from members of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) and the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Board (5) to consider issues around the support for children and young people and their families, who are waiting for an autism assessment, or have been diagnosed with autism in school settings.
- 1.2 Throughout this report, we will use the word **autism** and identity-first terminology ("**autistic people**" rather than "people with autism") when referring to autistic people - children, young people and adults.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) are recommended to:
 - 1) Note the progress made by the task and finish group
 - 2) Support the continuation of the task and finish group during the 2023/24 municipal year
 - 3) Thank Councillor Joe Clifford for his contribution to the work of the task and finish group

3 Background and Information

- 3.1 In the 2021-22 municipal year, the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Board (5) ran a task and finish group to look at support for children and young people, and their families, who had been referred for an autism assessment. One of the recommendations was that the Education and Children's Service Scrutiny Board undertake a task and finish group during the 2022-23 municipal year to look at the in-depth challenges facing schools in providing support to children, young people and their families who are on the autism assessment pathway.
- 3.2 There were a number of recommendations from the initial task and finish group. A progress report was received by the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Board at their meeting on the 7th December 2022. Members of the task and finish group were also invited to attend.

4 Task and Finish Group Membership

- 4.1 The Task and Finish Group membership is Cllr Ali, Cllr Blundell, Cllr Brown, Cllr Clifford, Cllr Innes (Chair), Cllr Masih, and Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) Co-optee, Sybil Hanson.
- 4.2 Officers from Coventry Council Education Services attended meetings to provide evidence including service overviews of the Complex Communications Team, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Information Advice Service, and Educational Psychology.
- 4.3 Members of the task and finish group also visited three Coventry schools and the group would like to extend their thanks to the teachers and pupils who made this possible.
- 4.4 A summary of the work of the task and finish group during 2022-23 is outlined in sections 5 and 6.

5 Services Offering Support in Education Settings

- 5.1 Members were briefed in detail on the support to children, families and schools provided through the Council's Education Services.
- 5.2 The SEND Information and Advice Service provides impartial information, advice and support for parents and young people. They offer group sessions on Autism which are well attended. A large proportion of their contacts are in relation to Autism. The service is a statutory requirement and maintains an impartial relationship with service users and the Council.
- 5.3 The Education Psychology service provides both a statutory and traded service to the LA and education providers across the City. The service has the capacity to respond to current demand and therefore does not operate a central waiting list. Schools and services are able to identify children requiring assessment, support and intervention without a requirement for a health referral.
- 5.4 Demand for the service is high. This is set against a national recruitment and retention challenge. Whilst training placement are available, qualification follows a 3 year post graduate doctoral programme.
- 5.5 The Complex Communication Team (CCT) is also a traded service with over 90% of Coventry schools subscribing to the offer. The service provides advice, assessment and training targeted at children with or without a diagnosis of autism. The main aim of the service is to support children to access the curriculum and progress academically, by creating an appropriate environment and reducing anxiety and distraction through a trained workforce.

6 School Visits

- 6.1 Members of the T&F group visited three schools, to experience at first hand the support offered to children with additional needs. One of these was a special school, specifically for autistic children, one had a specialist unit within a mainstream primary school and the third was a mainstream primary school exemplifying best inclusive practice.
- 6.2 Members were able to talk to staff at the school, as well as talk to pupils and observe the settings in practice.
- 6.3 As a consequence of these visits, Members requested an extension of the task and finish group to allow them to engage with parents/carers, children, and young

people, as well as visit a wider range of school settings. To enable this to happen effectively and sensitively requires the work of the task and finish group to extend beyond this municipal year.

7 Emerging Themes and Areas for Further Exploration

7.1 There are several themes and areas for further exploration that have been identified through the work of the task and finish group:

- The need for clearer referral pathways for parents.
- Support for all schools to deliver best practice across the city
- Provision in Secondary schools and strong transition from Primary
- The views of parents and carers, and children and young people

7.2 These issues will be considered in more detail through work in 2023-24

8 Health Inequalities Impact

8.1 The following paragraph from the Coventry and Warwickshire All Age Autism Strategy outlines some of the health inequalities experienced by autistic people

8.2 *“The difficulties autistic people experience with communication, interaction, and social imagination lead to inequalities in health, education and social outcomes for autistic people compared to non-autistic groups for almost all conditions studied. This includes mortality, obesity, smoking, bullying, social isolation, education, criminal justice, employment, and homelessness. 80% of autistic adults and 70% of autistic children will experience mental health conditions including anxiety and depression, leading to higher rates of self-harm, suicide, and admissions to mental health hospital. In Coventry, the largest proportion of children and young people with Education Health and Care Plans have a primary need of Autism.”*

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