

Meeting of:	<b>Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>Tuesday, 09 March 2021</b>
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Healthy Living and Social Care
Report Title:	<b>Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD): Adult Autism Team</b>
Purpose of Report:	To provide Members with an update on the Adult Autism Team and to outline future actions to be undertaken
Report Owner:	Director of Social Services
Responsible Officer:	Head of Adult Services / Locality Manager
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Suzanne Clifton, Head of Adult Services
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for Executive decision
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To inform Scrutiny Committee of the progress of the Adult Autism Team.</li> </ul>	

## **Recommendations**

1. That the work being undertaken by the Adult Autism Team is considered by Scrutiny Committee.
2. That Scrutiny Committee receives annual updates on the work of this team.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

1. To keep Members apprised of the work of the Adult Autism Team and its achievements to date.
2. To ensure that a further report will be presented to this Scrutiny Committee in 2022.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 Wales was at the forefront of developing a national autism strategy publishing the original document in 2008. The strategy soon recognised that “Adults with Autistic Spectrum Disorders do not fit easily within Learning Disability (LD) or Mental Health (MH) Services, and for people with Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism especially, this is perhaps the biggest barrier to accessing services.” (WG:2009)
- 1.2 In an effort to address this the Adult Autism Advice service was created in 2012 to work across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. This new service was specifically designed to offer low level support, advice and signposting for adults who did not have a learning disability or a mental health problem.
- 1.3 Funding was originally provided in the form of a specific Welsh Government grant. When the grant funding was transferred into the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) sufficient funding was identified from the ring-fenced amounts for Cardiff and the Vale to continue providing the service. The service was staffed with two part time staff members and continued to operate in this form until the launch of the Integrated Autism Service (IAS) in September 2017.
- 1.4 The Welsh Government has confirmed funding till March 2022. This funding is to develop an Integrated Autism Service across Wales based on health board footprints. The structure of the IAS is prescribed by Welsh Government.
- 1.5 Welsh Government is currently in the process of writing a code of practice for the delivery of autism services and as part of this process undertaking a demand and capacity exercise across existing services. This process may result in a change to the amount of funding available post 2022. This could result in an increase or a decrease compared to current levels. There is no indication that the funding will be removed.
- 1.6 When the new service opened in Penarth in 2017 the two experienced Adult Autism Advice staff were added to the three Local Authority staff funded through the ICF IAS funding to enhance the existing service and provide a strong basis of

information advice and assistance expertise to the new team. The ASD lead was also attached to the office and provides line management to the LA staff. This has imbued an ethos of advice and preventative work which is shared by the health colleagues who, in addition to their clinical roles, will also provide information and advice much of which is collated by the support staff.

**1.7** The Information Advice and Assistance elements of the service are now well established and have proved to be consistently popular with people accessing the service. Broadly support is either by individual contact or delivered in groups (currently only virtual). The individual support provided in each case depends on the needs of the person. Examples include:

- Information on Department of Work and Pension benefits such as Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and Employment Support Allowance (ESA)
- Help around education for example disabled student allowance.
- Signposting to advocacy services.
- Signposting to volunteering opportunities or support gaining employment with organisations such as the Prince's Trust.

Groups have been a feature of this service since its inception however the Covid-19 epidemic has curtailed the possibility of face to face groups. Staff have worked hard to adapt materials and learn new techniques of contact and get to grips with technology.

Groups so far adapted include:

- Post Diagnostic Group - This group provides information for recently diagnosed adults. An information sheet as provided to clients explaining the group and how to access it is included in the background papers.
- Virtual Autism Hub - Adults no longer have a monthly forum in the way that they previously did but can access a virtual hub providing contact with the team virtually on a regular basis.

**1.8** The team were once again recognised at the 2020 Regional Safeguarding Awards in two categories with an individual winner for exceptional commitment to the safeguarding of vulnerable adults and the whole team received a certificate of recognition for significant wider community safeguarding.

**1.9** Autistic adults are at a higher risk of social isolation than other members of our community. Additionally autistic adults can be more vulnerable to scams, financial abuse and coercion.

**1.10** The onset of Covid-19 and the various stages of lockdown has placed this group at even higher risk. Many of the already limited social contact avenues that were previously open to them have been closed and their isolation increased. The team has been regularly checking in with people throughout Covid and always responding promptly as a service to any safeguarding concerns. The team are very good at communicating concerns with each other and the multidisciplinary nature of the team provides prompt advice and support to each other. The team

have adapted to the needs of the group by radically changing the method of operation. Adults are receiving calls or emails or video contact, whatever works best for them, to provide that much needed human contact. The outcome may be information provided, signposting, 3rd sector organisation involvement or IAS support being offered. The team member may simply find that the very act of calling someone, of speaking to another human being, of having an understanding listening ear is in itself therapeutic. As we all come to terms with working from home, not going out etc. we all have some insight into how isolating the current situation is. For those who were already isolated to begin with the social isolation could become very serious indeed without the work of teams such as this.

**1.11** Local Authorities in both Cardiff and the Vale and the UHB, through the Regional Partnership Board have supported the local implementation of the IAS. In practical terms for the Vale this included adding the staff that made up the Adult Autism Team to the Integrated Autism staff team funded by Welsh Government. Local Authority staff have continued to deliver an information advice and assistance service as described above, with the added benefits of being part of a wider integrated service.

**1.12** The Minister's original funding announcement for the IAS provided funding until 2021. In the ministers written statement of 20 September 2020 he said. *"I also want to re-affirm the commitment to re-occurring funding for autism services I made in my last written statement on 23 September 2019. For 2021-2022 the Integrated Autism Service funding will continue through the Integrated Care Fund which is overseen by the Regional Partnership Boards, emphasising the integrated nature of the work, between health and social care, together with other partners. Funding will be available for a further year to give more time for the demand and capacity review to be completed and future funding decisions to be made."*

## **2. Key Issues for Consideration**

**2.1** The confirmation of ongoing Welsh Government funding places the Adult Autism Advice service on a somewhat different and more solid footing compared to its original form as a grant funded service. It has developed from a small regional information and advice service to one that fed into and informed the development of the Integrated Autism Service. This service has become a mainstay of Welsh Government autism policy evidenced by its ongoing funding.

In addition to the development of the Integrated Autism Service Welsh Government are also working on a Code of Practice on the Delivery of Autism Services. This will underpin existing duties in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the NHS (Wales) Act 2006. This Code of practice and associated set of guidance has been out for public consultation at the end of 2020, is scheduled to be laid before the Senedd in March 2021 and implemented in September 2021.

The Integrated Autism Service is an integral part of this code and associated

guidance. This is changing what started out as a grant funded Adult Autism Advice Service which then merged with the current IAS and evolving into a statutory service underpinned by Welsh Government.

- 2.2** Outcomes for people accessing the system are measured using a range of tools. These are prescribed so that there is consistency across Wales. This provides data that indicates reductions in generalised anxiety, reduction in depression score's and improvement in mental health and wellbeing.
- 2.3** Staff additionally apply a technique called the Autism or Spectrum Star. This is used when an adult is embarking on a series of meetings or episode of involvement. The Spectrum Star covers nine key areas: Physical health, Living skills & self-care, Well-being & self-esteem, Sensory differences, Communication, Social skills, Relationships, Socially responsible behaviour, Time and activities. By using a tool such as this people are worked with in a consistent way and staff gain a clear indication of the areas that should be concentrated on. By applying it at the end of a series of meetings both the staff member and the individual can get a clear indication of improvements that have been made and where further work might be appropriate. By incorporating it into individuals' records a future referral has a clear starting point.

### **3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?**

- 3.1** Long-term: The evolution of a small grant funded team into part of a WG funded service places this service on a welcome long-term footing. The additional staff provide a much more flexible and extensive range of response. The team are able to work with clients who were previously far too complex.
- 3.2** Prevention: It is inherent in the design of this service. The team is not a commissioning service and the concentration of the Local Authority staff is entirely on low level preventative interventions. This includes work to keep clients safe recently recognised by receiving awards at the Regional Safeguarding Board awards.
- 3.3** Integration and Collaboration: The team has a strong history of working in an integrated and collaborative manner. This was initially around working with social services staff principally based in the Community Learning Disability and Mental Health Teams. With the inception of the IAS, this has now extended to being part of a formal integrated team and working collaboratively day to day with health colleagues. Wider support is provided to colleagues in Learning Disability and Community Mental Health teams. The team also works with the adult services support planners for both Cardiff and the Vale sharing resources and meeting regularly.
- 3.4** Team members also work collaboratively on national initiatives such as a recent employment symposium delivered with Welsh Government, DWP and academic colleagues.

- 3.5 Involvement:** One of the first actions by the original team was the creation of two adult forums which enabled adults with an autism diagnosis to make their voices heard and to feed into the development of the service. Although personal direct involvement opportunities are currently limited virtual contact with adults has been enhanced. The team is regularly contacted by agencies seeking the views of the adults who engage with the service. This helps to ensure that their voices continue to be heard at a local regional and national level.

## **4. Resources and Legal Considerations**

### **Financial**

Local Authority funding supports two part time ASD Community Support Project Workers who deliver the service across the two Local Authority areas. The posts are for 21 hours and 22.5 hours a week. Sufficient funding has been identified within the ring-fenced RSG funding across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan to meet the running costs of these posts. These posts are in addition to the WG funded IAS posts. This ring-fenced funding also supports the role of ASD lead across the two authorities.

### **Employment**

- 4.1** There are no specific employment implications as a result of this report.

### **Legal (Including Equalities)**

- 4.2** There are no specific legal implications as a result of this report.

## **5. Background Papers**

Ministerial Statement: 20 September 2020

<https://gov.wales/written-statement-statutory-code-practice-delivery-autism-services>

Consultation on code of practice for the delivery of autism services

<https://gov.wales/code-practice-provision-autism-services>

National Employment Symposium Webinar

<https://autismwales.org/en/about-us/employment-symposium-webinar/>

Report to Healthy Living & Social Care Scrutiny Committee, 14<sup>th</sup> January 2020.

<https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/Committee%20Reports/Scrutiny-HLSC/2020/20-01-14/Autistic-Spectrum-Disorder-Adult-Autism-Team.pdf>

Post Diagnostic Group flyer.



PDG Leaflet - virtual  
course - TEAMS.pptx

