

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 15 May 2012

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Children and Enterprise

PORTFOLIO: The Leader

SUBJECT: The Review of Progress against the National Autistic Society (NAS) Report 2008 for Halton Borough Council

WARD(S) Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To recommend to the Executive Board of Halton Borough Council the acceptance of the Report entitled The Review of Progress against the NAS Report published in 2008
- 1.2 To note the findings of the Report as evidence of good practice in the strategic approach to the provision of support to children, young people and adults with Autistic Spectrum Conditions in Halton
- 1.3 To outline proposed actions will be taken to improve the provision for children, young people and Adults with Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC) in Halton

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) The Executive Board of Halton Borough Council endorses the NAS Report and approves how the recommendations will be taken forward in the attached Development Plan (Appendix 2).**
- 2) The Executive Board gives its approval for formal consultations to begin on the re-designation of Ashley Special school as an 11-19 school for pupils with ASC.**

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In 2008, The National Autistic Society was commissioned to undertake a review of provision within the borough for children and adults with Autistic Spectrum Conditions.

- 3.2 The recommendations from the 2008 report and the associated action plans were monitored through internal processes. However after three years, an external independent evaluation was required. This coincided with issues raised through our own self-evaluation procedures and questions from some stakeholders about the match of the provision to the needs of children, young people and their families/carers.
- 3.3 In addition the proportion of children and young people with Autism Spectrum Conditions were being placed in provisions outside the borough, through the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Tribunals (SENDIST) process, was increasing.
- 3.4 In order to address the issues cited above, Halton Borough Council, commissioned an independent and objective strategic review of the progress made since 2008.

4.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 4.1 The objectives of the review agreed by the Executive Board in November 2011 were as follows:
- To conduct an independent and objective strategic review of the progress made by Halton Borough Council in provision for children and young people with Autistic Spectrum Conditions (ASC) in relation to the Strategic Review of 2008. Part 1 to relate to Children's Services; Part Two to relate to Adult Services.
 - To make recommendations about further steps Halton Borough Council need to make in order to strengthen communication with parents of children and young people with ASC and to increase parental confidence in the in borough provision for children and young people with ASC.
 - To complete a written report for Halton Borough Council with a summary of findings and key recommendations
- 4.2 The National Autistic Society (NAS) was commissioned to carry out the review which started in December 2011.
- 4.3 The scope of the Review included meeting with Senior Officers from the Borough Council, all those connected with the Autism Development Services in Halton and a variety of stakeholders, including, parents, teachers, support staff as well as children and young people.
- 4.4 The Review took place over four visits to Halton, which total eleven days for two consultants, with report writing allocated ten days.

- 4.5 The Reviewers found the process of examining progress against the last review to be transparent, helpful and supported by the local Authority's own robust self-evaluation, at every point.
- 4.6 Overall, the review team concluded that Halton Borough Council has made progress against the majority of the 2008 recommendations.
- 4.7 The attached Development Plan addresses the 17 recommendations from the 2012 NAS Review.
- 4.8 Detailed action plans from teams and services in the Adults and Children and Enterprise directorates will be produced and monitored and reported through Quarterly Monitoring Reports. The ASD Strategy Group will evaluate progress against priorities.

5.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The 2012 NAS review has taken into account statutory changes that have been introduced since the 2008 review. The Autism Act 2009 and Fulfilling Rewarding Lives: The Strategy for Adults with Autism have informed and provided a national context for policy development locally.
- 5.2 The Council's Strategy contained within the Children's and Young People's Plan and the Strategy for the Inclusion of pupils with SEN provide the policy content and the framework.

6.0 **OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The parents of children and young people experiencing Autistic Spectrum Disorders and Social Communication Difficulties are highly vulnerable, themselves experiencing challenges and anxieties, whilst additionally dealing with external systems and procedures. Any Review of provision for children and young people with Autism Spectrum Conditions has to include of parents/carers, and recognise their vulnerabilities. This will have resource implications with respect to face to face contact and improving communication using a variety of media.
- 6.2 Further investment in relation to 11-19 Special School provision supporting Autism Spectrum and Social Communication Disorders would prevent the need for parents' preference for their children and young people's placement in independent educational institutions out of borough.

6.3 **Financial implications:**

There are financial implications for Halton both in terms of staff time

and resources and in terms of being able to educate and care for children and young people experiencing Autistic Spectrum and Social Communication Disorders within the Borough and their home communities. However, most of the changes can be funded from within existing resources

7.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

7.1 **Children and Young People**

The School-aged Pathway and the effective use of a multi-agency approach ensures that needs of Children and young people on the with ASC are addressed regard with to the Every Child Matters agenda namely:

- Being Healthy
- Staying Safe
- Enjoying and Achieving
- Making a Positive Contribution
- Achieving Economic Well-being

7.2 The Development Plan contributes to Halton's Sustainable Community Strategy and the Children and Young People's Plan, 2009-2011, with respect to:

- Early intervention and prevention of possible complex difficulties in order to secure long-term positive outcomes for children and young people;
- Safeguarding the emotional health and mental well-being of children and young people;
- Removing barriers to achievement and attainment;
- Supporting children and young people in making a successful transition to adulthood;
- Supporting positive outcomes for education, employment and training;
- Transparent and seamless partnership working across agencies and in collaboration with children and young people and their parents/carers.

7.3 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

Early accurate, holistic assessment and diagnosis of, and intervention with, children and young people experiencing Autistic Spectrum Disorder and Social Communication Difficulties are important precursors for transition into adult life and future positive prospects and quality of life throughout adulthood.

7.4 **A Healthy Halton**

All children and young people experiencing Autistic Spectrum

Disorders and Social Communication Difficulties will have access to appropriate health provision within education and within Child and Mental Health Support (CAMHS).

7.5 A Safer Halton

Not applicable

7.6 Halton's Urban Renewal

Not applicable

8.0 RISK ANALYSIS

8.1 The proportion of children diagnosed with ASC is set to increase nationally at a time when resources available to local authorities are being reduced. There is an increased risk that the demand from young adults with ASC, requiring local provision may exceed supply.

8.2 Without a clear Pathway there is likely to be an increase in the number of successful Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Tribunal applications against the borough, with long term cost implications

8.3 A reconfiguration of present staffing resources in order to continue with the current arrangements is not considered feasible and could result in service support to schools being reduced.

9.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

9.1

- The Autism Strategy and Development Plan when implemented will secure access children and young people and adults experiencing Autistic Spectrum Disorders and Social Communication Difficulties to have access to the same opportunities as all children and young people and adults.

9.2

- The implementation of the Development Plan will enable children, young people and adults experiencing Autistic Spectrum Disorders and Social Communication Difficulties, to have their strengths identified and barriers to attainment, achievement and well-being reduced so they can reach their full potential.

10.0 REASON FOR DECISION

The NAS report recommended re-designating Ashley School as an ASD specific 1-19 school in order to meet the continuum of needs locally. The re-designation of Ashley Special School will ensure that local provision meets the needs of pupils with ASC. This will ensure

that pupils stay within their communities. The cost of out of Borough provision will also be reduced there will be a significant saving to the Council.

11.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

The only other option available is for pupils to be educated out of Borough away from their families, peers and communities at a significant cost to the Council.

12.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Formal consultations will commence as soon as the proposal has been approved by Executive Board. A formal public consultation process and time line will be drawn up. The re-designation should be completed during the 2012/13 academic year.

13.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT

None under the meaning of the Act.