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| Report on | Update: Introduction of Autism (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 (Autism legislation) |
| Date of Meeting | 8 th September 2022 |
| Reporting Officer | Philip Moffett, AD Organisational Development, Strategy and Performance |
| Contact Officer | Ann McAleer, Corporate Policy and Equality Officer |

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| Is this report restricted for confidential business? | Yes | |
| If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon | No | X |

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| 1.0 | Purpose of Report |
| 1.1 | The purpose of this report is to update Members on recent updated legislation relating to Autism, in the context of updated legislation which passed the NI Assembly in the form of the Autism (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022. |
| 2.0 | Background |
| 2.1 | Council has previously carried motions, two within the current mandate, relating specifically to the introduction of quiet hours as part of our services for those requiring them and specifically on calling upon enhancing autism funding and support services within the district. These motions were in 2019 and 2021, respectively. |
| 2.2 | This is an update paper to provide an indication of some of the activity which has been ongoing in this area. |
| 2.2 | <p>In the ongoing development and delivery of our services the council continues to be mindful of our commitments in ensuring they're as inclusive as possible for those with autism, their families and carers. The following provides a summary of some of the steps and actions we've undertaken.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An individual with Autism has been employed by the Council, for a period of 3 months, on an employment programme with the aim of providing practical employment experience in their area of third level education • Employers for Disability has provided Autism Awareness Training for 30 staff across two sessions to skill up those particularly within customer facing roles • Council's Policy and Equality Officer completed a CACHE Level 2 Awareness Course through the Magherafelt based Empower Programme and has also |

joined the Northern Trust's ASD Forum which meets quarterly, with access to a member's forum for comments/advise.

- Mid Ulster Disability Forum (the Council's Disability Advisory Group) has increased membership of Autism Support Organisations. It now includes and works directly with Sunflower Support, Tobin Centre, Empower and AUsome Kids as well as the Education Authority Youth Included programme which welcomes all neuro diverse conditions as part of it
- Engagement and contact has taken place with support groups such as the FACTS (Families, with Autism Coming Together for Support) group based in Magherafelt which involved the sharing of information by video to elected members on their activities and service provision within their locality
- Our Parks section is actively exploring the delivery of Forest School sessions for children with autism as part of their programme offering
- Burnavon Arts & Cultural Centre has achieved an Autism Impact Award and offered summer activities for children which cater for children with various additional needs, including ASD. ASD friendly Workshops which are being scheduled throughout the year are being organised as part of Halloween Crafts and our Fun Days
- Seamus Heaney HomePlace also run play and craft events and activities suitable for children with SEN, including ASD
- Hill of the O'Neill & Ranfurly House offer a quiet hour of arts activity prior to their corporate events, for example, Easter; Halloween and Christmas.
- Online Just a Minute Training (JAM Card) is being made available to customer facing staff. The initiative supports individuals with autism (and other types of neurodiversity) and their carers to access a Council service while discreetly requesting support if it is required.
- Parks section, OM Dark Skies and the Bridewell, Magherafelt have all recently completed Autism Impact Award training and should be in receipt of their Autism Impact Award and plaques in the coming weeks
- The Council promotes Autism Awareness Week across its social media platforms
- A sensory audit has been completed of Council's leisure services with recommendations for changes to be made to make the centres more accessible for customers with autism. Suggestions have included making social stories etc available.
- Leisure services provide an Autism Activity Club for 6-12 years in 4 centres across the district and have provided taster sessions for Quiet Hours for swims and soft play. The sessions were developed in consultation with local autism support groups.

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Events team have purchased sensory equipment to facilitate quiet and sensory spaces during corporate events • An initial meeting has been held with a provider the 'sensory sprint' space (the Cubbie) that offers regulation space for individuals with autism. It is being considered by some Councils as an alternative to quiet space/rooms |
| 3.0 | Main Report |
| 3.1 | <p>The original Autism Act became law in 2010. It focused on 2 specific areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amending the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 so as to resolve any ambiguity as to whether the term "disability" applies to autistic spectrum conditions; and • By requiring the preparation and implementation of an autism strategy |
| 3.2 | <p>The Autism Act has now been updated and strengthened in the shape of the Autism (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, adding the following additional requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"4B) The autism strategy must set out how the Department is to make provision for an autism support and early intervention service.</i> • <i>(4C) The autism strategy must set out how the Department is to make provision for an autism information service which is accessible (both in person and remotely) by; (a) persons with autism; (b) the families and carers of persons with autism, and (c) professionals working with persons with autism, and their families and carers.</i> • <i>(4D) The autism strategy must set out how the needs of adults with autism will be addressed, including in particular their needs in respect of—</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>(a) lifelong learning,</i> <i>(b) employment support,</i> <i>(c) recreation,</i> <i>(d) physical health,</i> <i>(e) emotional and mental well-being,</i> <i>(f) supported living, and</i> <i>(g) housing.</i> • <i>(4E) The autism strategy must set out how the Department will reduce waiting times for autism assessment and treatment services provided by HSC trusts."</i> |
| 3.3 | <p>The Autism Co-ordinator for the NHSCT has indicated that it is very early days, but the Department for Health is currently exploring how the requirements of the legislation will be implemented and the associated actions will form the basis of an Autism Strategy (2023-2028) expected to be published next year.</p> |

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| 3.4 | As set out in Section 2.0 (above) Council has responded to service need and introduced services in help meet the needs of individuals who have autism as well as ensuring that staff have completed appropriate training. Therefore, this amended legislation does not equate to any immediate changes to service delivery. |
| 3.4 | The amended legislation, however, means that the Council should be cognisant of the design and delivery of its services within and across Directorate in considering the needs of people with Autism. This could require further adjustment to Council service delivery going forward. |
| 4.0 | Other Considerations |
| 4.1 | Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications |
| | Financial: None |
| | Human: None |
| | Risk Management: None |
| 4.2 | Screening & Impact Assessments |
| | Equality & Good Relations Implications: Currently there are no specific actions to equality screen. |
| | Rural Needs Implications: Currently there are no specific actions to conduct a Rural Needs Impact Assessment. |
| 5.0 | Recommendation(s) |
| 5.1 | It is recommended that Members note the amended Autism legislation, work being undertaken in this area for service users and the potential impact that it is likely to have on the design and delivery of Council services in the future. |
| 6.0 | Documents Attached & References |
| 6.1 | N/A |