

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

12 DECEMBER 2017

QUESTION 1 in accordance with Standing Order No.36

Councillor Josh Williams to ask the Chair of the Committee:

Suicides in the Autism Community

MPs of all parties have agreed that the "horrific" level of suicides in the autism community needs to be urgently confronted, with (according to the National Autistic Society) more than 70% of autistic people suffering from mental health issues at some point in their lives. Hard working GPs aren't always sure where to send people, information isn't always available and pathways to help people who are on the autism spectrum are not always clear.

Can the Lead Councillor update us on the Autism Partnership Board - is that still meeting or has it been another victim of the cuts in Reading ?

Can the Lead Councillor briefly update us on any work the Council is doing with its partners to reduce the overlong waiting times for CAMHS autism assessment, and to help and support parents of autistic children in Reading ?

REPLY by the Chair of the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee

I invite Councillor Gavin, the Lead Councillor for Children's Services and Families to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by Councillor Gavin, Lead Councillor for Children's Services and Families:

Thank you, Cllr Williams, for your questions, which I will address in turn:

The Autism Partnership Board

The Partnership Board has unfortunately not met in recent months as the Chair has been off sick. It has now been taken up by Jo Hawthorne, Head of Well Being and Public Health, and will re-commence its work in the New Year.

CAMHS Waiting Times

Unreasonably long waiting times for vulnerable children to access mental health services is a well-documented and in my view a national disgrace, created by many years of chronic underfunding from this government.

The Local Authority are not responsible for the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, is a service provided by Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust (BHFT), I am therefore answering this part of your question on behalf of colleagues in the Health sector. CAMHS remit is to provide support, advice, guidance and treatment for children and young people with severe or moderate mental health difficulties whose symptoms are having a significant impact in their day to day lives.

The issue of long waiting times is high on BHFT'S agenda and they have reduced the average waiting time from over two years in 2015 to an average of 42 weeks at this time. Still much too long for distressed children and families. BHFT triage and prioritise children and young people so those children and young people most in need are assessed sooner. BHFT are committed to reducing the waiting list further and this is evidenced by the agreement to increase staffing levels, improving systems and utilising evidence more effectively from multi agency professionals, such as Speech and Language therapists, already involved with children and young people. Reading council are committed to working with them in whatever way we can to improve the pathway for these young people.

BHFT have also put in measures to support families whilst they are waiting for an assessment to take place. These include pre-assessment workshops run by Autism Berkshire and Parenting Special Children, an Autism helpline, an online support tool SHaRON as well as information and advice leaflets. The Council promotes and signposts these services through our Service Guide and The Local Offer.

Help and Support available for parents of autistic children in Reading

Within Reading there are a number of organisations, support groups and activities for children and young people with autism and their families. These are outlined within the Local Offer and the enclosed link provides more detail:

<http://servicesguide.reading.gov.uk/kb5/reading/directory/results.page?familychannel=3&qt=autism&term=&sorttype=relevance>

Autism Berkshire is particularly active in the area but there are other organisations such as Reading Autism Families Together (RAFT). Activities include trampolining, swimming and cinema clubs to name a few.

Within Children's Services, the Children and Young People with Disabilities team support children and young people with learning disabilities and autism making use of direct payments, short break units and care support.

Within education we have an autism adviser for schools and settings as well as both a primary and secondary resource unit in schools for children with autism who need additional support. The primary resource unit also provides outreach support to schools.