

June 2014

Dear resident,

Thank you very much for your interest in Think Autism, the update to Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives and how the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames is responding to it.

Here in Richmond we have been working in partnership with the Push for Action campaign and it is great to hear that you have supported this, too. A lot has changed over the past 3 years and we are proud of what we have achieved in Richmond. The update on the national strategy is enabling us to build on the work so far and continue improving opportunities for children and adults on the autistic spectrum in Richmond.

Since the extensive consultation on the local autism strategy in the autumn of 2012, the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames has been very keen to continue involving *experts by experience* (people on the autistic spectrum and their carers) throughout the process of implementing the Richmond Joint Autism Strategy. This has been achieved by involving experts by experience in the different work stream project groups as well as the over-arching Autism Programme Board.

In addition to this we are continually inviting feedback and keeping all those interested up to date on progress by publishing the Richmond Autism News roughly every 6 weeks and maintaining up-to-date webpages at www.richmond.gov.uk/autism.

In the newsletter we publish useful information about general and autism-specific services, updates on work on the local autism strategy, and maintain an open channel of communication with over 100 people on the autism spectrum, their carers and friends who have signed up to receive the newsletter. Please visit http://www.richmond.gov.uk/home/services/health_conditions/autism/autism_news.htm to find our most recent newsletter, copies of previous editions and to sign up for future editions – the next newsletter is due at the end of June.

During the self-assessment exercise in October 2013 we not only sought feedback from the already established experts by experience, but used the newsletter to openly invite feedback on the proposed response. You can find the October edition of the newsletter with the proposed responses here.

As soon as the new self-assessment questionnaire has been released we will again work on seeking feedback from as wide a variety of individuals who are supported by the autism strategy as possible, using the network we have established over the past 18 months.

In fact, the National Autistic Society recently recommended the work on involving experts by experience in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames to another local authority at the very beginning of their consultation process. It has been great to share our experience and learning with another local authority in London and give them the opportunity to improve their practice as a result.

We are pleased to hear about the development of the Autism Innovation Fund and are excited to apply for funding from it once the criteria and application guidance has been released – the Department of Health states that this is scheduled for the end of June. It is not yet known what the criteria or time-lines for grants from this fund are, but we will of course communicate any news as and when we have it via our webpages and the newsletter.

Since the amount of the fund is very limited and the level of applications will no doubt be high we are not just relying on this to find innovative and positive ways to support people on the autistic spectrum and their carers in Richmond, but have already developed, and will continue to develop, new services locally through other available funding streams.

This includes social skills programmes for young adults, carer support and information groups, a drop-in social support group for adults and a focus on training and awareness raising in general throughout all council services (particularly in leisure services) so far. Through our joint commissioning collaborative with Richmond Clinical Commissioning Group we have commissioned an Aspergers diagnostic service which includes post diagnostic support. People using this new service have shared their experience, and through this have had a direct impact on shaping the service for the future.

New ideas are continually being developed in partnership with people on the autism spectrum and their carers as well as local organisations, including the local branch of the National Autistic Society.

You can find more information on the implementation of the Richmond Joint Autism Strategy generally at www.richmond.gov.uk/autism

As stated previously it is great to hear that you are interested in and support the local autism strategy, so please accept this as an invitation to get involved in the local implementation in any way you can. Sign up for the newsletter, contact our Autism Specialist Worker Rebecca Swist at autism@richmond.gov.uk with your feedback and ideas, get involved in training and awareness raising or in one of the autism work stream project groups or in the Autism Programme Board.

Whichever way you can, we would very much like to hear your thoughts!

With kind regards,

London Borough of Richmond upon Thames and
Richmond Joint Commissioning Collaborative