

**READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

TO:	HEALTH & WELLBEING BOARD		
DATE:	17 APRIL 2015	AGENDA ITEM:	9
TITLE:	READING'S AUTISM STRATEGY		
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SERVICE:	DISABILITY SERVICE	WARDS:	ALL
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with and relates to others, and how a person learns and processes information.
- 1.2 In 2014 Berkshire Autism Society completed a needs assessment on support for people with autism in Reading, including consultation with people with autism and their families and carers. This needs assessment informed the development by Reading Borough Council and partners of an Autism Strategy that sets out the plans to improve support for children, young people and adults with autism in the borough.
- 1.3 Reading's Autism Strategy is included as Appendix A to this report. An Equality Impact Assessment is included as Appendix B.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 To approve the Autism Strategy and recommend it for sign-off by the Council and other partners
- 2.2 To endorse the establishment of the Autism Partnership Board to progress work on the Strategy through an Action Plan
- 2.3 To agree for the Strategy Action Plan for be presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board at a future meeting

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The first national autism strategy, 'Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives' was published by the Department of Health in 2010. The Strategy set out how a range of services across

the public sector should improve support for adults with autism. 'Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives includes the government's vision for adults with autism:

'All adults with autism are able to live fulfilling and rewarding lives within a society that accepts and understands them. They can get a diagnosis and access support if they need it, and they can depend on mainstream public services to treat them fairly as individuals, helping them make the most of their talents.'

3.2 In 2014, the Department of Health published 'Think Autism', an update to the 2010 Strategy following a review of progress. 'Think Autism' reaffirmed the commitment to the five areas of action originally identified in 'Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives' to improve the lives of adults with autism:

1. Increasing awareness and understanding of autism
2. Developing clear, consistent pathways for the diagnosis of autism
3. Improving access for adults with autism to services and support
4. Helping adults with autism into work
5. Enabling local partners to develop relevant services

3.3 The national autism strategy addresses support for adults with autism, and the transition of children and young people into adult services. Support for children and young people with autism will change as the legislation governing Special Educational Needs & Disability included in the Children and Families Act is implemented, with statements of SEN phased out and replaced by Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCPs).

3.4 Reading does not currently have a local Autism Strategy, although the Learning Disability Partnership Board does cover support for people with a learning disability who also have autism (estimated to be 1 in 3) through its 'A Big Voice in Our Lives' Strategy. People with learning disability and autism are involved in consultation and engagement events completed by the Learning Disability Partnership.

3.5 In Reading's Autism Self-Assessment Exercise in 2013, five areas were rated as 'Green', ten areas as 'Amber' and two as 'Red'. The next Autism Self-Assessment is due in early 2015. The Autism Strategy will set out how Reading intends to address areas identified as needing improvement.

4. DEVELOPMENT OF READING'S AUTISM STRATEGY

4.1 In 2013, Berkshire Autistic Society were commissioned by Reading Borough Council to complete an assessment of the needs of people with autism in the borough, and the services available to support children, young people and adults with autism and their families and carers. The report was informed by a consultation with people with autism and their families, mapping of existing provision in Reading, and an examination of population projections and data to understand need.

4.2 Progress with the research by Berkshire Autistic Society, including initial findings, was reported to the Health and Wellbeing Board in December 2013. The Board agreed to a future report on the Autism Strategy once completed.

4.3 The Berkshire Autistic Society research was used to develop an Autism Strategy for children, young people and adults with autism in Reading. Drafts of the Strategy have been shaped by feedback from the multi-agency Steering Group and wider partners across the local authority, health services, the voluntary sector, and people with autism and their families.

- 4.4 The Strategy sets out the national and local context for people with autism and their families, and the current service provision. The main part of the Strategy presents six priorities for improving support for people with autism in Reading:
1. Increasing awareness and understanding of autism
 2. Improving access to diagnosis
 3. Supporting better outcomes for people with autism
 4. Supporting people with autism to live safely and as independently as possible
 5. Supporting families and carers of people with autism
 6. Improving how we plan and manage support
- 4.5 The Strategy is aligned with a number of other key strategic documents that outline support for people with autism. This includes the Special Educational Needs and Disability Strategy that is in development for children and young people aged 0-25, and the Berkshire West Joint Commissioning Plan for Services for People with Learning Disabilities and Challenging Behaviour.
- 4.6 Work is underway to produce an Action Plan that sets out how the actions identified in Strategy will be delivered. It is proposed that the Strategy Steering Group continues to meet to oversee this work, as an Autism Partnership Board. The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to endorse the establishment of an Autism Partnership Board that builds on the existing membership.
- 5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS**
- 5.1 The Strategy supports Priority 1 in the Council's Corporate Plan 2015-18, "Safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable". The focus on early support through universal services also supports Priority 2, "Providing the best life through education, early help and healthy living".
- 5.2 The Strategy is aligned with Reading's Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2013-16, which includes a Goal to 'reduce the impact of long term conditions with approaches focused on specific groups'.
- 6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**
- 6.1 Consultation with people with autism and their families and carers heavily informed the needs assessment completed by Berkshire Autistic Society and the Autism Strategy. A wide range of partners and providers were also contacted by Berkshire Autistic Society in their research, and made comments on draft versions of the Strategy that were used to inform the final version. The Strategy's development has been overseen by a multi-agency steering group.
- 6.2 One of the statutory requirements for local authorities is that the views of people with autism and their carers are taken into account when developing services; engagement is therefore an ongoing need throughout the life of the Strategy as the Action Plan is developed and implemented in partnership with people with autism and their families.
- 7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**
- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment for Reading's Autism Strategy has been completed and is attached as an Appendix to this report.
- 8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The Strategy sets out how Reading will continue to develop support to people with autism to meet the responsibilities placed on local authorities by the statutory guidance supporting the implementation of 'Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives'. The statutory guidance requires each local authority to:
- Develop the area's commissioning plan around services for adults with autism using the best available information about adults with autism in the area
 - Appoint a joint commissioner/senior manager who has in their portfolio a clear commissioning responsibility for adults with autism
 - Ensuring that the views of adults with autism and their carers are taken into account in the development of services locally

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Strategy is set in the context of reducing budgets across Council services and other partners. It aims to support organisations to work creatively and in partnership to ensure support is delivered to people with autism who need it as early as possible, to minimise the longer-term impacts.
- 9.2 The Council will ensure that people with autism who are eligible for Adult Social Care services continue to be able to access support to meet their needs, while working with partners to support people with autism across the spectrum to live as independently as possible, and prevent, reduce or delay their needs from becoming more serious.
- 9.3 Delivery of the Strategy will be supported by the development of an Action Plan by the Partnership Board to set out more detail around the specific actions identified to implement the Strategy, and how this will be completed with the resources available, including working more effectively across partners.
- 9.4 It is proposed that the Action Plan is presented back to the Health & Wellbeing Board once finalised, with more detail about plans, responsibilities and timescales. The Action Plan will demonstrate how Reading is narrowing the gap and improving outcomes for children, young people and adults with autism, their carers and families with partners within the resources available.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Reading's Autism Strategy (Appendix A)
- 10.2 Equality Impact Assessment for Reading's Autism Strategy (Appendix B)
- 10.3 'Think Autism: Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives, the strategy for adults with autism in England: an update' (2014)
- 10.4 'Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives: The Strategy for Adults with Autism in England' (2010)