

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SOCIAL CARE AND HEALTH

TO:	ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE		
DATE:	31 MARCH 2022		
TITLE:	BRIEFING - UPDATE ON AUTISM PARTNERSHIP BOARD		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR JOHN ENNIS	PORTFOLIO:	DIRECTORATE OF ADULT CARE & HEALTH SERVICES
SERVICE:	ADULT SOCIAL CARE	WARDS:	BOROUGH WIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	SUNNY MEHMI	TEL:	0118 937 4586
JOB TITLE:	ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	E-MAIL:	Sunny.mehmi@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Committee and provide assurance that the Autism Partnership Board is working with community partners in order to improve the lives of children and adults with autism in Reading.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the ACE Committee note the new "National Autism Strategy"
- 2.2 That the ACE Committee note the workplan for the Autism Partnership Board and the progress in the development of the Reading Autism Strategy

3. POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 National Context:

- 3.1.1 The Autism Act 2009 set out the requirements for local authorities and NHS bodies to work with local partners to improve services and support for people with Autism. The work plan focused on:

- Training for staff in improving their understanding of Autism and responding to the needs of those of Autism
- Identification and diagnosis of people with Autism, followed by the offer of needs assessment
- Planning of services and support that enable people with Autism to live independently within the community.

- 3.1.2 The Act places a duty on Government to produce and regularly review an 'Autism Strategy' to meet the needs of adults and children of all ages with autism in England. The national Autism Strategy was first written in 2009 and updated in 2010 and 2014. The

latest Autism Strategy was published in July 2021: 'The national strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026'¹.

3.1.3 The latest strategy builds on the previous two strategies which focused on training and raising awareness and widens the themed areas from the previous strategies and considers the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on autistic people and their families.

3.1.4 The 2021 strategy aims to focus on 6 themes, these include:

- improving understanding and acceptance of autism within society
- improving autistic children and young people's access to education, and supporting positive transitions into adulthood
- supporting more autistic people into employment
- tackling health and care inequalities for autistic people
- building the right support in the community and supporting people in inpatient care
- improving support within the criminal and youth justice systems

3.2 Local Context

3.2.1 Since the last ACE report in October 2019, the work of the Autism Board and the development of the Reading Autism Strategy has been impacted by COVID19 Pandemic, which has resulted in health and social care, along with our voluntary partners diverting resources to support residents impacted by the virus.

3.2.2 The newly released National Autism Strategy 2021, ensures that we are able to align the national priorities along side the local demands and needs of the Reading Autistic population.

4. Current Position

4.1 Reading Autism Partnership Board

4.1.1 The Reading Autism Board was restarted in January 2019, with a terms of reference and remit to drive forward the work in developing the Reading response to Autism. The Board would develop and implement the local strategy and an action plan in response to the national Autism Strategy, however, as mentioned above due to the COVID pandemic this work has not progressed as expected.

4.1.2 Since September 2021, the Board has agreed to meet every 6 weeks to fast track the work on the development of the Strategy. The aim is to consult on a draft Autism Strategy, which we will consult on and report back to Elected Members. Following feedback, the finalised strategy and action plan will be presented to a future Committee meeting for approval.

4.1.3 Given the length of time since the development of the terms of reference and membership, the Board has reviewed these and agreed on the clarified the purpose and membership. See Appendix 1.

4.2 Purpose of the Autism Partnership Board

4.2.1 The Partnership Board is a consultative body of stakeholder representatives who are committed to improving the lives of people with Autism of all ages, and their carers to enable them to lead fulfilling and rewarding lives.

¹ [National strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97822/national-autism-strategy-2021-to-2026.pdf)

4.2.2 The Board will ensure it is inclusive, ensuring the active participation and co-production from a wide range of experts by experience, parents and carers.

4.2.3 The Board will constantly seek to raise awareness of Autism, using a strength based approach within the wider community and work to enable children and adults with autism to be fully included in society. The aims of the Autistic Partnership Board are detailed in Appendix 2.

4.3 Next Steps

4.3.1 The aim is to have the draft Autism Strategy for consultation by June 2022. We anticipate following feedback and amendments to the strategy this will be finalised with an action plan for presentation to Committee in September 2022

4.3.2 The Autism Partnership Board have agreed to two task and finish groups:

a) The first task and finish group will collect national and local datasets across health, social care, education, Criminal Justice System, housing and employment to identify an evidence-based needs assessment. This needs assessment will help shape and inform the priorities.

b) The second task and finish group will develop an Engagement Strategy and will not only bring together the views of autistic children, adults and their families, but aim to use these stakeholders to co-produce the new Strategy, its objectives and priorities. The Board has discussed the potential to use these stakeholders as a reference group in the future and potentially merging the two groups into one.

4.3.3 While the delivery of the Autism Strategy will be the primary role of the Board, the Board will also develop a wider work plan to develop the remit and coverage its role.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The formation of the Autism Board alongside key partners across the Health, Educational and Voluntary sector ensure that Strategic Aims set out in the Reading Borough Council Corporate Plan are met:

Thriving Communities

- Committed to tackling inequality in our society, to ensure everyone has an equal chance to thrive whatever their economic, social, cultural, ethnic or religious background.
- Prioritising the needs of the most marginalised groups and the most vulnerable adults and children in our communities.
- Tackling the effects of the pandemic, such as increased unemployment, long term health problems, mental health issues and social isolation.

5.2 Furthermore the following ambitions are realised through the action plan of the Board.

- To promote equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all
- Contributions to Community Safety, Health and Wellbeing of residents with autism.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There is no environmental or climate implications arising from this report. Any actions that derive from the Autism Strategy will support the Council's climate change policy commitments:

- The 2019 'climate emergency' declaration: this recognises the need for more urgent and concerted action to avert the most dangerous impacts of climate change.
- The Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25: the Council endorsed the Strategy, based on the vision for 'a net zero, resilient Reading by 2030', in Nov 2020.
- The corporate Carbon Plan 2020-25: the Council adopted the Plan, which set a target to reduce the Council's own emissions by 85% by 2025, en route to net zero by 2030, in Nov 2020.

These commitments are reinforced in the Council's Corporate Plan.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

7.1 Autistic children, adults and their families including carers and professionals that support autistic people, will be engaged through the work of the Board. The Board currently benefits from the representation of various community groups and a task and finish group to engage and co-produce the Autism Strategy has been formed. This will contribute towards the success of the Board and consultation of and the implementation of the Strategy and action plan.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 It is not considered that an EIA is required for the decisions being made in this report. The aim of the work is to reduce inequality for autistic people and will ensure that those autistic people with other disabilities have, as far as possible, equality of access. Any work that comes out of the Board will be considered separately should this be necessary.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The national autism strategy Fulfilling and rewarding lives (2010)², and linked statutory guidance arising from the Autism Act 2009³ set out requirements for local authorities and NHS bodies to work with partners to improve services and support for people with ASC. Local Authorities should set up and lead the local Autism Board and is required to carry out / implement the government's Autism Strategy 2021 on a local level.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no budget implications regarding the set up and running of the board. The action plan Autism Strategy and Action plan will set out commissioning intentions which support children and adults with autism remaining supported in the local community thus reducing residents being placed a long way from home so that they stay connected to local services and support networks.

² [Fulfilling and rewarding lives: the strategy for adults with autism in England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/428222/fulfilling_and_rewarding_lives_the_strategy_for_adults_with_autism_in_england.pdf)

³ [Autism Act 2009 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/38/section/1)

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 The national strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026 – 21st July 2021

Care Act 2014⁴

⁴ [Care Act 2014 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

Appendix 1: The Reading Autism Partnership Board Terms of Reference

The Reading Autism Partnership Board is a consultative body of stakeholder representatives who are committed to improving the lives of people with Autism of all ages and their carers to enable them to lead fulfilling and rewarding lives.

Definitions

It is recognised that there are a number of different terms used to describe autism, for example, 'Autistic Spectrum Disorders'. For consistency with the national strategy guidance, the term 'autism' will be used in the context of the Autism Partnership Board.

Aims

- To develop, agree and implement the Autism Strategy for Children, Young People and Adults with Autism in Reading, ensuring it aligns with the 5-year National Autism Strategy
- To govern the implementation of the strategy to ensure its effectiveness and that it remains responsive to local need, national guidance and other requirements
- Championing the voice of autistic people in Reading, ensuring they are actively involved in co-producing the Autism Strategy
- Update the Local Offer, including the Reading Services Guide regarding the outcomes for people and improvement of services
- To support and monitor progress of the development of services for people with autism and their families
- To provide advice to commissioners about the needs of the population with autism
- To ensure that commissioned services are needs led co-produced with children and adults with autism together with their supporting voluntary sector/parent organisations
- To ensure that local Reading Autism Plan aligns with the 10-year NHS Plan
- To link to other health and local authority strategies i.e. Adult Social Care Accommodation Strategy, Education and SEND Strategy
- Ensuring Partners are able to feedback on local developments and issues

Workplan

- To implement the Action Plan related to the Autism Strategy for Children, Young People and Adults with Autism in Reading

Chair

Sunny Mehmi, Assistant Director, Adult Social Care

Board Members

- Chairing – RBC Adult Social Care
- Autistic Resident with Lived experience
- Reading Families Forum
- Head of Snowflakes/Blessed Hugh Farringdon/Avenue
- Preparing for Adulthood - RBC
- Early years
- Reading College (Part of Activate)
- RBC Public Health Rep
- NHS Berkshire West CCG rep
- Brighter Futures for Children (Education & Social Care rep)
- Thames Valley Police – Autism Lead
- Autism Adviser

- Healthwatch
- Autism Berkshire
- Reading Mencap
- Talkback
- Kingwood
- BHFT Clinical Psychology
- BHFT Neuropsychology

Please note all members may not have to attend every meeting but should be invited if the agenda is relevant to them.

Other representatives may be invited to attend as appropriate to the work of the Board.

Members who cannot attend meetings of the Board should make this known in advance and where possible, organisations should send a suitable substitute (by prior arrangement).

Meetings

Meetings are held every 6 weeks.

Updated: January 2022