

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SOCIAL CARE AND HEALTH

<b>TO:</b>	<b>ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE</b>		
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>18 JANUARY 2023</b>		
<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>READING'S ALL AGE AUTISM STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN</b>		
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#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee of the outcome of the public consultation on Reading's All Age Autism Strategy 2022 – 2026 and to implement this strategy and action plan across Reading.

#### 2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Adult, Children's Education Committee note the findings of the public consultation for the Reading's All Age Autism Strategy
- 2.2 That the Adult, Children's Education Committee agree the Reading's Autism Strategy, Action Plan, for children, young people and adults and delegate the delivery and oversight to the Autism Partnership Board.

#### 3. POLICY CONTEXT

##### ○ 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 autistic people. The Act put a duty on Government to produce and regularly review an 'Autism Strategy' to meet the needs of for children, young people and adults with autism in England. The latest Autism Strategy was published in July 2021: 'The national strategy for autistic children,

young people and adults: 2021 to 2026. Reading's strategy and action plan enables us to align the national priorities in conjunction with local demands and needs of those residents in Reading with autism.

- **Local Context**

### **3.2 Background - How the strategy was shaped**

3.2.1 Public and partner engagement has been a core element of developing Reading's Autism All Age Strategy (2022-2026), see Appendix 1, including autistic people and their families and carers, third sector and voluntary organisations and professionals from across Reading. Engagement and coproduction took place via interviews, workshops, surveys, forums, existing local groups, targeted outreach to groups and feedback sessions. This insight was used to inform and shape the strategy, and to test emerging findings, recommendations, priorities, and vision development.

3.2.2 Overall, throughout the development of the strategy we received views and contributions from 257 people from the surveys and the focus groups. During the initial development of the strategy, we received contribution from 227 people and 30 once the public consultation opened.

3.2.3 As a result of the engagement and feedback **Seven** priorities were developed have been used as the basis for the strategy:

1. Improving awareness, understanding and acceptance of autism
2. Improving support and access to early years, education and supporting positive transitions and preparing for adulthood
3. Increasing employment, vocation and training opportunities autistic people
4. Better lives for autistic people – tackling health and care inequalities and building the right support in the community and supporting people in inpatient care
5. Housing and supporting independent living
6. Keeping safe and the criminal justice system
7. Supporting families and carers of autistic people

### **3.3 Public Consultation**

3.3.1 See section 7. Community Engagement and Information.

## **4. Current Position**

### **4.1 Next Steps – Implementation of strategy, priorities and action plan**

4.1.1 The All-age Autism Strategy and Action Plan will be delivered by the Autism Partnership Board. This Board will report directly into the Health and Well Being Board to ensure this strategy remains a priority and owned by all partner agencies.

4.1.2 Each of the seven priority areas, highlighted above, will have a responsible Partner agency to lead on that element of the Action Plan, making sure actions are achievable and make a difference to our autistic residents.

- 4.1.3 The Autism Partnership Board will be expected to write an annual report to the Health and Well Being Board in the Summer on the progress of the implementation of the All-age Autism Strategy, its Action Plan, success and issues over the year.

## **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 work plan of the Board, All age Autism Strategy and its Action Plan.
- To promote equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all
  - Contributions to Community Safety, Health and Wellbeing of children, young people and adults with autism.

## **6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There is no environmental or climate implications arising from this report.

## **7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

- 7.1. Engagement and coproduction took place via a mixture of interviews, workshops, surveys, forums, existing local groups, targeted outreach to groups and feedback sessions. This insight was used to inform and shape the strategy, and to test emerging findings, recommendations, priorities, and vision development. This strategy was developed through two phases from November 2021 to May 2022.

### **Phase 1: defining the current state and needs**

- Reviewing strategic documents, current level of provision and support
- Determining population health need
- Stakeholder engagement and consultation
- Development of an Autism Needs Assessment

The aim of this phase was to understand the existing challenges and identify potential future opportunities for improvement to inform the development of the strategy.

### **Phase 2: Prioritisation, vision and strategy development**

- Co-development of a local vision and key aspirations
  - Production of a long list of priorities and action areas
  - Prioritisation process: criteria to review the priorities against to produce a shorter list e.g., what will have the greatest impact, can realistically be delivered locally
  - Strategy development and testing with autistic people, their families, and those who support them including systems to ensure the strategy and focus reflected identified needs, was fit for purpose and adequately ambitious.
- 7.2 As part of the initial engagement, participation and input from autistic people and those who support them was actively sought through a series of focus groups, workshops, and a needs analysis survey. We received views and contributions from 257 people from the surveys and the focus groups. Previous stakeholder engagement feedback from children and young people, and their parents and carers from the previous two years was also included.
- 7.3 The formal public consultation on the strategy and priorities ran for 60 days from 20<sup>th</sup> July 2022 to the 18<sup>th</sup> September 2022. This extended period was solely due to the summer break and the education sector being closed. An online survey was hosted by Reading Borough Council to gather feedback.
- 7.2 The response to the public consultation was relatively low (30 respondents in total), the wider context needs to be taken into consideration as most of the views and feedback were gathered and analysed during the Needs Assessment period. Engagement and coproduction took place via interviews, workshops, surveys, forums, existing local groups, targeted outreach to groups and feedback sessions. This insight was used to inform and shape the strategy, and to test emerging findings, recommendations, priorities, and vision development.
- 7.3 The results of the consultation will support Reading Borough Council, local statutory services and voluntary sector partners in meeting our statutory duty to implement actions in relation to the provision of services for autistic people in Reading (Ref: [The National strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)). It will also ensure Reading meet the requirements from the Autism Act (2009) ([Autism Act 2009 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#))

## **Overview and Methodology**

- 7.4 Reading residents, autistic children, young people, adults, and their families and carers, as well as people working with or supporting autistic people, in a caring capacity or professional role were consulted for the views on the All-age Autism Strategy 2022-2026 and its Action Plan.
- 7.5 The purpose of the public consultation was to confirm that the priorities identified in the Needs Assessment reflected what we had been told by autistic children, young people and adults and, their families, carers and professional's supporting them, and that they are the ones that the strategy should focus on over the next four years, or if there are any other areas that needed to be considered. The results of the consultation cemented the chosen priorities for the strategy and will drive the next stage in developing the related implementation plans.
- 7.6 The public consultation questionnaire was hosted online, and two public events were arranged focusing on engaging with autistic people, their families and carers face to

face and online, as well as attending focus groups using the already established links with key local groups and partners.

- 7.7 Support was offered and provided for people who preferred to use other methods to contribute their views, such as hard copy version of the consultation questionnaire, the draft strategy and additional support via telephone or email where offered.
- 7.8 An Easy Read version of the draft strategy was produced and made available to access online and in local libraries during the consultation period.
- 7.9 Where engagement activities were held online, support was provided to ensure attendees were able to use online platforms (such as TEAMS or Zoom) or could join the meeting via a telephone line. Where engagement activities were held face to face, additional care was taken to ensure people taking part were in a safe and accessible environment.

### Consultation feedback ‘You said, We did’

Themes	You said	We did - Changes we made within the strategy
Diagnosis	<i>‘To encourage representation of transgender and women’</i>	Will be a thread throughout the priority areas
Autistic voice	<i>‘more autistic voice, first person experiences and role models’</i>	Already present under Priority 1 within the strategy, however changes made to make this more explicit
Autistic people with Learning Disabilities/Physical Disabilities/Mental Health issues	<i>‘recognition of the needs of those autistic people who have complex learning disabilities and/or physical disabilities’ and mental health issues’</i>	Present within the strategy under Priority 4 but it will more explicitly presented in the implementation plans
Socialising and getting connected	<i>‘opportunities outside of core business hours’ and ‘online community’ for autistic people’</i>	Already present under Priority 4, but made more explicit in the strategy
Diagnosis for children/young people	<i>Automatic access to speech and language / Occupational Therapist / Psychological support’</i>	No changes made. Currently no additional resources available to facilitate automatic access.
Diagnosis for older adults	<i>‘better access to diagnosis for older adults’ including ‘access to a path to official diagnosis</i>	Already present within the strategy under Priorities 4 and 7
Recognise all carers of autistic people	<i>Strategy ‘is written in the language of child and parent and hasn’t really considered the needs of carers of adults’</i>	Reworded to ensure inclusivity of carers of adults (Priority 7)
Language barriers	<i>‘The future plans should include ‘more about how to ensure that families</i>	Already present within the strategy under Priority 1

		<i>whose English is not as good or are vulnerable themselves are able to access support'</i>	
Training professionals	for	<i>'Autism needs to be taught as a specialty not as a general topic' in teaching/childcare settings'</i>	Already present within the strategy under Priority 1 but reworded to be made more explicit
Transition in schools		<i>Lack of autistic units in secondary schools within RBC boundaries</i>	Currently no resources available to facilitate this. However, noted for future consideration.
Transition adulthood	into	<i>'After Preparing for Adults Team, there is no provision for adults who need ongoing adult social care support'</i>	Present within the strategy under Priority 2b
Educational/Workplace settings		<i>More engagement needed with Colleges and Universities to design training programmes, co-produced with autistic people, around supporting autistic people</i>	Reworded in the strategy under Priority 3 but it will more explicitly presented in the implementation plans
Planning		<i>Ensure Planning Department considers the needs of autistic residents</i>	Embedding with Priority 5 to make more explicit
Partnership (housing)	work	<i>Involve local partners to address inequalities and provide support in finding housing</i>	Present within the strategy under Priority 5, however reworded to be made more explicit.
Direct process	payments	<i>There is a 'long winded process to get direct payment through. The process is not clear'</i>	Comments have been feedback to Adult Social Care and review of Direct Payments is currently underway
Transport		<i>The strategy should 'highlight more of what is positive and happening in Reading with regards to Transport'.</i>	Present within the strategy but made more explicit

## 8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
  - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
  - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

- 8.2 See Appendix 3 for the full Equality Impact Assessment which has been updated after the consultation period.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 There are no duties for the Local Authority regarding the Autism Board however there is a requirement to carry out / implement the Autism Strategy which was published in July 2021: 'The national strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026 on a local level. The Local Authority also need to consider the needs of children, young people and adults as part of our legal duties under the Care and Families Act 2014 and Care Act 2014.
- 9.2 Under the Section 1 and 4 of the Care Act the Local Authority has a duty to 'Promote individual well-being' and 'Provide Information and Advice. We have a responsibility under Section 9 to 'Assess an adult care and support needs' and under section 18 a 'Duty to meet the care and support needs'.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 There are currently no significant budget implications regarding the implementation for the Strategy and Action Plan. The delivery of the Action Plan would be within existing resources and reviewing existing pathways to meet the needs of residents. The care and support needs of children and young people and adults who require social care are met as per our legal duties.

## **11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 11.1 The Autism Strategy was published in July 2021: 'The national strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026'<sup>1</sup>.
- 11.2 All Age Autism Strategy for Reading 2022 to 2026. – Appendix 1
- 11.3 All Age Autism Strategy Action Plan 2022/23 – Appendix 2
- 11.4 The Equality Impact Assessment – Appendix 3

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<sup>1</sup> [National strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/national-strategy-for-autistic-children-young-people-and-adults-2021-to-2026)