

Agenda Item 44.

TITLE	Autism Strategy Update
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday, 25 January 2023
WARD	None Specific;
KEY OFFICER	Sophie Kendall Commissioning Manager, Autism Lead

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The development of an all-age Autism Strategy for Wokingham Borough, setting out a vision and framework to improve services and opportunities for local autistic people.

RECOMMENDATION

The committee is recommended to note the update.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This paper sets out the approach to develop and publish a strategy for autistic people in Wokingham Borough, in line with the Autism Act 2009 and associated guidance.

Introduction

This paper sets out progress to date and the next steps for the development and delivery of a Strategy for Autistic People in Wokingham Borough in 2023.

The strategy will be developed in line with the Autism Act 2009, and associated guidance. This places a duty on local authorities to appoint a commissioning lead, develop a commissioning plan and ensure meaningful local arrangements are in place with stakeholders, including autistic people and their families and NHS partners. The key responsibilities outlined within the guidance include:

	Local authority & Integrated Care Board & Health and Wellbeing Board responsibilities
Accountability	Appoint commissioning lead (LA) Review plan annually (HWB)
Strategy & plan	Develop a joint commissioning plan based on JSNA data with stakeholders, including the views of local people with autism and carers, with stakeholders (LA with ICB)
Partnerships	Ensure meaningful local arrangement/s in place , with senior LA & NHS input & autistic people & families (LA with ICB)
Services oversight	Ensure general autism awareness & data collection in place (LA & ICB) Service specifications to include requirement to demonstrate how reasonable adjustments will be made (LA & ICB)
Training oversight	Ensure staff have appropriate training, enhanced for social care assessors & providers (LA & ICB) Lead on local Oliver Mc Gowan training capacity & plans (ICB)
Expertise oversight	Ensure staff carrying out assessments have the knowledge/access to expertise required (LA & ICB) Appoint clinical lead to develop diagnostic and assessment services (ICB)

Background

Extensive work was undertaken to develop an Autism Strategy for Wokingham Borough in the spring/summers of 2020 and 2021. Activity included:

When	What
Feb 2020	Gail Fletcher , an independent consultant, is tasked to lead on an adults' autism strategy .
March 2020	Promise Inclusion are resourced to support the engagement and co-production of the strategy.
Spring/summer 2020	Lots of engagement and consultation takes place, albeit restricted by covid impacts .
Autumn/winter 2020	Autism Project Group established and work starts on the strategy.
Spring/summer 2021	Wokingham Borough Council's autism strategy is drafted and agreed by the group.
July 2021	Latest national strategy released , now all-age and with a broader focus than health and care.
Autumn/winter 2022	The strategy remains in draft as it needs to incorporate children's and progress is on hold without a lead .
Spring/summer 2022	Resourcing for the lead post agreed & recruitment takes place.

A key recommendation emerging from this work was the appointment of an Autism Lead to support the development of the strategy and delivery of accompanying action plans, including through coordinating collaboration amongst the various stakeholders.

The resourcing for this post was agreed in spring/summer 2022 and subsequently recruitment took place. The postholder started in mid-October 2022. The past quarter has been spent meeting a broad array of stakeholders and learning about pathways, the current offer, and gaps, as well as the broader system locally. As a result, a way forward has now been proposed.

Proposed way forward (including any financial implications)

In July 2021 the latest national autism guidance was released by the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education. Whereas previous strategies had focused on support to adults, this took an all-age approach for the first time. The guidance also increased the remit of the strategy beyond the focus on health and care, with priorities including improving children and young people's access to education and improving support within the criminal and youth justice systems. The revised focus required a local area approach and Wokingham Borough Council will seek to proceed with a whole-population strategy overseen by the Health and Wellbeing Board and its broad-reaching sub-governance structures.

The Adults' and Children's Directorates of Wokingham Borough Council have agreed to work together to ensure the local strategy is all-age, reflecting the national and local ambitions to develop a seamless approach to supporting autistic people particularly through transitions across the life course. The strategy will be developed building on the work done to date to develop the draft adults' strategy, as well as various developments underway since across both services.

It is proposed that an Autism Alliance will be facilitated by the Autism Lead, to ensure both broad and focused input into the development of the strategy and the associated action plan and to drive and oversee progress going forwards. This includes core representation from key VCSE partner organisations, who are critical to its success. It also includes a core working group of officers, to develop and deliver the workplans required within Wokingham Borough Council service areas. It will build on all previous work to date including extensive engagement with autistic people and their families. By taking the approach of an Alliance bringing together key stakeholders through a variety of means, we will be able to keep growing and building momentum. It will create scope for a plurality of ways for stakeholders to shape the direction of the strategy and action plans, including beyond a traditional meetings format to include alternatives tailored to the needs of autistic people and their families and underrepresented groups. It increases consistency too, for example with the Mental Health and Dementia Alliances.

As the Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) arrangements become established across Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West, it is our ambition to proceed in partnership with the Integrated Care Board. We will work closely with health partners to ensure that workstreams are aligned and towards an increasingly integrated approach as Integrated Care Partnership priorities and plans are agreed over the coming months.

We are intending to develop a three-year strategy, covering the periods 23/24, 24/25 and 25/26 and aligned with the national strategy timeframe. The strategy will be accompanied by annual plans which will set out how progress will be achieved.

We are proposing that progress is overseen by both the Autism Alliance and the appropriate governance routes of the Health and Wellbeing Board. This will enable us to work together with autistic people, their families, and the broader local system in reviewing progress and prioritising resources. As part of the Alliance, we will develop lived experience review and action-focused roles, drawing on a co-production budget and aligned to the broader Social Care Futures direction of travel.

Our intention is to develop the strategy over spring and summer, with a final decision by the Council Executive at the 28th September 2023 meeting.

The proposed timeline is as follows:

Phases	Targeted milestones
January	Decision on the proposed way forward.
February, March, April	Drafting of the all-age, WBC-led strategy with regular input from an Alliance Working Group (officers) and an Alliance Core Group (targeted VCSE organisations and autistic people).
May, June	Focused input on the draft strategy in areas required and finalising the draft.
July, August	Decision-making process starts.
September	Decision by the Council Executive.

Partner Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services and partners, including properties and priorities?)

No property implications.

The strategy will be cross council, led by the Adults’ and Children’s directorates. It will have implications for practices across broader council services including customer support and housing, which will be developed in collaboration with the relevant services.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Please confirm that due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken and if an equalities assessment has been completed or explain why an equalities assessment is not required.

The purpose of this strategy is to improve services and opportunities for all autistic people. We will take an intersectional, equitable approach, recognising and seeking to mitigate the exacerbation of health inequalities amongst the autistic population. This will be set out within the strategy and associated action plans.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

n/a

List of Background Papers

n/a

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