

Wiltshire Council

Health and Wellbeing Board

08 September 2022

Subject: Wiltshire Autism Strategy 2022-27

Executive Summary

This joint, all-age autism strategy is guided by a vision of an inclusive, vibrant, well-connected Wiltshire, in which autistic children, young people and adults can fulfil their potential, be actively involved and included in their communities, make informed decisions, have control over their lives, and be valued and included within society.

Proposal(s)

It is recommended that the Board:

- i) Approves and signs off the Wiltshire joint all-age autism strategy 2022-27
- ii) Notes the governance arrangements for its implementation.

Reason for Proposal

This all-age strategy brings together national and local priorities and puts the voice of autistic people and their families, carers, friends and allies at the forefront of our plans. Whilst we are making progress in supporting autistic people and their families, we recognise we have a long way to go to turn the vision of this strategy into reality. We want to support autistic children, young people and adults as they move through the various transitions in life – from early years to school, from primary to secondary school, from adolescence to adulthood etc. That is why this is a five-year strategy, with annual review points to assess how well we are doing.

Robert Holman	Dan Wilkins	Amanda du Cros
Commissioning transformation lead	Head of service, Learning Disabilities & Autism Service	Associate Director, Locality Commissioning, Wiltshire
Wiltshire Council	Wiltshire Council	NHS B&NES, Swindon and Wiltshire ICB

Subject:

Purpose of Report

1. To provide a summary of the joint, all-age Wiltshire Autism Strategy.

Relevance to the Health and Wellbeing Strategy

2. The strategy echoes the four areas of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy with its emphasis on:
 - Early diagnosis and support to prevent disability, poor health and/or education outcomes, unemployment in adulthood, etc.
 - Tackling the health and other inequalities which we know that autistic people face, and which are outlined in the strategy.
 - Making Wiltshire an inclusive, accepting and knowledgeable place for autistic children, young people and adults to play, learn, work and live.
 - Integration and person-centred support, acknowledging that autism spectrum conditions are examples of neuro-diversity and that autistic people make significant contributions to society, the economy and public life.
3. The strategy uses population data to assess current and forecast future prevalence and demand on services.

Background

4. Autism is a spectrum condition which affects different people in different ways. Autistic people bring a wealth of skills, perspectives and attributes to every aspect of life, from work and education to relationships and family life. Many autistic people, whether they are children, young people or adults, have high ambitions for how they want to live their lives, and many can and do realise their ambitions. Autistic people may experience difficulties with social communication and interaction, repetitive and restrictive behaviour, sensitivity to light, sound, taste or touch, highly focused interests or hobbies, and anxiety and depression.
5. Statistics show that autistic people are more vulnerable to anxiety and depression, particularly in late adolescence and early adult life. Autism can also limit an individual's ability to work or find employment – often because society does not understand the experience of the autistic person.

6. Children, young people and their families tell us they want to remain living with their families, avoiding where possible the need for residential care both now and as they move into adulthood. Children and young people (especially those with special educational needs and disabilities) also tell us that they want to live independently, take risks and try new things – but sometimes feel held back by the worries and anxieties of their parents, or because they cannot access the right support.
7. This strategy brings together the themes of the National Autism Strategy, published in 2021, and builds on the work of the SEND Inclusion and emerging System of Excellence, as well as the B&NES, Swindon and Wiltshire Learning Disabilities and Autism Partnership and recent developments in adult social care, particularly the establishment of the new Learning Disabilities & Autism Service (LDAS).

Main Considerations

8. This joint, all-age autism strategy is guided by a vision of an inclusive, vibrant, well-connected Wiltshire, in which autistic children, young people and adults can fulfil their potential, be actively involved and included in their communities, make informed decisions, have control over their lives, and be valued and included within society.
9. Through consultation and co-production, six priorities and three enablers have been identified:

Priorities

- i. **Improve health and reduce health inequalities** by ensuring people get early diagnosis and support based on their needs, training the workforce to understand the different ways autism spectrum conditions can manifest, prioritising annual health checks, and removing barriers to access.
- ii. **Support children and young people to play, learn and move into adult life** by promoting inclusion, training staff and leaders in education settings, developing a continuity of provision so that pupils benefit from consistency, and supporting young people and parents early to plan for their futures.
- iii. **Support people to access work** by developing a SEND Employment Board to bring together key stakeholders, raising awareness and promoting good practice amongst employers, promoting apprenticeships, Supported Internships and Traineeships.
- iv. **Support people to live independently in the community** by ensuring staff working for commissioned social care and housing providers have the right training and skills, ensuring housing is designed with autistic people in mind, mapping crisis pathways and ensuring we have the right services in Wiltshire, and promoting positive risk-taking.
- v. **Raise awareness of autism in Wiltshire** by hearing the diversity of voices in the County, promoting community cohesion and inclusion, celebrating the contributions and stories of autistic people, using national campaigns and sharing best practice.

- vi. **Improve support for autistic people in the criminal justice system** by developing community forensic services, establishing robust working relationships between Wiltshire Council, the integrated care partnership and the Police, and ensuring that training is available for staff working in criminal justice.

How we will make this happen

- We will create positive and ongoing dialogue between autistic people and services
- Improve data collection and reporting to monitor implementation of the strategy and drive system improvement
- Strengthen governance, leadership and accountability

Co-production and engagement

10. The draft strategy has been considered by the Wiltshire Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) Inclusion Board, Wiltshire Locality Mental Health, Learning Disabilities & Autism (MH/LD/A) meeting, and Bath, North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire (BSW) Learning Disabilities & Autism (LDA) Programme Board on a number of occasions.
11. Officers from education, social care, health, the voluntary sector and others have contributed and given the scope and ambition of the strategy.
12. The strategy was approved by the Wiltshire Locality Group and Wiltshire Council Strategic Commissioning Board meeting in common on 27 July 2022.
13. There is an existing governance structure around the BSW LDA Programme, but a separate locality structure will be needed which ensures that the voice of autistic people and their families/supporters are at heart of delivery. It is proposed that implementation of the strategy is reported to the MH/LD/A meeting.
14. The Wiltshire Autism Partnership Board was paused during 2021, as autistic people reported that it was not accessible and weighted too much towards the voice of professionals. The Partnership Board has been re-launched in 2022 and is jointly chaired by an Expert by Experience and the Head of Service for Learning Disabilities and Autism Service (LDAS).

Next Steps

15. A detailed implementation plan will be developed following the sign-off of the principles set out in this strategy.

Robert Holman	Dan Wilkins	Amanda du Cros
Commissioning	Head of service, Learning	Associate Director,

transformation lead	Disabilities & Autism Service	Locality Commissioning, Wiltshire
Wiltshire Council	Wiltshire Council	NHS B&NES, Swindon and Wiltshire ICB

Report Authors:
[Name, title, organisation]