

REPORT TO:	CABINET 7 JUNE 2021
SUBJECT:	Autism Strategy
LEAD OFFICER:	Rachel Soni, Interim Director of Commissioning Rachel Flowers, Director of Public Health Annette McPartland, Director of Operations Social Care
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillors Janet Campbell and Alisa Flemming Cabinet Members for Families, Health and Social Care; and Children, Young People and Learning
WARDS:	All
COUNCIL PRIORITIES 2020-2024 This report aligns to the following Croydon Renewal Plan priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will live within our means, balance the books and provide value for money for our residents. • We will focus on tackling ingrained inequality and poverty in the borough. We will follow the evidence to tackle the underlying causes of inequality and hardship, like structural racism, environmental injustice and economic injustice. • We will focus on providing the best quality core service we can afford. First and foremost, providing social care services that keep our most vulnerable residents safe and healthy. And to keep our streets clean and safe. To ensure we get full benefit from every pound we spend, other services in these areas will only be provided where they can be shown to have a direct benefit in keeping people safe and reducing demand. 	
FINANCIAL IMPACT There is no proposed financial impact on the Council's expenditure as a result of this report.	
FORWARD PLAN KEY DECISION REFERENCE NO.: 2721CAB The notice of the decision will specify that the decision may not be implemented until after 13.00 hours on the 6th working day following the day on which the decision was taken unless referred to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee.	

The Leader of the Council has delegated to the Cabinet the power to make the decisions set out in the recommendations below

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet is recommended to

- 1.1 Endorse and approve for publication the Autism Strategy.

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| 1.2 | Note the approvals either received, or pending, from other partner organisations in the strategy. |
| 1.3 | Agree that minor future amendments to the strategy can be made by the Director of Commissioning in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Families, Health and Social Care. |

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 Autism is a neurological difference, which is lifelong. Autistic people have brains which work differently to other, “neurotypical” people, and they react differently to things such as sensory input or changes to routine. Every autistic person is different, but they are linked by the fact that almost all of their lives are made more challenging by being autistic.
- 2.2 We believe that there are likely to be between 8 and 11,000 Croydon residents who are autistic, as explained in the strategy. No local authority will ever know this number exactly. Some will be undiagnosed; many will not be accessing services. Mainly, though, this is because autism is not a data field on most public sector databases. Instead it is usually categorised alongside either mental health or learning disability, but autism is neither of those things.
- 2.3 In an ideal world we would have had more information about our autistic residents before we published this strategy, but this is, in effect, a chicken and egg situation: with this data the strategy could be improved, but we are much more likely to get the data with the strategy in place.
- 2.4 An Autism Strategy is not a statutory requirement, although a large number of local authorities already have one. It is, though, considered good practice, and is something which our autistic community was vocal about previously, and has been extremely supportive of during the production of this document.
- 2.5 This strategy is designed to improve our collective support for autistic Croydon residents of all ages, and their families. It is also intended to support autistic people right across the autistic spectrum, from those with multiple complex needs and learning difficulties, to those who are able to work and, most of the time, live similar lives to neurotypical people.
- 2.6 Following approval of the strategy by all of the key partners, a detailed action plan will be drawn up with clear targets and ownership. The need to align multiple, large partner organisations, as well as the difficulty of sourcing accurate baseline data, is the reason that we have always intended that this will follow the strategy.

3. DETAIL

- 3.1 There is a wide variety of legislation which places duties on public bodies, including Local Authorities, specifically in relation to their support of autistic people. These include the Autism Act 2009, the Care Act 2014, and many

more, as well as a wide variety of secondary legislation, perhaps most notably the SEND Code of Practice.

- 3.2 There is also a national Autism Strategy, Think Autism, which was published in 2010 and revised in 2014. This formed the start of our discussion around key priorities for Croydon. However, being seven years old, and encompassing only adults, it was not adequate as a template for our own strategy. We expect a refresh of the strategy to appear at some point over the next year, although this taken much longer than expected due to Covid-19.
- 3.3 To truly create a meaningful strategy, this work needed to include partners beyond Croydon Council, particularly from the health sector. We are very pleased that we have provisional approval to be named partners in delivering the strategy from Croydon Health Services, South West London Clinical Commissioning Group, and Croydon Mencap, with further partners expected to join this list shortly. Approval is provisional only because those partners were awaiting a final version of the document at the time of their relevant governance meetings. It has not changed materially between then and now.
- 3.4 The strategy details how the partnership will work together to improve the lives of autistic residents, making better use of existing resources, delivering previously-planned changes, and collaborating more effectively across agencies. We also intend to raise awareness and understanding of autism amongst our residents, and particularly amongst those people who work with autistic people on a regular basis.
- 3.5 The strategy is expected to cover the period up to March 2024. Reviews of the content, and delivery against the action plan, will take place annually unless a major change is required mid-year. This would be most likely in the event of significant changes to legislation or public duties relating to autistic people; or in the event of a significantly revised national Autism Strategy being published.
- 3.6 Delivery of the strategy will be overseen by the Shadow Health and Care Board, with implementation led by the Autism Partnership Board, and supported by a number of sub-groups including the Autism Working Party (see section 4.4).

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 In the summer of 2020, a six-week online public consultation took place to gauge the views of the autism community on what matters to them, and what they wanted to see in the strategy. 222 responses were received, around a fifth of them from autistic people themselves; the remainder were split mainly between parents and carers of autistic people, and professionals working with them.
- 4.2 It was hoped that public meetings would be able to be carried out to enable engagement with more of our autistic residents but sadly this was unable to happen due to the impact of Covid-19.

- 4.3 In lieu of this, the Borough Autism Champion and the Autism Inclusion Lead carried out an extensive programme of virtual attendance at key meetings with autistic people, families, and professionals across a wide range of organisations across Croydon. In total, well over 500 people were engaged in the production of this strategy.
- 4.4 Throughout the process of developing the strategy, officers were advised and supported by an “Autism Working Party” – a sub-group to the Autism Partnership Board, comprised mainly of autistic residents, or parents and carers to autistic people; as well as council officers and a small number of professionals from partner organisations.
- 4.5 The Borough Autism Champion and Autism Inclusion Lead have also engaged with senior and operational staff at all of the proposed partner organisations to ensure their buy-in and support at all stages of the process.
- 4.6 It is vital that this engagement with our autistic community does not stop here. We intend to continue working with the Autism Working Party to ensure their continued input into the delivery of the strategy, and using the group as a vehicle for professionals to discuss proposed changes to, or commissioning of, services with the community.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 As in section 7 below, there are no proposed changes to budgets or expenditure in relation to this strategy.
- 5.2 As above, creating a strategy is good practice but is not a statutory responsibility. As such there are no legal or statutory ramifications in relation to non-delivery of elements of the strategy, save for those duties which we would be required to meet with or without this document in place.
- 5.3 The predominant risks relate to organisational reputation and partnership working. Whilst the commitments being made are reasonable and reflect our current direction of travel, it would be wrong not to note the potential impact of the current financial position, and of the nature of working in partnership with a number of diverse organisations.
- 5.4 The main risk is in not delivering key elements of the strategy, and risking the goodwill which has begun to be built up with our autistic community. To mitigate this, the Autism Inclusion Lead post has been extended, in order to deliver the implementation of this strategy; the Autism Working Party will continue in order to provide a forum where the views of autistic people and their families can be sought; and there is clarity on the oversight of this work, reporting up to the Shadow Health and Care Board and the Autism Partnership Board.
- 5.5 There is always a risk in working across a broad partnership, where individual organisations are responsible for the delivery of significant elements of the strategy. However, there are also significant benefits to doing this, and it

recognises the fact that we cannot reasonably say that we are fully supporting our autistic residents without the support of a wide number of partners.

6 PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY

- 6.1 This report was presented to a joint meeting of the Council's Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee prior to being brought to Cabinet.
- 6.2 The committee strongly endorsed the strategy, subject to minor amendments as below, and recommended it for approval by Cabinet.
- 6.3 Comments were noted and amendments made to the document as a result of this.

7 FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 Revenue and Capital consequences of report recommendations

There are no proposed changes to expenditure as a result of this strategy. Targets which suggest the addition or revision of services are taken from existing organizational plans, or in the case of health-related targets, from the NHS Long-term Plan.

There may well be opportunities to seek reductions in expenditure if we are able to carry out the actions in this strategy, as a key aim is to ensure that early intervention reduces the need for more expensive / crisis services further down the line.

- 7.2 It is hoped that the partnership approach developed as a result of this strategy will enable better collaborative work and increase the likelihood of finding efficiencies whilst continuing to deliver quality services.
- 7.3 The strategy also significantly increases the likelihood that we can seek to bring external funding into the borough to support this area of work, via bids put together by Third Sector partners or directly from public bodies.

Approved by Nish Popat on behalf of the Interim Director of Finance, Risk and Investment (S151 Officer)

8 LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 The Council has no legal duty to prepare an Autism Strategy, however central Government is required to do so by virtue of section 1, Autism Act 2009. Central government issued statutory guidance to Local Authorities in March 2015, "*Statutory guidance for Local Authorities and NHS organisations to support implementation of the Adult Autism Strategy*"
- 8.2 The Council must follow this guidance, however there is liberty to deviate from it on admissible grounds where the Council judges there is a good reason to do so, but without freedom to take a substantially different course.

- 8.2. When preparing the Council's Autism Strategy, regard must be given to the public sector equalities duty to eliminate unlawful conduct under the Equality Act 2010. The duty is set out at Section 149 of the 2010 Act. It requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate discrimination (both direct and indirect discrimination), harassment and victimization and other conduct prohibited under the Act, and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a 'protected characteristic' and those who do not share that protected characteristic.
- 8.3 The Principal Lawyer for Childcare and Education Law comments on behalf of the Interim Director of Law and Governance that there are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report. Any legal implications arising in relation to individual actions will be dealt with as projects and decisions come forward for approval.

Approved by Doutimi Aseh, Interim Director of Law & Governance & Interim Deputy Monitoring Officer

9 HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

- 9.1 There are no direct Human Resources implications arising from this report for Croydon Council employees.

Approved by: Debbie Calliste, Head of HR for Health, Wellbeing and Adults on behalf of the Director of Human Resources.

10 EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 10.1 This document is specifically intended to improve equality of access for a marginalised group of people.
- 10.2 This strategy will work towards improving our collective support for autistic Croydon residents of all ages, and their families. It is also intended to support autistic people right across the autistic spectrum, from those with multiple complex needs and learning difficulties, to those who are able to work and, most of the time, live similar lives to neurotypical people.
- 10.3 The strategy details how the partnership will work together to improve the lives of autistic residents, making better use of existing resources, delivering previously-planned changes, and collaborating more effectively across agencies. We also intend to raise awareness and understanding of autism amongst our residents, and particularly amongst those people who work with autistic people on a regular basis.
- 10.4 An equality analysis was undertaken to ascertain the potential impact on groups that share protected characteristics. This concluded that the strategy will help the Council and its partners towards delivering the vision for Croydon as a place where autistic people feel welcomed, understood and supported to

live happy and productive lives.

Approved by Yvonne Okiyo, Equalities Manager.

11. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

11.1 There are no environmental impacts arising from this report.

12. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

12.1 There are no direct crime and disorder impacts arising from this report. However our engagement with the police on this issue has stepped up recently, and they are now permanently represented on the Autism Partnership Board.

13. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS/PROPOSED DECISION

13.1 The production and implementation of an Autism Strategy is considered good practice and was felt by our autistic community to be overdue.

13.2 Building a strong partnership across organisations in Croydon to deliver this strategy can potentially bring benefits to the wider community.

13.3 A strong and clear direction in relation to our support for autistic people gives us the opportunity to consider and prepare bids for external funding to support this agenda in the future.

14. OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

14.1 None. As above, the approach being taken by the Council is considered good practice.

15. DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

15.1 The Director of Policy & Partnership comments that there are no data protection implications arising from the contents of this report

Approved by Gavin Handford, Director of Policy and Partnership.

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APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

Appendix 1 – Autism Strategy
Appendix 2 – Equalities Analysis

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None