

North Yorkshire Council
Health and Adult Services: Executive Member Meeting
3rd November 2023

REPORT TO Executive Member for Health and Adult Services

Draft All-Age Autism Strategy for North Yorkshire: Proposed Public Consultation

1.0 Purpose Of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval for a proposed public consultation on the draft North Yorkshire All-age Autism Strategy.

2.0 Background

2.1 Autism is lifelong neuro-development condition that affects how people perceive the world, communicate and interact with others. Approximately 1% of the UK population is autistic, meaning around 6,155 autistic people live in North Yorkshire based on the 2021 Census.

2.2 Autism is often called a spectrum condition because it can impact on people in many different ways. They may need to access different levels of support across their lives in areas such as education, employment, housing, health and care or within their communities. Many different organisations across North Yorkshire have a part to play in this, working together with autistic people of all ages and their families.

3.0 Issues

3.1 The new draft All-Age Autism Strategy (Appendix 1) builds on the [previous local strategy](#). It addresses key issues facing autistic people, outlining a local system-wide response to the [national strategy](#), available data, evidence and what people have told us.

3.2 The overall aim is that “Autistic children, young people and adults and their families enjoy full, happy, and healthy lives”. To achieve this, we will work together on 8 key priorities:

- Education and preparing for adulthood
- Employment
- Housing
- Carers
- Assessment, diagnosis and support
- Health and care
- Criminal and youth justice
- Inclusive communities

To help us to deliver our strategy, we will also focus on a number of cross-cutting themes: working together; workforce; data and research; and making the best use of resources.

4.0 Performance Implications

4.1 Working together across the partnership to deliver on our shared priorities within the strategy should impact positively on performance in a number of key metrics including:

- Waiting times for assessments (eg diagnosis, education, carers)
- Numbers of people supported to gain and/or maintain employment
- Training sessions delivered and completed
- Feedback from autistic children, young people and adults, and their carers / families

4.2 The strategy also recognises that in some areas we need to understand more about the current position in North Yorkshire in order to ensure that we make the biggest impact through the strategy and can demonstrate the difference we have made.

5.0 Policy Implications

5.1 This strategy aligns with a number of other local strategies in place or in development:

- Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (draft) - autistic people are identified as a priority group in the draft North Yorkshire Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy with the ambition of 'adding years to life and life to years'
- Economic Growth Strategy (draft) - includes a commitment to inclusion, health and employability for our residents, supporting people to overcome barriers that hold them back from moving into employment or progressing in work
- Housing strategy (draft) – the vision is to deliver “good quality, affordable and sustainable homes that meet the needs of all of our communities”, and there is a priority around “meeting supported housing needs and the needs of specific groups”

6.0 Alternative Options considered

6.1 The partnership Steering Group considered a number of options for the strategy scope:

- Age range: a single all-age strategy (rather than separate strategies for children & young people and adults) was preferred. Considering the whole life course means that autistic people of all ages can benefit from our collective action under the strategy, though we recognise that some chapters such as education or employment may be more relevant to people at particular stages of their lives; and that some pathways or services will continue to be targeted at specific groups.
- Conditions: it is recognised that autism is one or a number of neuro-developmental conditions and that autistic people may have multiple neuro-diversity. We have brought forward a strategy specifically focussed on autism for the period 2024-2027 aligned to the national strategy. We recognise also that we need to better understand the needs of our neuro-diverse population more widely and have included a commitment to this within the strategy

7.0 Financial Implications

7.1 Within North Yorkshire Council there is no specific budget ring-fenced for autism, but rather, a range of services and budgets which are used to meet the needs of autistic people. There are no plans for the Council to derive savings specifically as a result of the autism strategy, and any incidental savings may be re-invested. There is no new funding for work on autism and any expenditure must be resourced from existing budgets. Through our work on the strategy, we will work towards improving value for money of Council services and making best use of resources by joining up across agencies. More widely, the strategy will have a positive economic impact through the priority focus on supporting autistic people to gain and/or maintain employment. A number of proposed actions within the strategy are preventative in nature, which supports best value for money across public sector organisations.

8.0 Legal Implications

8.1 Producing a local autism strategy was a requirement from the national strategy “Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives” which stemmed from the Autism Act 2009. The requirement was reiterated in the refresh of the national strategy ‘Think Autism’ (2014) and the accompanying ‘Statutory guidance for Local Authorities and NHS organisations to support implementation of the Adult Autism Strategy’ (2015). In 2021, the government launch a new [national strategy](#) (2021 -2026). The draft local strategy (Appendix 1) has been developed as a local response to the national strategy as well building on the work of previous local strategies.

9.0 Consultation undertaken and responses

9.1 This report seeks approval for a proposed 3-month public consultation on the draft Autism Strategy. An overview of plans is at Appendix 3. Easy-read versions of the key documents and consultation materials will be prepared. Extensive joint working with autistic people, their carers / families and partner agencies has informed the draft strategy as follows:

- 9.2
- Our work is led by the North Yorkshire Autism Group which includes representatives from across the partnership and a parent/carer (see acknowledgements page)
 - We have built a wider Autism network of autistic children, young people and adults, their carers/families, staff, partners and wider community services whose experiences, views and ideas have been shared through events, workshops, surveys and conversations over the past 6 months
 - April - May 2023: 8 events (local & virtual) for autistic children, young people and adults plus carers/families, and a survey which received 170 responses. 104 people attend the events with 72 autistic people / carers present.
 - July 2023: 104 practitioners from across organisations attended 7 events, and 40 colleagues were reached through 2 partnership meetings
 - Sept 2023: autistic children, young people and adults, carers/families, practitioners and partners came together for 7 thematic action-planning workshops (mixture of virtual and local), with 77 different people participating

10.0 Impact on other services/organisations

10.1 Delivering this strategy will impact on a number of services and organisations (see page 5 in the strategy, Appendix 1). Successful implementation requires commitment from:

- North Yorkshire Council departments – Health and Adult Services (Adult Social Care, Prevention/Service Development and Public Health), Children & Young Peoples Services (Inclusion, Education), Community Development (Housing, Libraries, Culture, Leisure), Stronger Communities
- Health Services including Integrated Care Boards, Primary Care, commissioned Autism Diagnosis Service providers, General Hospitals and Mental Health Community Services and Hospitals
- Schools, colleges and other education and childcare providers
- Criminal & Youth Justice: Probation, Police, Youth Justice Service
- Providers of care, support and activities for autistic people and their families
- Wider community & voluntary sector
- Employers, businesses and organisations within the community

11.0 Contribution to Council priorities

11.1 The draft strategy contributes to a number of ambitions in the [North Yorkshire Council Plan](#), in particular those under the Health & Wellbeing and People priorities, as well as having links to economy (employment priority) and locality working (autism-friendly communities).

12.0 Equalities Implications

12.1 Autism is considered a disability under the Equality Act (2010), although we know that not all autistic people see themselves as disabled. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) for the draft strategy has been completed, this can be found at appendix 4. An Easy Read summary will also be produced. Both will be made available for comment as part of the public consultation and will be reviewed during strategy adoption and implementation.

13.0 Climate change implications

13.1 A climate change impact assessment screening for the draft strategy was completed. Following advice from a Climate Change specialist within North Yorkshire Council, it was deemed that a undertaking a full Climate Change Impact Assessment would not be proportionate. This is because the potential impact on the environment is minimal (mostly associated with the potential to slightly increase or decrease travel for around 1% of the local population who are autistic). This will be kept under review during strategy delivery.

14.0 Community safety implications

14.1 The draft strategy includes a priority on the Criminal and Youth Justice systems, which should impact positively on community safety across North Yorkshire.

15.0 Reasons for recommendation/s

15.1 The draft strategy presented at Appendix 1 has been prepared with extensive involvement from autistic children, young people and adults, their carers/families, a range of staff and practitioners from the key partners as well as representatives from communities and employers. However, it is good practice for a strategy of this significance to also seek feedback through a formal public consultation.

16.0 Recommendation/s

16.1 To approve the proposed 3-month public consultation on the draft North Yorkshire All-age Autism Strategy (Appendix 1) in line with the plans which can be found at Appendix 2.

Report author: Naomi Smith (Head of Health and Adult Services Planning)

Appendices:

1. Draft strategy for consultation (full version)
2. Consultation plan
3. Supporting data pack
4. Draft Equality Impact Assessment for consultation