

North Yorkshire Council

Executive

A North Yorkshire Autism All-Age Strategy 2025-2030:

“Working together to enable autistic people, carers and their families to enjoy a full, happy and healthy lives”.

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To share the final North Yorkshire Autism All-Age Strategy 2025-2030 outlining the vision, priorities, and actions to support autistic individuals and their families in North Yorkshire.
- 1.2 To recommend that Executive approves the strategy, and the strategy is launch as part of autism acceptance week in April.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 The North Yorkshire Council Autism Editorial Group has developed, engaged, and publicly consulted on the North Yorkshire Autism all age strategy since 2023.
- 2.2 The strategy offers a high-level vision and outlines ambitious goals for North Yorkshire, whilst also acknowledging the broader challenges faced nationally in supporting autistic people. The development of the strategy development has involved a variety of engagement activities, including public consultations and professional input.
- 2.3 The Autism Strategy is overseen by the North Yorkshire Health and Wellbeing board and is led by the North Yorkshire Autism Editorial Group, which includes a wide range of partners such as carers, advocates, voluntary sector organisations, and agencies responsible for health, care, education, and criminal justice.
- 2.4 Throughout its development, the strategy has identified several challenges, both nationally and locally, including issues related to data and research, waiting times, consistency of services, housing provision, and health inequalities.
- 2.5 The strategy aims to improve the lives of autistic people by fostering inclusive communities enhancing access to assessments and support, and addressing key areas such as education, health, employment, and housing. The strategy is informed by national guidelines and local feedback, with a focus on collaboration and continuous improvement.
- 2.6 Delivery of the strategy y will be supported by a comprehensive Annual Delivery Plan, which will acknowledge the actions within our control while also recognising that some challenges are beyond our local influence and require national change. An Annual Progress Report will be published to track progress, providing transparency

on the steps taken and highlighting areas where external factors may impact on achieving outcomes.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Autism is a lifelong neuro-developmental condition affecting how individuals perceive, communicate, and interact with the world. Whether people find out they are autistic as a child, young person, or adult, being autistic is often an important part of a person's identity for the whole of their lives. The Editorial Team heard examples of children and young people being diagnosed with autism and then parent carers also being diagnosed or self – identifying as autistic later.
- 3.2 Between 2.6% and 5% of the UK population is autistic. Research also shows that autistic people are more likely to have multiple conditions such as ADHD or dyspraxia or a learning disability.
- 3.3 Long waiting times for assessments are thought to contribute to continued underdiagnosis, this means that levels of autism may still be underreported.
- 3.4 Almost 8 out of 10 autistic people without a learning disability experience mental health difficulty, more than 3 out of 10 autistic adults have attempted suicide (UK data) Cassidy and Rogers (2017)
- 3.5 Life expectancy for people with autism is about 5 years shorter, and about 10 years for people with autism and a learning disability. Most medical conditions are more prevalent in the autistic population, including diabetes, hypertension, and obesity. Autistic people experience premature mortality with life expectancy potentially reduced by 16–30 years.
- 3.6 The number of young people transitioning from children's services to adult services is projected to increase by 29% by 2030. Demand for Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs) is also rising. While many of these young individuals may not meet the eligibility criteria for ongoing adult social care support, spending on 18-24-year-olds is still expected to grow by 40% by 2030.
- 3.7 There are wide variations between the data sources on autism. This makes it difficult to accurately estimate the size and characteristics of the population within the community that are autistic. However, a common factor across most data sources is increasing prevalence over time.
- 3.8 The North Yorkshire strategy is designed to address the feedback gathered from engagement and consultation events, as well as align with the National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People, and Adults 2021-2026, which has expanded its focus to include autistic individuals of all ages. This national strategy is further supported by key initiatives and frameworks, including the National Disability Strategy (2021), the Health and Care Act 2022, the "People at the Heart of Care" adult social care reform white paper, the "Transforming Support" Health and Disability White

Paper, the Building the Right Support Action Plan, and the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan: Right Support, Right Place, Right Time.

- 3.9 The Editorial Team comprising North Yorkshire Council, North Yorkshire and Humber ICB, North Yorkshire Probation, North Yorkshire Police, Community First Yorkshire, Healthwatch North Yorkshire and lived experience has worked with partners across the system, and people with lived and living experience, to develop and publicly consult on the strategy. Key partners from the editorial group have endorsed the strategy within their own organisations.

4.0 DETAILED PRESENTATION OF THE SUBSTANTIVE ISSUE

4.1 The strategic vision

“Working together to enable autistic people, carers and their families, to enjoy a full, happy and healthy lives”.

4.2 The strategy outlines eight priority areas:

- **Inclusive Communities:** Creating autism-friendly environments through awareness and training.
- **Assessment, Diagnosis, and Support:** Improving access to timely and consistent diagnostic services.
- **Education and Preparing for Adulthood:** Supporting autistic children and young people in their educational journey and transition to adulthood.
- **Health and Care:** Addressing health inequalities and ensuring autism-friendly health services.
- **Adult and Youth Justice:** Supporting autistic individuals within the criminal and youth justice systems.
- **Housing:** Providing suitable and appropriate housing options.
- **Employment:** Enhancing employment opportunities and support for autistic individuals.
- **Carers:** Supporting carers through training, resources, and improved assessment processes.

4.2 The partnership will achieve the vision by delivering on the following ambitions.

- Everyone can access the support they need when they need it. Access to assessment and diagnosis happens as early as possible in a person’s life, with priority for those with greatest need.
- Autistic children and young people thriving at school and into adulthood.
- Autistic people thriving at work.
- To support autistic young people and adults with appropriate housing.
- Parents, carers, and families of autistic people are supported to thrive.
- Autistic people of all ages live healthier and longer lives, supported by autism friendly health and care services.

- Autistic children, young people and adults are well supported when accessing the criminal and youth justice systems.
- North Yorkshire is an inclusive place to live, work and visit.

4.3 To deliver the strategy the partnership will focus on

- **Working Together:** Everyone has a part to play, Refining, delivering, and evaluating.
- **Data and Research:** Build on data to understand the needs of neurodiverse communities.
- **Workforce:** Training and support at all levels is vital, Embed understanding, appreciation, and leadership
- **Resources:** Utilise collective resources between partners, Increase scale, efficiency, and deliverability.

5.0 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN AND RESPONSES

5.1 The strategy was developed through extensive consultation with autistic individuals, families, carers, voluntary sector partners, and public sector organisations. Feedback from engagement events and surveys has been incorporated into the strategy. They are a full consultation report available with further detail.

5.2 The consultation took place over 15 weeks and 4 days from 27th November 2023 to 15th March 2024 to seek views on the draft strategy from autistic people, unpaid carers, families, those who work with autistic people and wider members of the public. The consultation focussed on gaining feedback on strategy content, prioritizing actions, measuring success, strategy design and working together. This built on the 3 stages of engagement which ran from April to September 2023, and which were used to create the strategy.

5.3 A total of **392 contributions** were received, via the following consultation methods:

- 4 different surveys for different audiences / age groups (available online, as paper copies and in other formats as required) - **181** participants in total across:
 - General Survey - 92 responses
 - Easy Read Survey – 65 responses
 - Primary School Age Survey – 12 responses
 - Teenage Survey – 12 responses
- Events – Presentation and workshop: 1 launch event, 7 in-person workshops (one in each locality) plus 3 online workshops including one evening and one weekend session, and visits to 4 established groups – **172** participants.
- Submissions via email - **33**
- Public questions to North Yorkshire Council committees via the democratic process - **6**
- Presentation to Scrutiny of Health Committee public meeting (March 2024)

5,4 Analysis of the consultation feedback was completed by a multi-agency team including staff from North Yorkshire Council, Humber North Yorkshire Integrated Care Board, Probation Service and Healthwatch North Yorkshire, following common principles and a consistent approach. Consultation analysis was provided to each chapter lead (a senior representative from the relevant organisation) to review and propose amendments and additions to the strategy in response to consultation feedback. This is presented throughout the report.

5.5 The summary findings from the consultation are as follows:

Strategy content (priorities): Survey respondents were asked for each of the 8 priority areas how far they agreed that the priority should be a key theme for the strategy. Across the general and easy read surveys, between 96% and 80% agreed that each priority should be a key theme, with Inclusive Communities priority having the highest rate of agreement and Carer's priority having the lowest rate of agreement. Overall, this demonstrates that the 8 priorities are the right ones for the strategy.

Strategy content (actions): Those responding to the general survey were asked about how well the draft actions under each priority reflect and respond to the key issues for autistic people in North Yorkshire. Between 71% and 52% agreed that the proposed actions reflect and respond to the key issues, with Inclusive Communities priority having the highest rate of agreement and Carer's priority having the lowest rate of agreement. Overall, this data suggests that whilst some changes or additions may need to be made (see below), most participants agreed with the proposed actions.

Strategy content (gaps) and working together: During the consultation events, participants had the opportunity to give their views on the proposals in the draft strategy, with workshops focussing on exploring the key issues affecting people and any gaps in the strategy. Survey participants were also invited to provide feedback about their responses and any gaps through free-text boxes. This qualitative data has been analysed for each of the 8 priority areas, as well as the theme of "working together" and general feedback on the strategy, to identify areas where the strategy needs to be strengthened, amended, or added to. This report outlines the key themes, number of responses and a summary of comments, and then goes on to explain how we have updated the draft strategy in response to the areas raised.

Prioritising actions: The consultation also sought feedback on which of the proposed actions were most important to people. This information is presented under each priority theme and has been used to inform areas of focus for the year 1 action plan which has been developed alongside the updated strategy.

Measuring success: Participants were also asked about how we should measure the success of the strategy. The feedback given has informed updates to the draft strategy and success measures for the year 1 action plan.

Strategy design: People also had the opportunity to provide feedback on the strategy design (which is summarised in this report and has informed the final design of the strategy document) and to express an interest in being involved in producing the final version of the strategy design, for example by contributing artwork or poetry.

- 5.6 The extensive feedback received through the consultation has resulted in several changes to the draft strategy to strengthen areas which are important to people and address the gaps identified, building on the strategy which was itself shaped by engagement with people with lived experience. The rich insights gathered through the consultation will also be used to inform strategy implementation, when the more detailed ideas and suggestions put forward during consultation can be considered and further built upon to deliver improvements for autistic people of all ages along with their carers and families living in North Yorkshire.
- 5.7 Additional engagement has occurred beyond the initial consultation, involving individuals with lived experience, professionals, employee support groups, leadership teams, and partner organizations.

6.0 CONTRIBUTION TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES

6.1 North Yorkshire Council has a key role to play in supporting the delivery of the vision for North Yorkshire autism community. The strategy aligns with the council's priorities and will contribute to the council ambitions for the following:

- **Place and environment** ○ Good quality, affordable and sustainable housing that meets the need of our community.
- **Health and wellbeing:**
 - people are supported to have good quality of life and enjoy an active healthy lifestyle.
 - Reduced variations in health through tackling the root causes of inequality.
 - People can access good public health services and social care across our different communities.
 - People have control and choice in relation to their independence and social care support.
- **People**
 - People can achieve their full potential through lifelong education and learning.
 - People are better supported. ○ People are free from harm and feel safe.
 - Have an inclusive workplace culture in which everyone can thrive and reach their full potential.
- **Organisational** ○ Good quality and value for money services that are customer focus and accessible to all.
 - One council, where colleagues work together to achieve our ambitions and support each other.

7.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 7.1 Alternative approaches to supporting autistic individuals were considered, including maintaining the status quo and implementing isolated initiatives. However, a comprehensive, all-aged strategy was deemed the most effective approach.

8.0 IMPACT ON OTHER SERVICES/ORGANISATIONS

- 8.1 The strategy will require collaboration with various services and organisations, including health, education, housing, and criminal justice sectors, to ensure a coordinated approach to deliver and achieve the outcomes.

9.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Implementation of the strategy will require investment in training, resources, and service improvements. The delivery of the strategy will use existing resources more effectively.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The strategy aligns with legal requirements under the Autism Act 2009, Equality Act 2010, and Care Act 2014, ensuring that the council meets its statutory obligations.

11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The strategy promotes equality by addressing the specific needs of autistic individuals and ensuring they have access to appropriate support and opportunities.

12.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The strategy includes considerations for creating autism-friendly environments, which may involve modifications to physical spaces that align with sustainability goals.

13.0 PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 The strategy includes key performance indicators to monitor progress and measure the impact of actions on the lives of autistic individuals and their families.

14.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 The strategy will inform, and shape future policies related to autism support and services within the council.

15.0 RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 Risks associated with the implementation of the strategy include potential resource constraints and the need for ongoing stakeholder engagement. Mitigation plans will be developed to address these risks.

16.0 HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

- 16.1 The strategy will require training and development for staff across various services to ensure they are equipped to support autistic individuals effectively.

17.0 ICT IMPLICATIONS

17.1 The strategy may incorporate the use of technology to enhance access to information and support services for autistic individuals and their families. Additionally, the group will need changes to data collection processes within the LLA to enable accurate reporting.

18.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

18.1 The strategy includes measures to support autistic individuals within the criminal and youth justice systems, contributing to overall community safety.

19.0 CONCLUSIONS

19.1 The North Yorkshire Autism All-Aged Strategy 2025-2030 provides a comprehensive framework for improving the lives of autistic individuals and their families through collaboration, targeted actions, and continuous improvement.

19.2 The strategy aims to improve the lives of autistic individuals by fostering inclusive communities, enhancing access to assessments and support, and addressing key areas such as education, health, employment, and housing. The strategy is informed by national guidelines and local feedback, with a focus on collaboration and continuous improvement.

19.3 The strategy will be supported by a comprehensive Annual Delivery Plan, which will acknowledge the actions within our control while also recognising that some challenges are beyond our local influence and require national change. An Annual Progress Report will be published to track progress, providing transparency on the steps taken and highlighting areas where external factors may impact outcomes.

20.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

20.1 The strategy is recommended for approval to ensure that the council meets its statutory obligations and supports autistic individuals in achieving full, happy, and healthy lives.

21.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

That North Yorkshire Council Executive adopts the North Yorkshire Autism all-age Strategy 2025-2030 -

APPENDICES:

- Appendix 1 – North Yorkshire Autism all age strategy 2024 -2028
- Appendix 2– Consultation Report
- Appendix 3 – Data Pack
- Appendix 4 – Equality impact assessment

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18th March 2025 County Hall, Northallerton

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