

Title of report: Herefordshire and Worcestershire All Age Autism Strategy 2024-2029

Meeting: Cabinet

Meeting date: 28 March 2024

Cabinet member: Carole Gandy, cabinet member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing

Report by: Corporate Director Community Wellbeing

Report author: Senior Commissioning Officer

Classification

Open

Decision type

Key Decision

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to approve the Herefordshire & Worcestershire All-Age Autism Strategy (2024-29).

Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet:

- 1. Approves the Herefordshire and Worcestershire All Age Autism strategy, and**
- 2. Delegated authority be given to the Corporate Director for Community Wellbeing and the Corporate Director for Children and Young People to take all operational decisions that fall within the responsibility of Herefordshire Council to complete, as set out within this strategy.**

Alternative options

- a) Do nothing. This is not recommended because the actions set out in the strategy require support from the Council to enable further progress to be made.
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- b) Not to endorse the strategy. This is not recommended because the strategy has identified several important priority areas for work required to improve the lives of people with autism.

Key considerations

Legislative Context

1. The Autism Act 2009 [Autism Act 2009 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/38/contents) is currently the only disability-specific legislation in England. The Act requires the Government to introduce and keep under review an autism strategy. The most recent National Strategy was published in 2021 [National strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97422/national-strategy-for-autistic-children-young-people-and-adults-2021-to-2026.pdf).
2. The statutory guidance is aimed at supporting the NHS and local authorities in implementing the strategy in areas such as staff training, identification and diagnosis, transition planning when people move from children to adult services, employment, and criminal justice.
3. The [Special Educational Needs and Disability \(SEND\) Code of Practice](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/422222/special-educational-needs-and-disability-send-code-of-practice-2015.pdf) (2015), continues to place duties on local authorities, NHS organisations and schools in respect of autistic children and young people. There is also a duty to provide services to disabled children under section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970.”
4. The Equalities Act 2010 sets out requirements to ensure that all public bodies play their part in making society fairer by tackling discrimination and providing equality of opportunity for all.
5. The Health and Social Care Act 2022 requires all CQC registered providers to undertake Mandatory Autism Training.

Background

6. In September 2022, initial work started to progress an all-age strategy, in line with the National Autism Strategy, for the Integrated Care System (ICS) in Herefordshire and Worcestershire.
7. Initial co-production work identified seven priorities listed below; six included in the national strategy and an additional priority of ‘Keeping Safe’:
 - I. Improving understanding and acceptance of autism within society
 - II. Improving autistic children and young people’s access into education and support positive transitions into adulthood
 - III. Supporting more autistic people into employment
 - IV. Tackling health and care inequalities for autistic people
 - V. Building the right support in the community
 - VI. Improving support in criminal and youth justice systems
 - VII. Keeping Safe
8. A workstream lead was identified for each of the seven priorities who led the co-production and collated the information for each priority. Workstream leads were from across the ICS including Herefordshire Social Care Commissioners, Head of Additional Needs for Herefordshire Council Children and Young people, Worcestershire Adult Social Care Commissioners, All-Age Disability Lead for Worcestershire Children’s First, NHS ICB Commissioners, and the Head of Criminal Justice for West Mercia Police.

9. The co-production included workshops, facilitated groups and a questionnaire. There were over 400 responses to the questionnaire from a range of different stakeholders. A summary of the responses is included in appendix 2.
10. This information has been collated with a short summary of “what we know” for each priority, high level aims and key actions included in the strategy.
11. Co-production work will continue through the development of annual implementation plans, progressing and monitoring the actions.
12. The version of the strategy document included in appendix 1 is currently with the ICB design team to make into a more attractive, user-friendly document. There will also be an easy read version.

Key Messages

13. There are a significant number of key findings and required actions set out in the strategy document. The strategy is ambitious, however it should be noted that a significant number of actions relate specifically to statutory duties according to the legislation set out in points 1-4.
14. The strategy sets out a description of each of the priorities, high level aims and actions in addition a number of themes which have been highlighted within each of the seven priorities.
15. At the ICS Learning Disability and Autism Programme Assurance Board in January 2024 it was agreed that cross cutting themes were the key points of the strategy to work on first: a) Support / advocacy b) Carers c) Mental health d) Reasonable Adjustments
 - I. Many Autistic People need **support/advocacy** to access mainstream services or navigate systems.
 - II. **Carers** have voiced concerns that there will be no support for their autistic child when they can no longer provide it. The need for support was clearly evidenced through work on all of the priorities and for people of all ages and their carers.
 - III. The plan is to continue the multi-agency approach taken with this strategy to plan the best way for carers to get the support that they need.
 - IV. Some Autistic people are not getting the right support for their **mental health** needs. The strategy sets out aims and actions around this in priority 4 but people talked about this in each priority.
 - V. Many people talked about feeling suicidal because of their situation. The intention is to use the strategy to tackle issues facing autistic people in Herefordshire and Worcestershire to **improve mental health and wellbeing and to reduce risk of suicide** and suicidal thoughts.
 - VI. Organisations need to make **reasonable adjustments**. A key action is to promote good practice examples of reasonable adjustments to all organisations in Herefordshire and Worcestershire and remind organisations of duties under the Equality Act 2010.

Implementation and Monitoring Progress

16. Work will commence in April 2024 with each priority lead working with stakeholders to co-produce an annual implementation plan based on the high level aims and actions identified within the strategy document. Implementation plans will need to identify any future resource implications for each of the organisations across the ICS and business cases will need to be developed where appropriate. Plans will also include details of how success will be evaluated.

17. Progress will be monitored at the ICS Developing Services for Autistic People Board (name and terms of reference to change with a dedicated focus on the autism strategy implementation) including all workstream leads, people with lived experience and carers and chaired by the ICS Autism Champion. This will report into the ICS Learning Disability and Autism Programme Assurance Board and annual reports will be presented to the Health and Wellbeing Boards in both counties.
18. In addition to the ICS wide governance, there will be additional oversight within Herefordshire, with regular progress updates reported into the Herefordshire Autism Partnership Board and the SEND Assurance Board.
19. A communications plan will include a bi-annual newsletter to be produced for all stakeholders to be distributed across all channels in the two counties.

Community impact

- 20 The autism strategy aims to deliver positive outcomes in a number of different areas across local communities which includes health inequalities, support into employment, support for people in the criminal justice system and building the right support for autistic people in the community.
- 21 Herefordshire's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-33 sets out how the Council and its local partners plan to address the health and wellbeing needs of its population and is a key jointly owned document that promotes collective action.
- 22 The key themes of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy align closely with priorities set out within the autism strategy. This includes enabling the best start in life for children and good mental wellbeing throughout life. Additional priorities addressed in both strategies include
 - I. Improve access to local services
 - II. Good work for everyone
 - III. Support for people with complex vulnerabilities

Environmental impact

23. Whilst this activity will have minimal environmental impacts, consideration has been made to minimise waste and resource use in line with the Council's environmental policy.

The Council provides a wide range of services for the people of Herefordshire. Together with partner organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors, there is a shared strong commitment to improving the environmental sustainability and achieving carbon neutrality in Herefordshire.

Equality duty

- 25 The decision does not discontinue any service and has no detrimental impact to eligible service users under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.
- 26 The Council is committed to equality and diversity using the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. An Equality Impact Assessment is attached at Appendix 4.
- 27 The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. All partners are aware of their statutory requirements in regards to equality legislation.
- 28 This proposal will contribute to providing support and improving the quality of life to autistic people of all ages and protected characteristics.

Resource implications

- 29 There is a training implication to ensure that all appropriate staff receive the Oliver McGowan mandatory training.
- 30 There is a resource implication in that all stakeholders will need to work together to achieve successful completion of the actions set out in the strategy. Workstream leads will need to continue to oversee and collate the work for their priority.
- 31 There are no financial implications associated directly with the approval of this strategy as the resources to take forward the strategy in relation to the development of implementation plans will be delivered within current revenue budget constraints. Any resource implications that are identified as part of implementation plan development will require the development of business cases, which will need to be approved by the relevant organisation(s) prior to proceeding.

Legal implications

- 32 The strategy has been developed to support compliance with the legislative framework, as set out above in sections 1 to 5 of this report.
- 33 The Autism Act 2009 states that there has to be a Government strategy which then places further statutory guidance on Local Authorities which must be followed. Failure to do so, without just cause, may lead to a judicial review or action by the Secretary of State.

Risk management

- 34 Further work to implement the strategy is required with support across the Council needed to ensure progress is made within Herefordshire communities.
- 35 Without consistent support and engagement from a wide range of public, voluntary and private sector partners, there is a risk that the Council will not be able to deliver the intended improvements and outcomes for autistic people and their carers.

Risk	Mitigation
Sufficient resources to implement the strategy are not available.	The next stages of the process will identify work already underway which will contribute; key resources; robust governance and further engagement across the Council
Key stakeholders do not engage productively with this strategy	We will mitigate this by building relationships between partners, through further engagement and priority area focussed working groups.

Consultees

- Herefordshire Autism Partnership Board
- Corporate Leadership Team

- Community Wellbeing Cabinet Member
- Community Wellbeing Corporate Director
- Children and Young People Corporate Director
- SEND Assurance Board
- Herefordshire Social Care Commissioners
- Head of Additional Needs for Herefordshire Council Children and Young people, Worcestershire Adult Social Care Commissioners
- Worcestershire Autism Partnership Board
- All-Age Disability Lead for Worcestershire Children's First
- NHS ICB Commissioners
- Head of Criminal Justice for West Mercia Police.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Herefordshire and Worcestershire All Age Autism Strategy 2024-2029

Appendix 2: Survey Response Data 2023

Background papers

None

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Governance	John Coleman	Date 01/03/2024
Finance	Judith Tranmer Karen Morris	Date 28/02/2024 Date 29/02/2024
Legal	Samantha Evans, Community Wellbeing	Date 01/03/2024
Communications	Luenne Featherstone	Date 28/02/2024
Equality Duty	Harriet Yellin	Date 29/02/2024
Procurement	Lee Robertson	Date 28/02/2024
Risk	Jo Needs	Date 29/02/2024

Approved by	Hilary Hall	Date 08/03/2024
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Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- Integrated Care System (ICS)

- National Health Service Integrated Care Board (NHS ICB)