

# Report to Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board

<b>Subject:</b>	Update on the Development of an Autism Strategy for Sandwell
<b>Director:</b>	Director of Adult Social Care Rashpal Bishop
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## 1 Recommendations

1. That the Board considers and comments upon the update on the development of an Autism Strategy for Sandwell, prior to its presentation to the Health and Wellbeing Board in the summer of 2025 and final approval in the Autumn 2025.
2. That the Board endorses the refinement of the emerging Autism Strategy to include the needs of people living with ADHD.



## 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The current draft Autism strategy currently only includes people with a Learning Disability and Autism and that wider co-production with both young people and adults living with both Autism and/or ADHD as well as greater involvement with health and social care, in both adults and children services.
- 2.2 This will ensure that the Autism Strategy is fully aligned with the broader health and wellbeing goals across Sandwell, such as improving physical and mental health, preventing ill health, and ensuring access to the right care at the right time. This collaborative approach is essential for addressing the complex needs of individuals with autism and ADHD ensuring that they receive holistic and coordinated support.

## 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Council Plan

Growing Up in Sandwell	Recognising the importance of diagnosis and support for young people in Sandwell.
Living in Sandwell	That Sandwell is a place that recognises the positive impact those who may be neurodivergent can have on our communities.
Thriving Economy in Sandwell	By supporting people with Autism and ADHD to work
Healthy in Sandwell	Recognising the impacts to the health and wellbeing of those with Autism and ADHD within Sandwell both in terms of physical and mental health.
One Council One Team	Understanding the needs of neurodivergent staff within the Council to ensure they are supported and that recruitment processes cater or those who may neurodivergent

## 4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are neurodevelopmental conditions that affect individuals across the lifespan.
- 4.2 In the UK, approximately 1% of the population have been assessed as being on the autism spectrum, and about 4% having ADHD.

- 4.3 Whilst this report highlights a significant increase in diagnosis it should also be noted that many people with an autism diagnosis can and do function lives without support. These people are often referred to as High Functioning and may have little or no need for health or social care intervention.
- 4.5 This report is intended to give Health and Social Care Scrutiny committee sufficient information to consider the impact on Health and Social Care services here in Sandwell and an update on the development of the strategy.

## **5 Current Diagnosis Rates in Sandwell**

- 5.1 Specific data on ASD and ADHD diagnoses for adults aged 18 and over in Sandwell is limited. However, a report on children aged 0-5 in Sandwell indicates that the rate of ASD diagnoses has been increasing since 2016/17, with 1.9 children per 1,000 diagnosed in 2018/19.
- 5.2 Statistically boys have a higher rate of diagnosis compared to girls.

## **6 National Trends and Predictions**

- 6.1 Nationally, there has been a significant rise in ADHD diagnoses and prescriptions over the past two decades. For instance, in men aged 18-29, ADHD diagnoses increased approximately twenty-fold, and prescriptions fifty-fold between 2000 and 2018.
- 6.2 Given these national trends, it is anticipated that the prevalence of ASD and ADHD diagnoses among adults in Sandwell will continue to rise over the next 20 years.
- 6.3 This increase is due to greater awareness, improved diagnostic practices, and reduced stigma surrounding these conditions.

## **7 Implications on Health and Social Care Services**

- 7.1 The rising number of diagnoses is expected to place significant pressure on health and social care services in Sandwell. Nationally, there has been a five-fold increase in the number of people waiting to see an autism specialist since 2019, and a 51% increase in prescriptions for ADHD medication.
- 7.2 This surge in demand may lead to longer waiting times for assessments and treatments, potentially affecting the quality of care provided.

7.3 Additionally, some individuals with ASD and ADHD will require tailored support in areas such as employment, education, social integration and independent living. The Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust's Adult ADHD Service provides assessment and diagnosis for adults registered with a GP in the Black Country, including Sandwell. However, the capacity of such services may be challenged by the increasing demand.

## 8 **Joint Autism Strategy to include ADHD and an Action Plan for Sandwell**

8.1 It is recognised that developing a strategy for Sandwell covering Autism and ADHD, given the lack of data, is a complex undertaking and requires input from several different partners across Health, Social Care both adults and children.

8..2 A draft Strategy which encompasses both Autism and ADHD is due to be presented before the Health and Wellbeing Board in the summer with a view to the final strategy being signed off in the Autumn 2025.

8.3 It is intended that the strategy document will be co-produced with people with lived experiences of both autism and ADHD.

## 9 **Legislation**

9.1 The following details the legislative framework that support the importance of developing an Autism and ADHD Strategy.

9.1 The Autism Act is a piece of legislation that was passed in the United Kingdom to improve services and support for people with autism. The **Autism Act 2009** (also known as the **Autism Act** or the **Autism Act (England)**) was the first ever piece of legislation in the UK specifically aimed at autism. Here are some of the key points:

1. **Purpose:** The Act aimed to address the needs of people with autism, ensuring they receive appropriate support across different services, including health, education, and social care.
2. **National Strategy:** The Act required the UK government to develop a **national strategy** for autism, which includes providing guidance and standards for service delivery for individuals with autism.
3. **Autism Strategy for Adults:** The Act specifically focused on adults with autism, aiming to improve their access to services, support, and integration into society. It emphasized the need for tailored interventions to support adults with autism in their everyday lives, including employment, housing, and social activities.

4. **Autism Act (2010):** The **National Autistic Society (NAS)** played a significant role in campaigning for the Act, and its passing marked a significant step toward addressing the specific needs of the autism community.
5. **Local Authorities' Duty:** The Act also requires local authorities and the NHS to develop specific plans and strategies to meet the needs of people with autism. This includes training staff to better understand autism and how to work effectively with autistic individuals.
6. **Assessment of Needs:** The Act stresses the importance of carrying out assessments of the needs of people with autism, ensuring that their voices are heard, and they are not marginalized from essential services.
7. **Reviews:** The strategy is subject to review, which ensures that its implementation continues to meet the needs of people with autism over time.

9.2 The Autism Act marked a major milestone for autism awareness and advocacy in the UK, contributing to further reforms and improvements in services. However, there are ongoing calls to ensure that the implementation of the Act leads to tangible, high-quality outcomes for people with autism.

9.3 The **Care Act 2014** is another important piece of legislation in the UK that significantly impacts individuals with autism, especially in terms of adult social care. The Care Act 2014 was introduced to create a more consistent and fair approach to adult social care, ensuring that individuals' needs are better understood and met by local authorities.

### **Key Elements of the Care Act 2014 Relevant to Autism:**

#### **1. Assessment of Needs:**

- a. The Care Act 2014 requires local authorities to carry out **comprehensive needs assessments** for individuals, including adults with autism. This helps identify their care and support needs, as well as any risks they may face in daily life.
- b. For people with autism, this means their unique challenges, whether related to communication, social interactions, or sensory processing, should be recognised and considered in the assessment.

#### **2. Eligibility for Care:**

- a. The Care Act introduced a national **eligibility threshold** for social care support, ensuring that everyone who meets the criteria for care gets support. People with autism, if they experience significant difficulties in day-to-day living, could qualify for various forms of support.

- b. The assessment process ensures that individuals with autism receive the appropriate services and support needed to maintain their independence.

### 3. **Personalised Care and Support Plans:**

- a. Once an assessment is done, local authorities are required to develop a **personalised care and support plan** tailored to the individual's needs. For people with autism, this could involve different approaches depending on their challenges, including emotional and behavioural support, education, employment, or assistance with daily living.
- b. The plan should be designed to help individuals with autism lead as independent a life as possible, with appropriate services in place.

### 4. **Preventative Support:**

- a. The Care Act emphasises **preventative care**, aiming to intervene early and prevent the escalation of problems. This is particularly important for people with autism, as early interventions can prevent more serious issues from arising in terms of health, behaviour, or social isolation.
- b. Services might include therapies, social groups, or access to resources that help people with autism thrive before they need more intensive care.

### 5. **Safeguarding:**

- a. The Care Act requires local authorities to ensure that adults at risk, including those with autism, are **protected from abuse and neglect**. This is especially important for people with autism, who may be more vulnerable to exploitation or harm due to communication barriers or social naivety.

### 6. **Carers' Support:**

- a. The Act also acknowledges the needs of **carers**—family members or others who provide support to individuals with autism. It ensures that carers are assessed and provided with support to help them in their role.
- b. This is key for families of people with autism, as caregiving can be a complex and demanding task. The Care Act ensures that the needs of carers are met, reducing the burden on families and improving the overall quality of care for the person with autism.

### 7. **Local Authority Responsibilities:**

- a. Local authorities are required to **offer information and advice** to individuals with autism, ensuring they know what support is available to them.

- b. The Care Act also gives individuals the right to **independent advocacy** during the assessment and planning process if they have difficulty understanding or communicating their needs.

### How It Impacts People with Autism:

- The Care Act 2014 provides a framework to ensure that adults with autism are properly supported in their daily lives, with services tailored to their individual needs.
- It recognizes autism as a lifelong condition that requires ongoing care and support. Through comprehensive assessments and personalized care plans, individuals with autism can access services that enhance their independence and quality of life.
- For people with autism, the Care Act works alongside the **Autism Act 2009** by strengthening their access to services, support for managing challenges, and ensuring safeguards are in place.

## 9 Implications

<p><b>Resources:</b></p>	<p>The diagnosis and subsequent support needs of individuals with autism and ADHD undoubtedly place a strain on national resources, particularly in healthcare, education, and social services. However, the long-term benefits of investing in early intervention, education, employment, and mental health support can lead to improved outcomes for individuals and contribute to a stronger, more inclusive society.</p> <p>By providing the right support and accommodations, national resources can be used efficiently to help individuals with autism and ADHD reach their full potential, contributing meaningfully to society. Early intervention, inclusive education, and workplace integration can not only reduce future costs but also lead to a more productive, equitable, and diverse society.</p>
<p><b>Legal and Governance:</b></p>	<p>The Autism Act is a piece of legislation that was passed in the United Kingdom to improve services and support for people with autism. The Autism Act 2009 (also known as the Autism Act or the Autism Act (England)) was the first ever piece of legislation in the UK specifically aimed at autism.</p> <p>The Care Act 2014 is another important piece of legislation in the UK that significantly impacts individuals with autism, especially in terms of adult social care. The Care Act 2014 was introduced to create a more consistent and fair approach to adult social care, ensuring that individuals' needs are better understood and met by local authorities.</p>

	Both pieces of legislation are covered in section 9 of this report.
<b>Risk:</b>	Not supporting individuals with autism and ADHD can have far-reaching consequences for both the individuals themselves and society at large. It can lead to increased mental health problems, social isolation, academic failure, economic disadvantage, and unfulfilled potential. However, with appropriate support, these individuals can lead successful and meaningful lives, contributing to society in a variety of ways. Investing in support services, inclusive education, and early intervention is key to preventing these risks and helping neurodiverse individuals reach their full potential.
<b>Equality:</b>	Equality for individuals with autism and ADHD is not about treating everyone the same; it's about ensuring that everyone has the same opportunities to succeed and live fulfilling lives, regardless of their neurodivergence. This means providing the necessary support, accommodations, and opportunities for education, employment, healthcare, and social participation to help individuals with autism and ADHD thrive. By fostering an environment that values diversity, promotes inclusion, and addresses the unique needs of neurodiverse individuals, we can create a more equitable and inclusive society for all.
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	Promoting well-being for individuals with autism and ADHD requires an integrated approach that addresses emotional, social, and physical health. With tailored support, individuals with these conditions can thrive in their personal, social, and academic lives. Strategies such as providing structure, promoting self-regulation techniques, fostering positive relationships, and focusing on strengths can all contribute to better overall well-being for both children and adults with autism or ADHD.
<b>Social Value:</b>	The social value of promoting inclusion and support for individuals with autism and ADHD is vast. By reducing stigma, offering tailored services, promoting self-advocacy, and fostering inclusive communities, society not only benefits individuals with autism and ADHD but also enriches the broader social fabric. Recognising and harnessing the strengths and potential of neurodiverse individuals leads to a more innovative, compassionate, and resilient society where everyone can contribute and thrive.



<b>Climate Change:</b>	There are no implications for climate change outcomes or any potential impact on the environment linked to the purpose of this paper.
<b>Corporate Parenting:</b>	Corporate parenting responsibilities for children with autism and ADHD ensure that these children are supported in every aspect of their care, from education and mental health support to social inclusion and safeguarding. Local authorities have an important role in advocating for and providing tailored care that addresses the unique needs of children with these conditions. The aim is to ensure that children in care with autism or ADHD have the best possible opportunities to thrive and lead fulfilling lives, both in the care system and after they transition to adulthood.

## 10 Conclusions

- 10.1 While specific data for Sandwell is limited, national trends indicate a significant rise in ASD and ADHD diagnoses among children and adults, but this should be read alongside the fact that many people diagnosed may not require any Health and Social Care intervention.
- 10.2 This increase is expected to continue over the next two decades, potentially impacting health and social care services in Sandwell. Addressing this challenge will require strategic planning, resource allocation, and the development of specialised support services to meet the evolving needs of individuals with ASD and ADHD.