

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Cabinet

DATE: 5th March 2024

SUBJECT: Slough Autism Strategy 2024-29

CHIEF OFFICER: Marc Gadsby, Executive Director People Adults

CONTACT OFFICER: Jane Senior, Director of Commissioning
Giuseppe Di Martino, Learning Disability and Autism Commissioner

WARD(S): All

PORTFOLIO: Cllr Anna Wright, Social Care and Public Health

KEY DECISION: YES

EXEMPT: NO

DECISION SUBJECT TO CALL IN: YES

APPENDICES: Appendix 1 – Equalities Impact Assessment
Appendix 2 – Autism Strategy
Appendix 3 – Autism Strategy Consultation

1 Summary and Recommendations

This report requests approval of the Autism Strategy 2024-29 including an Autism Action Plan. The Strategy sets out how the Council, working with its partners, will support and encourage autistic adults to live as independently as possible, actively engage with the wider community, maximise their potential, fulfilling their needs and aspirations, manage their own health and wellbeing, and ensure that that right support is known about, accessible, and available at the right time.

The aim of the strategy is to ensure that Slough is a place where autistic people live a long and purposeful life, experiencing good health and achieving a desired quality of life. Importantly, the Strategy seeks to minimise the negative impacts of social isolation and loneliness and seeks to prevent or delay crises.

The Strategy has been informed by engagement events with autistic adults and the wider Community, both in person and online, and with active support and participation from Co-Production Network, DWP, Autism Berkshire, SCVS, East Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust, and the Local Authority. In addition, autistic people, their families and carers, and relevant professionals were asked open questions via a survey about their views and experiences which also underpin this strategy. This was co-designed with support from the Co-Production Network and other partners.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the Slough Autism Strategy 2024-29 set out at Appendix 2.
2. Note that a report will be brought back to Cabinet annually setting out the progress against the Action Plan and recommending any amendments to the Strategy.

Reason:

To ensure that a fit for purpose Slough Autism Strategy with a clear action plan, and deliverables is in place.

Commissioner Review

No specific comments to add to the report.

2 Report

Publishing the Autism Strategy 2024-29 contributes to the following priorities:

Slough Corporate Plan

A town where residents can live healthier, safer and more independent lives

- Working with partners to target health inequalities and promote well-being.
- Supporting residents to be as independent as possible whilst providing quality services for the most vulnerable.

Staying healthy, remaining independent at home, and meaningfully engaging with the community are important elements in achieving a good quality of life. For Autistic people, this is likely to be more challenging than for others due multiple factors such as health inequalities and barriers in accessing the community.

Our Corporate Plan sets out a vision for Slough where **residents can live healthier, safer and independent lives**. The Autism Strategy outlines 8 key priorities to support this vision and to address the needs of those who might require additional support by working with the wider community. These priorities were borne out of national and local drivers set out in the JSNA and Observatory Data and importantly through consultation with Autism stakeholders.

Slough Wellbeing Strategy 2022-25

Priority 2: Integration

- Increase the number of people living independently at home and decrease the proportion needing specialist services.
- Increase the number of people managing their own health and care needs.
- Increase employment opportunities to enhance people's independence.

Options considered

| Option | Pros | Cons |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Option 1</p> <p>Approve and implement the Autism Strategy 2024-29.</p> <p>Recommended</p> | <p>Up to date Autism Strategy in place which is informed by community engagement.</p> <p>Implementation of an Autism Strategy Action Plan to be overseen by a new Autism Steering Group comprising Autistic People, Carers, the Co-Production Network, Council officers and professional stakeholders and reported through existing and new Council governance arrangements.</p> | <p>No clear disadvantage to approving and implementing the Strategy.</p> |
| <p>Option 2</p> <p>Do not approve Autism Strategy 2024-29.</p> <p>Not recommended</p> | <p>No clear advantage</p> | <p>There is no Autism Strategy and Action Plan currently in place</p> <p>Missed opportunity to implement an effective strategy which is aligned to the Corporate Plan and the Slough Wellbeing Strategy and thereby supports the delivery of broader corporate objectives.</p> |

Option 1 is recommended.

Background

- 2.0 The Autism Strategy 2024-29 provides an opportunity to strengthen the Autism offer within the town - based upon evidence and information obtained through engagement. The Strategy sets out 8 key priorities for Autism in Slough which are aligned to intended Corporate Objectives. The priorities are:

Priority 1: Promote Independent Living

This priority regards how to navigate life and society independently and includes the co-production of dedicated initiatives with the autistic community (nothing about us without us), improved information in accessible format (e.g. video, simple language) regarding services available and how to access these, improved awareness of autism needs and adaptations within the community and concerning fundamental services (e.g. housing maintenance support).

Priority 2: Providing quality support in the community

This concerns themes such as the creation of dedicated spaces, online and in person, where to access advocacy, information; and events that meet the needs of the autistic community (e.g. low arousal environment), increase awareness of autism in the wider population, peer-mentoring programmes for support and advice.

Priority 3: Implement the integration of Health and Social Care

Engagement feedback has revealed the need to work with health partners to improve assessment pathway for diagnosis, better training opportunities for health and ASC staff to accommodate autistic needs in mainstream services, improved and accessible communication among professionals and with the autistic community.

Priority 4: Pathways for Transition to Adulthood

Transitioning to adulthood is always a complex time of changes, and this is even more significant when neurodivergent. Autistic people have expressed the need for a clearer pathway to adulthood which should include, among other priorities, early planning, timely referral, and improved and clearer communication between adult and children teams, and with carers.

Priority 5: Pathways to support Employment, skill development, and training

Access to meaningful employment and skill development pathways is a priority both for the Government and the Autistic community in Slough. To achieve this, autism stakeholders have noted the need for tailored local programme of skill development, mentoring opportunities (e.g. expert by experience), and resources to improve Autism awareness, and the accommodation of autistic needs (e.g. sensory, communication) in the workplace and in educational settings.

Priority 6: Empowering people to stay safe and free from abuse

Data suggest that between 50% to 89% of autistic adults have been victim of discrimination or victimisation with negative consequences for their mental health¹. This confirms the need for improved awareness of Autism needs within the wider community, pathways for self-protection, self-advocacy, abuse awareness from a young age, improved access to reporting, and support when abuse takes place.

Priority 7: Prevent Loneliness and Social Isolation

Loneliness has been one of the most heartfelt topics during engagement events. Autistic people in Slough feel the need for improved road safety to access the community, the creation of dedicated urban spaces in town that cater for the needs of autistic people, and community initiatives (e.g. special interests, sensorial, communication, environmental) to promote socialisation and prevent isolation.

Priority 8: Improving communication and information sharing

Improved access to information and communication has emerged as a clear need in all priorities discussed during engagement events. The feedback has been unanimous: it is an absolute priority to improve accessibility and availability of information in suitable formats (e.g. videos), as well as providing additional clarity on how to access communication and information about services (e.g. some people may not read, others may not be comfortable talking on the phone).

Further detailed information concerning each of these priorities is found in the Strategy.

¹ Reuben KE, Stanzione CM, Singleton JL. Interpersonal Trauma and Posttraumatic Stress in Autistic Adults. 2021

The Strategy contains an “Autism Strategy Action Plan” setting out a range of initiatives which will be implemented to deliver against the priorities. These include mapping the customer journey and developing a clearer set of operational pathways for Autistic people especially in key areas such as Employment, Education, Skills development.

One of the key elements of the action plan is to take a targeted approach that promotes and enables people’s autonomy and independence by working together with the territory to prevent Crises and deterioration of needs across health and social care, to tackle social isolation and loneliness, and to ensure meaningful lives for Autistic People within their communities.

This Strategy links closely with the Carers Strategy 2023-2028 to ensure that their needs can be met as we often find Carers play an important role in the adult social care economy especially for Autistic People and their caring can prevent the cared for person moving into expensive residential care.

The Action Plan will be overseen through a new Autism Steering Group comprising of Autistic People, Carers, the Council, and its partners with responsibility for delivering against the strategy resting with the People Strategy and Commissioning Team.

The Strategy has been shaped by diverse engagement events with Autism stakeholders and the wider community. This included an online event via Microsoft Teams, an event in person at Observatory House, and a written questionnaire circulated online and in paper format developed with the support of the Co-Production Network volunteers. Engagement events have been promoted across the community with the support of SCVS organisations, East Berkshire NHS, ICB Frimley, Healthwatch, DWP, CPN, Housing Department, Business Networks, and other relevant community groups and stakeholders. Furthermore, commissioners have actively participated to other community initiatives to extend awareness of the events and gather local feedback. Autistic people and the wider community have come together to share how they feel about Autism services, their needs, priorities, and what is their view of making Slough an Autism friendly town and community, and the participation has been remarkably high. The multimedia and multimodal approach has facilitated a wider active participation from the Autism community and their carers. Some of the consistent themes emerging from the engagement were the issues around isolation/loneliness, to provide more accessible information (not just digital) and about relevant and current issues e.g. employment, social participation, etc. Full information concerning feedback from the engagement, including cross-referencing back to the Strategy, is contained at Appendix 3 to the Strategy.

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 Financial implications

Whilst there are no financial implications directly relating to the publication of the Autism Strategy, it is intended that implementation of the action plan will deliver cost efficiencies to the Council and deliver on our best value duties. Like other Adult Social Care service users this will be through promoting independence (for example through increasing the use of assistive technology and skill development initiatives), progressing integration (for example through the establishment of a more robust customer journey across health and social care) and to prepare more effectively to meet the future needs of Autistic People within the community, including more

complex needs (for example by early planning with Public Health, Children Services and the NHS to target early identification). Cost efficiencies will be confirmed against each of the relevant workstreams once the new Autism Strategy Steering Group takes shape. Progress will be reported into Cabinet on an annual basis.

3.2 Legal implications

3.2.1 The Care Act 2014 contains duties to actively promote wellbeing and independence and to provide services, facilities, or resources to prevent, delay or reduce the need for care and support. This prevention duty is distinct from the assessment and meeting eligible needs duties. The Strategy and Action Plan set out a clear intention to further promote independence by supporting autistic people to self-advocate and to ensure the development of fundamental life skills.

3.2.2 The Care and Support Statutory Guidance refers to the prevention and promoting wellbeing duties as aimed at individuals with no current health or care and support needs. Universal services include but should not be limited to information and advice. Services can include supporting safer neighbourhoods, promotion of healthy and active lifestyles, reducing loneliness or isolation and encouraging early discussion in families. Priority 1 is focused on promoting independence and Priority 3, 5, and 7 on a sense of purpose, participation, and good health.

3.2.3 Effective intermediate and reablement services are also referred to in the Guidance as key to delaying the need for care and support services. These are services often provided for a limited period and are excluded from personal budgets. They are an effective way of preventing needs escalating and supporting individuals to maintain or regain the ability to live independently.

3.2.4 The Guidance refers to the need for strategies and plans to be aligned with other Council strategies and to take account of local differences. This requires the following principles to be met:

- involvement of local people who use the services and representative organisations,
- ensuring services are available at the right time in a range of formats and channels, meeting the needs of distinct groups,
- being clear, comprehensive and impartial,
- being consistent, accurate and up to date,
- being based on detailed analysis,
- directing people to sources of further information,
- being used to inform future planning,
- ensuring appropriate quality assurance and review, including customer feedback to make sure the Council learns from experience and continuously improves.

3.2.5 The Autism Strategy has been produced following consultation and engagement with Autistic People and the wider community, and it will be reviewed periodically to ensure it continues to meet the needs of the population and focuses limited resources in the right areas. Information consultation and engagement which has taken place is contained both within the Autism Strategy and its appendix 3. It is proposed that the annual review is brought back to Cabinet with an update on progress against the Action Plan and recommendations for any changes to the Strategy.

3.2.6 Section 12 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 introduced a duty at Section 2B of the NHS Act 2006 for the council to take appropriate steps to improve the health of the people who live in its area. The Autism Strategy places an emphasis upon Autistic People health and wellbeing. It is proposed that the annual review is brought back to Cabinet with an update on progress against the Action Plan and recommendations for any changes to the Strategy.

3.3 Risk management implications

Overall, the risks associated with approving the Slough Older People Strategy are set out below.

| Risk | Assessment of Risk | Mitigation | Residual Risk |
|--|--------------------|--|---------------|
| Insufficient staffing resource to implement the Action Plan. | Medium | <p>Full use of commissioning staffing budget over 2024-25 to support commissioning initiatives.</p> <p>Cross-council approach as necessary to support implementation of elements of the Autism Action Plan.</p> <p>Acknowledgement that progress will be negatively impacted if staffing resource is insufficient.</p> | Low / Medium |
| Unwillingness of partners to engage with and support the strategy and implementation of the action plan. | Medium | <p>Ongoing engagement through formal partnerships arrangement including the Health and Social Care Partnership Board and East Berkshire Directors meetings, and reporting through established governance arrangements eg the Slough Wellbeing Board.</p> | Low / Medium |
| Insufficient budget to support any commissioning intentions arising out of the Autism Action Plan. | High | <p>Budget availability to be confirmed in advance of commencement of any commissioning project.</p> <p>Ensuring best value considerations.</p> <p>Robust analysis as part of project of effectiveness and efficiency of any existing current supply.</p> | Medium |

3.4 Environmental implications

There are no environmental implications.

3.5 Equality implications

Approval and implementation of the Autism Strategy should have a positive impact in regard to protected characteristics and is tailored to supporting residents from different ethnicities and faiths. It is intended that the Strategy will have a positive impact upon the lives of autistic people by supporting individuals to manage their own health and wellbeing needs and to access the right support at the right time. This applies to Autistic People of any sexual orientation, including Autistic People who are married or in a civil partnership.

The Strategy sets out a particular commitment to understand how people in Slough can access opportunities to actively engage within their communities and to ensure that their needs can be met. This will be enabled through co-produced initiatives with the wider stakeholder community.

A full Equalities Impact Assessment is set out at Appendix 1.

4. Background Papers

None

Appendix 1

Equality Impact Assessment

| Directorate: People Strategy & Commissioning People (Adults) | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|--------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--|--|
| Service: Autism Strategy 2024-29 | | | | | | | | |
| Name of Officer/s completing assessment: Giuseppe Di Martino | | | | | | | | |
| Date of Assessment: 20/12/2023 | | | | | | | | |
| Name of service/function or policy being assessed: Autism Strategy | | | | | | | | |
| 1. | <p>What are the aims, objectives, outcomes, purpose of the policy, service change, function that you are assessing?</p> <p>The Strategy sets out how the Council, working with its partners, will support and encourage carers to manage their own health and wellbeing, and ensure that that right support is known about and available at the right time.</p> <p>The aim of the Strategy is to ensure that Slough is a place where Autistic People can live their best live and where we intervene early to reduce or delay the development of crises across health and social care.</p> | | | | | | | |
| 2. | <p>Who implements or delivers the policy, service or function? State if this is undertaken by more than one team, service, and department including any external partners.</p> <p>Delivery of the Autism Action Plan contained within the Strategy will be overseen by a new Autism Steering Group comprising of Autistic People, Carers, the Co-Production Network, SCVS, Council officers and other professional stakeholders including representatives from Frimley ICB. It is intended that reporting will take place into the Slough Wellbeing Board.</p> | | | | | | | |
| 3. | <p>Who will be affected by this proposal? For example, who are the external/internal customers, communities, partners, stakeholders, the workforce etc. Please consider all of the Protected Characteristics listed (more information is available in the background information). Bear in mind that people affected by the proposals may well have more than one protected characteristic.</p> <p>The Strategy affects Autistic People in Slough and their carers.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="232 1315 2011 1414"> <thead> <tr> <th>Characteristic</th> <th>Positive , Negative, Neutral or</th> <th>Rationale for Assessment</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | | Characteristic | Positive , Negative, Neutral or | Rationale for Assessment | | | |
| Characteristic | Positive , Negative, Neutral or | Rationale for Assessment | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |

| | | | |
|----|---|-----------------------|---|
| | | Unknown Impact | |
| | Age | Positive | It is intended that the Strategy will have a positive impact upon the lives of Autistic People by supporting individuals to manage their own health and wellbeing needs and to access the right support at the right time. |
| | Disability | Positive | About 40% of autistic people also present a learning disability. The Strategy therefore directly benefits disabled people as it seeks to address and prevent a range of Long-Term Conditions and crises by working in an integrated way across the NHS and Social Care. |
| | Gender Reassignment: | Positive | The Strategy will benefit all Autistic People including those who have undertaken gender reassignment. |
| | Marriage and Civil Partnership: | Positive | Some Autistic People support a partner. The Strategy is likely to have a benefit upon those who are married or in a civil partnership as it will support Autistic People within their caring roles. |
| | Pregnancy and maternity: | Positive/ Neutral | N/A |
| | Race: | Positive | The Strategy sets out to inclusively understand the difficulties which Autistic People from black and minority ethnic people can experience. The Strategy should have a positive benefit. |
| | Religion and Belief: | Positive | Autistic People of any religion and belief should benefit from the Strategy. |
| | Sexual orientation: | Positive | Autistic People of any sexual orientation should benefit from the Strategy. |
| | Other: | Positive | |
| 4. | <p>What are any likely positive impacts for the group/s identified in (3) above? You may wish to refer to the Equalities Duties detailed in the background information.</p> <p>Better support to individuals across all equalities categories to enable Autistic People to receive the right support at the right time.</p> | | |

| | |
|-----|--|
| 5. | <p>What are the likely negative impacts for the group/s identified in (3) above? If so then are any particular groups affected more than others and why?</p> <p>There will be no negative impact.</p> |
| 6. | <p>Have the impacts identified in (4) and (5) above been assessed using up to date and reliable evidence and data? Please state evidence sources and conclusions drawn (e.g. survey results, customer complaints, monitoring data etc).</p> <p>There has been a range of engagement activities to support the development of the Strategy including the Priorities. The Strategy contains a commitment to gather further information on the needs of Autistic People from diverse communities in order that we understand the needs of Slough communities.</p> |
| 7. | <p>Have you engaged or consulted with any identified groups or individuals if necessary and what were the results, e.g. have the staff forums/unions/ community groups been involved?</p> <p>The Strategy has been shaped by engagement with Autistic People. Implementation of the Autism Action Plan will be overseen by a new Autism Steering Group comprising of Autistic People, Carers, the Co-Production Network, SCVS, Council Officers, and other professional stakeholders including representatives from Frimley ICB.</p> |
| 8. | <p>Have you considered the impact the policy might have on local community relations?</p> <p>A demonstrable commitment to delivering the strategy should have a positive impact upon community relations.</p> |
| 9. | <p>What plans do you have in place, or are developing, that will mitigate any likely identified negative impacts? For example what plans, if any, will be put in place to reduce the impact?</p> <p>There are no identified negatives.</p> |
| 10. | <p>What plans do you have in place to monitor the impact of the proposals once they have been implemented? (The full impact of the decision may only be known after the proposals have been implemented). Please see action plan below.</p> <p>Implementation of the Autism Action Plan Oversight by a new Autism Steering Group It is also proposed that progress against the Autism Action Plan is reported through the Slough Wellbeing Board.</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| What course of action does this EIA suggest you take? More than one of the following may apply | ✓ |
| Outcome 1: No major change required. The EIA has not identified any potential for discrimination or adverse impact and all opportunities to promote equality have been taken. | ✓ |
| Outcome 2: Adjust the policy to remove barriers identified by the EIA or better promote equality. Are you satisfied that the proposed adjustments will remove the barriers identified? (Complete action plan). | |
| Outcome 3: Continue the policy despite potential for adverse impact or missed opportunities to promote equality identified. You will need to ensure that the EIA clearly sets out the justifications for continuing with it. You should consider whether there are sufficient plans to reduce the negative impact and/or plans to monitor the actual impact (see questions below). (Complete action plan). | |
| Outcome 4: Stop and rethink the policy when the EIA shows actual or potential unlawful discrimination. (Complete action plan). | |

**Action
Plan and**

Timetable for Implementation

At this stage a timetabled Action Plan should be developed to address any concerns/issues related to equality in the existing or proposed policy/service or function. This plan will need to be integrated into the appropriate Service/Business Plan.

| Action | Target Groups | Lead Responsibility | Outcomes/Success Criteria | Monitoring & Evaluation | Target Date | Progress to Date |
|---------------|----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| | | | | | | |

Name: Giuseppe Di Martino
Signed:(Person completing the EIA)

Name:
Signed:(Policy Lead if not same as above)

Date: 20/12/2023