

# Essex All Age Autism Strategy

2020-2025



Essex County Council

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## Foreword

**Councillor John Spence**, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care and Chair of the Essex Health and Wellbeing Board.

**Andrew Hensman**, Chair, Essex Branch of The National Autistic Society Essex and Chair, All Age Autism Partnership Group.

**Jessica Stewart**, ECC Head of Commissioning and Co-Chair, All Age Autism Partnership Group.

Autism touches the lives of many people in our county and can affect many aspects of life, from school to healthcare to employment and social lives. As such, this strategy takes a whole life approach and encompasses children, young people, adults, older adults and their families and carers.

This is a partnership strategy. It has been developed by people with lived experience of autism including families and carers, Essex County Council Officers, NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups across Essex, voluntary and community partners and others within our community network. As representatives of this wider partnership group, we commend this joint All Age Autism Strategy.

We want to build on and focus on what people can do and where they want to get in life rather than focusing on what people may find challenging. It is right that this strategy considers all ages and takes positive steps to address wide-ranging issues; it is therefore relevant to all autistic spectrum conditions.

The strategy sets out clear objectives and constructive actions to work towards the vision of Essex as an autism inclusive county. It is a useful resource for anyone working with people with autism, as well as residents with autism themselves and their families and carers.

Making Essex an autism inclusive county in which people with autism can live fulfilling and rewarding lives is an important priority for us. We recognise that raising awareness of autism in the wider community and increasing knowledge and understanding is key to succeeding in this. All partners have a role to play in ensuring this happens.

We established an All Age Autism Partnership to support the development of this strategy. The group has engaged with and heard the views of people with autism, families and carers from across Essex and we want this to continue as the strategy is delivered.

The strategy proposes aspirational yet achievable solutions to make Essex a better place to live for people with autism. Delivery of the strategy will require that we continue to work in partnership for and with our communities to ensure its positive ambitions are achieved.

## 1. Introduction

We want Essex to be recognised as an autism inclusive county in which people with autism can live fulfilling and meaningful lives within communities that are understanding and supportive.

We have therefore developed a strategy for the next five years with people with autism, family members, health, voluntary and community partners and other key stakeholders. The strategy takes a whole life approach and encompasses children, young people, adults and older adults with autism and considers the views, wishes and opinions of carers and families. It has been informed by people with lived experience and their families and carers, including consultation and engagement within our network and partnerships.

We know that the number of people in Essex being diagnosed with autism is increasing. Essex currently has a range of support services for people with autism and health and social care commissioners are continuing to work together to ensure that there is an equitable offer across Essex. We want everyone to know and understand about autism and ensure that people with autism have access to effective support that responds to their needs and aspirations.

It is intended that this strategy is relevant to people with all autistic spectrum conditions and recognises that support will need to vary. This is inclusive of people recognised as “high functioning” with autism or those with multiple and complex support needs. The strategy is accompanied by a dynamic all age action plan which sets out the key actions that we will take to deliver the aims of this strategy.

## 2. What is autism?

The term ‘autism’, ‘autistic spectrum disorder’ (ASD) and ‘autistic spectrum condition’ (ASC) are often used interchangeably and refer to the same spectrum of conditions which includes autism and Asperger’s syndrome. For consistency we will use the terms ‘autism’ and ‘person with autism’ throughout this document.

Autism is a lifelong disability that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them. Autism is a spectrum condition. This means that while people with autism share certain difficulties, their condition will affect them in different ways. Some people with autism can live relatively independent lives but others may need a lifetime of specialist support. A person’s capacity may also fluctuate according to age, circumstance or environment.

In order for a person to be diagnosed as being on the autistic spectrum they generally have to be assessed as having had persistent challenges with social communication and social interaction and restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviours, activities or interests often since early childhood, to the extent that these limit and impair everyday functioning.

People with autism who also have other conditions such as learning disabilities or mental health conditions can experience specific additional challenges.

Statistics show that more males than females are affected by autism. There are many reasons why this may be the case, including possible genetic factors, an exaggeration of

normal gender differences, different presentations in males and females and diagnostic frameworks not sufficiently accounting for these differences.

Autism can be a 'hidden' disability as you cannot always recognise that someone has the condition from their outward appearance. This can mean that the behaviour of people with autism can be easily misinterpreted or that people do not take the condition into account when interacting with someone with autism.

Autism can be identified in early childhood and good outcomes may be achieved from effective early intervention. However, this can vary, and diagnoses can take place later in childhood or in adulthood, particularly in the case of people with high functioning autism or Asperger's syndrome. Confirmation following a late diagnosis of autism can help people, families and carers to understand how they can best manage their condition and/or maximise independence.

Most people with autism are provided with support by their own families. Having caring responsibilities may impact on a carer's own ability to stay healthy, fulfil their own potential and be successful in employment. Siblings in families where there are children with autism may also be impacted.

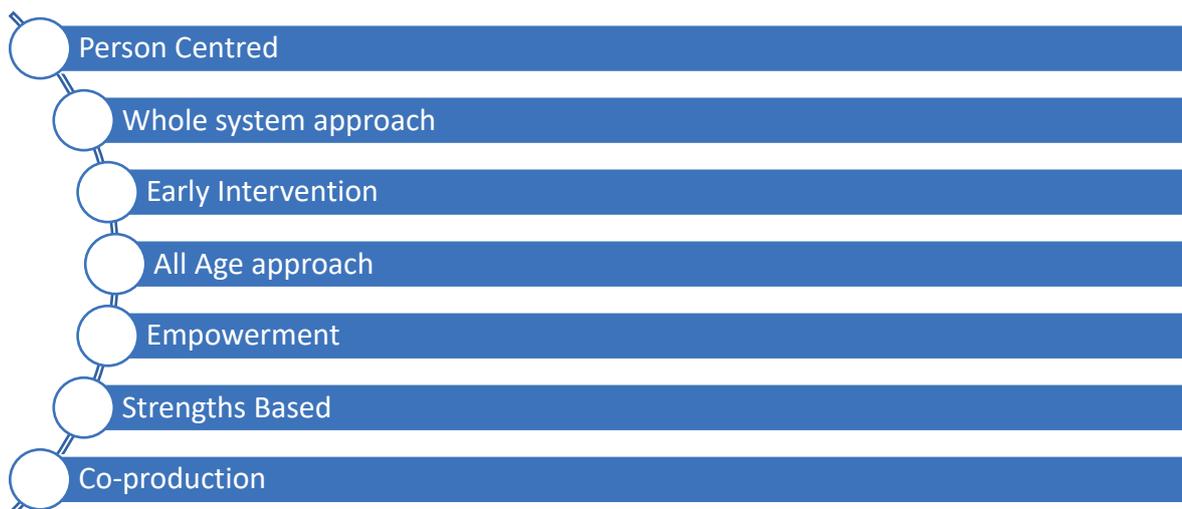
### **3. Our vision and aims**

We want Essex to be recognised as an autism inclusive county. We are working to ensure that people with autism live fulfilling and rewarding lives within a society that accepts and understands them. This means they can get a diagnosis if they choose to, access support if they need it, and have positive experiences with universal services.

To deliver this vision we will ensure that positive levels of awareness and understanding of autism are embedded across communities and that people have access to effective support that is responsive to individuals' needs and aspirations.

With the right support, many people with autism can work and have shared that they want to work. We will work with partners to enable more people with autism to access and retain meaningful paid employment. We believe that this will contribute to their mental and social wellbeing, increasing confidence, self-esteem and friendship networks as well as financial wellbeing.

In delivering this strategy we will work together with other organisations and partners and the way we work will follow these 7 key principles:



## Person Centred

We will strive to:

- Personalise services and support to the person as opposed to expecting individuals to change to fit the service;
- Involve people with autism and their families in decision making at both an individual and strategic level;
- Provide care informed by an understanding of what matters to a person and their family;
- Gain regular insight from individuals' experiences with services to ensure that services meet their needs.

## Whole system approach

We will strive to:

- Maximise the potential of working across partnerships such as social care, Health, GPs, Criminal Justice Service, Police, Voluntary and Community partners, Public Health, people with lived experiences, families, carers and other relevant stakeholders;
- Accept a shared responsibility for achieving positive, jointly agreed outcomes;
- Commit to effectively sharing information with each other (in accordance with guidance and legislation);
- Promote integration with health and social care whenever possible.

## Early intervention

We will strive to:

- Ensure early intervention system responses to support and enable those on the journey to diagnosis.

- Provide access to quality, timely and relevant information, advice and guidance in line with the statutory guidance and prevention agenda across children and adults services;
- Ensure people and their families can access support which is not solely reliant on a positive diagnosis of autism or on a diagnosis pathway where early indications are recognised;
- Ensure pre-school and Education settings have appropriately trained staff that are sensitive to identifying early indications of autistic behaviours, and putting in place pathways to facilitate efficient access to early support/ advice;
- Ensure adult services and providers have appropriately trained staff that are sensitive to identifying early indications of autistic behaviours, and putting in place pathways to facilitate efficient access to early support/ advice;
- Ensure reasonable adjustments are made in pre-school, educational, employment, public services settings;
- Ensuring support plans are implemented in pre-school, educational and accommodation support services and encouraging and supporting parents and carers to maintain the support plan whilst at home with families;
- Support to parents and carers through the commissioning and provision of parenting support and training programmes;
- Ensure that all the traditional transition points in a person's life are effectively managed and seamless.

## All Age approach

We will strive to:

- Focus on ensuring that support we provide for people is focused on progression across a whole life pathway;
- Work to ensure effective transition to adulthood for children and young people;
- Work collaboratively across children and adult services;
- Identify how to best provide support and appropriate services for people as they and their carers get older.

## Empowerment

We will strive to:

- Support families and carers to improve/maintain their caring role and resilience;
- Encourage families and communities to promote and develop inclusive communities;
- Ensure people with autism feel confident and are equal partners care and feel that their views, wishes and opinions are considered;
- Have access to advocacy support.

## Strengths based

We will strive to:

- Continually work with families and individuals, recognising strengths, what they can do now and what and how they could do in future;
- Find out what people's aspirations are and agree how we can help them achieve these; Build strength in the way we learn and develop by seeking examples of good practice through reaching out to our neighbours across our Integrated Care Systems and to other parts of the country.

## Co-production

We will strive to:

- Involve individuals and their families in planning and decision making at both a strategic policy led level and operational delivery of service level;
- Ensure we further develop co-production mechanisms to enable people across communities to influence strategy and service approaches.

## 4. National and Local context

The Autism Act 2009 places a duty on local authorities and NHS bodies to follow the national strategy which was last updated in 2014.

This strategy is designed to ensure that we continue to comply with our statutory duties in accordance with other key factors such as the NHS Long Term Plan.

This strategy is informed by national legislation, policy and best practice guidance and other strategies and plans we have agreed at a local level. These other documents already contain several requirements, commitments and work programmes relevant to autism.

It is recognised that when a person moves from a child to adulthood, there are different legal frameworks that govern our statutory duties. This strategy and accompanying action plan aims to ensure the transition from children to adult services is seamless with minimum impact to access for service users and their families.

The strategic action plan that will implement the deliverables of the priorities are informed by an amalgamation of health and social care statutory duties across children and adults in addition to the outcomes of the joint Essex Autism Self-Assessment Framework (ASAF) to ensure there are improvements to the access and quality of services for children, adults and their families with autism.

These joint statutory duties also includes the co-operation and partnership between local authority departments and other public bodies such as housing authorities and the police, which will be embraced and shall underpin delivery of this strategy and the action plan.

The table below provides an overview of key publications influencing and relevant to our strategy:

**National guidance, legislation and programmes:**

The national guidance and legislation specifically aimed at provision for autism are:

**The Autism Act (2009)** had 2 key statutes

- Put a duty on the Government to produce and regularly review an autism strategy to meet the needs of autistic adults in England.
- Put a duty on the Government to produce statutory guidance for local authorities to implement the strategy locally.

**The Adults Autism Strategy (2010)** - Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives, the strategy for, sets out that local authorities should:

- make basic autism training available for all staff working in health and social care.
- develop or provide specialist training for those in roles that have a direct impact on access to services for adults with autism.
- include quality autism awareness training within general equality and diversity training programmes across public services.

**The New Adults Autism Strategy (2014) Think Autism**

- A revised version of the 2010 strategy to strengthen the priorities of the strategy.

**National Institute for Health Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines**

- Reducing waiting lists.
- Meeting the referral to diagnosis timescales.
- CCGs commission assessment and diagnostic services.

**Department of Health 2015 - Statutory guidance for Local Authorities and NHS organisations**

- to support implementation of the Adult Autism Strategy.

<p><b>National guidance, legislation and programmes (cont):</b></p>	<p><b>Additional legislation and guidance that are inclusive of meeting the needs of Children and Adults with autism and their families:</b></p> <p>The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, The Children’s Act 1989 Health and Social Care Act 2012; Children and Families Act 2014, The Care Act 2014; The SEND Code of Practice 2014; Transforming Care; NHS Long Term Plan 2019, Equalities Act 2010. The Mental Health Act 1983 &amp; Code of Practice, The Mental Capacity Act 2005.</p>
<p><b>Local strategic partnership strategies, plans and programmes:</b></p>	<p>Essex SEND Strategy; Meaningful Lives Matter Programme (Adults); Essex Health and Wellbeing Strategy; Essex Mental Health Strategy; Essex Carers Strategy; Essex County Council: A vision for learning disability and / or autism services; Essex Children and Young People’s Plan; Essex County Council Organisation Strategy and Organisation Plan; Essex Hate Crime Prevention Strategy; Essex Safeguarding Arrangements Essex County Council Organisation Strategy and Organisation Plan.</p>
<p><b>Service specific / operational plans and programmes</b></p>	<p>ECC Adult Social Care Business Plan; ECC Children and Families Business Plan; ECC Education Business Plan; specific plans for partner agencies; schools’ local offers</p>

The local and service specific plans and strategies outlined above all contain actions and commitments which, when implemented, will help to deliver improvements in the lives of people with autism.

## 5. Local demographics

The prevalence of autism was found to be 1.0% of the adult population in England. The rate among men (1.8%) was higher than that among women (0.2%), which fits with the profile found in childhood population studies. This would indicate that there are approximately 14,780 people with autism living in Essex.<sup>1</sup>

It is not possible to give an accurate figure as some very able people with ASD may never come to the attention of services as having special needs, because they have learned

<sup>1</sup> Office for National Statistics (ONS).

strategies to overcome any difficulties with communication and social interaction and found fulfilling employment that suits their particular talents.

There are estimated to be 8,576<sup>2</sup> adults aged 18-64<sup>3</sup> and 2,880 people over 65 totalling 11,456 with autism living in Essex. The projected total number of adults with autism living in Essex is 12,932 by 2035.

The profile of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) is seeing autism as the fastest growing primary diagnosis group at 10% per annum over the past 5 years<sup>4</sup>.

As at 2017 34% of children with disabilities open to Children's social care teams had autism as one of their identified needs<sup>4</sup>.

A small but growing number of children and adults in acute in-patient secure placements also have autism<sup>5</sup>.

The number of children and adults diagnosed with autism is expected to raise as more awareness is raised and professionals and families are better trained at detecting and identifying autism.

## 6. Overview of funded arrangements

Support for people with autism and their carers/families is:

- funded and provided by ECC;
- funded by ECC but provided by the voluntary and community sector;
- funded and provided by independent organisations, charities, community and voluntary sector organisations;
- funded and provided by health and other partner organisations such as district, borough and city councils;
- funded by partners such as health but provided by others such as voluntary organisations;
- provided by individuals to each other through peer networks.

Some services are universal services that anyone can access, for example leisure services, information services, health services, others will be very specialist interventions for those who have the highest levels of need. People with autism should find it easy to identify at any stage in their lives what services are available and how they can access them.

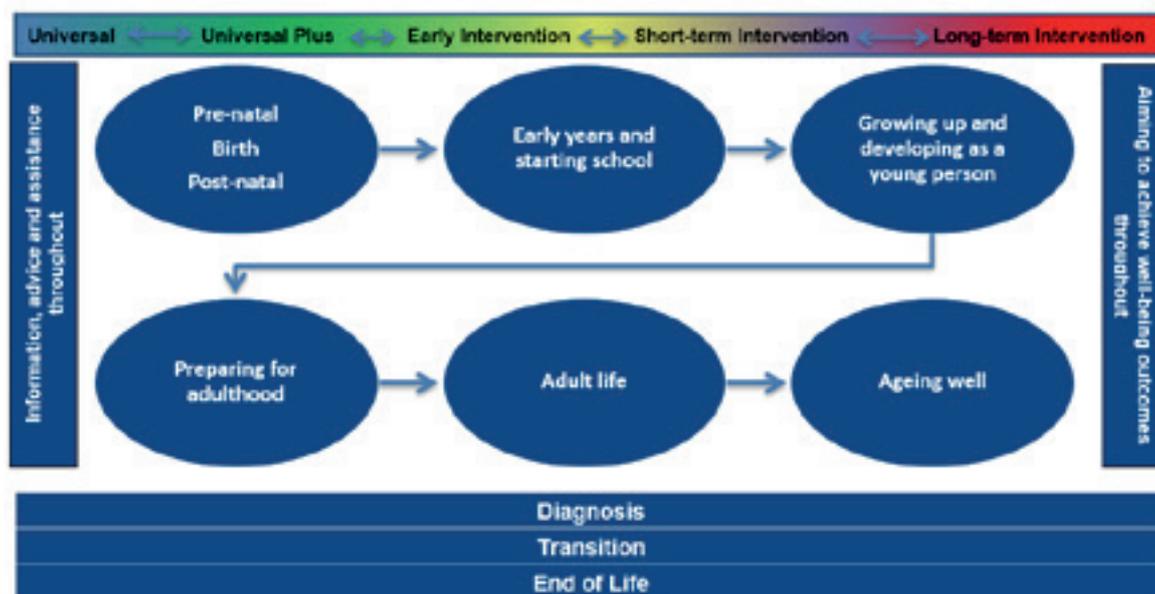
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<sup>2</sup> Projecting Adult Needs and Service Information (PANSI)

<sup>3</sup> Projecting Older People Population Information (POPPI)

<sup>4</sup> ECC SEND data.

<sup>5</sup> NHS Digital Portal.



ECC provides information to help people understand what is available through both its Local Offer website and the Living Well Essex Autism Hub website which provide a gateway to information and the range of support and choice for people with autism, carers, families and professionals.

They include support directories and access to support in relation to:

<https://www.livingwellessex.org/health-and-well-being/all-ages-autism-hub/>

<http://www.essexlocaloffer.org.uk/essex-local-offer/>

Health partners and voluntary sectors providers also provide information on the websites.

## 7. Outcomes

Our engagement with people with autism and their families has told us that what they want for their lives is to have an ordinary life. They may benefit from reasonable adjustments to achieve this. This strategy is our approach for helping people to achieve their outcomes. People with autism want to:

- Be happy, feel loved and well supported by their families, friends and communities;
- Access good and suitable schools, further, higher education and training opportunities;
- Achieve in education and training;
- Undertake meaningful work where possible;
- Be active members of their communities and enjoy social activities of their choice;
- Be positive and ambitious for their future and helped to achieve their ambitions;
- Be provided with the life skills needed to assist them with living independently and to exercise control over their own lives;
- Live in accommodation suitable to their needs;
- Participate in and influence decision making in respect of their care and support;
- Be healthy and supported in making good decisions about how they live their lives;

- Make use of mainstream services which make reasonable adjustments for their needs;
- Feel safe;
- Access advice and support easily when needed.

## 8. Priority areas and objectives

From our ongoing engagement and consultation with people with autism and their families we have identified priority areas and objectives. In this section we explain how we will seek to address them to fulfil the vision for the strategy.



### Priority area

- Planning

### Objective

- To provide autism inclusive services

## Where we are now?

Generally, people are confused about the system of support for autism, what is available, what different organisations offer and who does what in the system.

People report that services can be 'one size fits all' and that planning for provision does not sufficiently account for the numerous different forms of autism and the way it affects people. People would prefer services that are more flexible – for example more out of hours appointments and more home-based provision. Services that are available can differ across the county, both those provided by statutory organisations and the voluntary sector. Many parents of children with autism feel that the support provided is dependent on how effectively you can advocate for your child and how well you understand the system which could lead to an inconsistent allocation of resources.

Professionals report there is greater scope for collaboration, for sharing and improving data and for making reasonable adjustments within services.

Generally better outcomes are achieved when autism is identified at an earlier stage; however, partly due to people struggling to find the right support, opportunities for early intervention can be lost. People therefore advocate for greater resources to be invested in early help.

## Where do we want to get to?

- ✓ Accessible, flexible and suitable service provision which is more consistent across the county;
- ✓ A diversity of services and support that meet the needs of different people at different stages of their lives;
- ✓ Clearer information about who does what;
- ✓ Improved alignment of services and better joint working, both within and between organisations; reducing the gaps whilst avoiding duplication.
- ✓ Improved access to an expansion of early help.

## How will we get there?

We will work together to ensure we make reasonable adjustments to the services we provide to ensure people with autism can access them and that provision is appropriate and inclusive.

This includes:

- Adjusting existing services and ensuring newly commissioned services are accessible;
- Identifying opportunities for joint commissioning, pooling, sharing and aligning resources for better outcomes;
- Working in co-production with people with lived experience;
- Reviewing the advice and guidance we make available;
- Exploring new opportunities to provide help earlier.

## Priority area

- Professional awareness

## Objective

- To be autism aware

### Where we are now?

There are many examples of effective support being provided by professionals to people with autism. However, there is inconsistent knowledge and awareness of autism across the workforce. The wider levels of confidence of professionals in supporting people with autism without resorting to specialists need to be increased.

Communication from health, education and social care to people with autism can be inconsistent and not tailored to their needs; people can often be confused about the language used and what is meant by different terms. This confusion can extend to professionals themselves, who often use different terms for the same thing and who don't understand how other organisations work. Organisations do not always share information well with one another, meaning people must repeatedly share their stories.

### Where do we want to get to?

- ✓ Increased professional awareness and understanding of autism appropriate to different roles and levels;
- ✓ Improved communication between professionals and people with autism.

### How we will get there?

We will work together to help professionals working with children, young people and adults to have a better understanding of autism as a spectrum. This includes:

- Professionals having improved knowledge of autism including how and when to get people additional support;
- Professionals communicating effectively and transparently with people with autism, providing them with information they need to make well informed choices;
- Professionals sharing information between each other in accordance with guidance and legislation in the best interests of people with autism.

## Priority area

- Diagnosis, assessment and support

## Objective

- To support people to live meaningful lives

## Where we are now?

People feel like there is sometimes too great an emphasis placed on obtaining a diagnosis and that it can be difficult to obtain support without one.

Parents of children with autism report both not receiving enough information about the support that is available, for example they feel that organisations 'diagnose and discharge' without providing clear guidance about what they can do next, and too much information. They sometimes feel overwhelmed by the extent of different support options that are available and unsure how to make the choice between them.

People with lower levels of need who may not be eligible for services can benefit from accessing community-based support but do not always know where to go.

Diagnostic and other services are effective when they undertake comprehensive assessments which consider alternative diagnoses and ensure that specific needs in respect of communication, behaviour, physical and sensory conditions are identified.

Expectations of people with autism may not be sufficiently focused on progression and forward planning. Support services may focus on crisis intervention rather than planning and the longer term.

People also report that professionals often focus on addressing the symptoms of autism and can be misunderstood as mental health issues, rather than understanding autism and support needed.

Parents of children with autism report specific anxieties about how planning is handled at the point of transfer from children to adult services. They worry about continuity of support and about whether their adult children will be able to navigate the system for themselves. Carers of people with autism generally are concerned about how to plan for the future and what will happen to the person they care for when they are unable to do so. There is also however a level of avoidance of thinking about the future and a reluctance to engage in forward planning processes due to anxieties including that services may get taken away as a result of reviews.

Meeting the needs of people who care for people with autism is also important. Carers talk about the stress they experience in trying to get the person the care for the support they need.

A diagnosis of autism in life may also help people, families and carers to understand how they can best manage their condition and/or maximise independence.

## Where do we want to get to?

- ✓ People have access to support through the diagnostic process;
- ✓ Linking the autism diagnostic assessment to other health pathways;
- ✓ Effective planning and a focus on progression across a whole life pathway;
- ✓ Well planned and managed transitions;
- ✓ Improved recognition and support for carers;
- ✓ Clear information, advice and guidance being available to support people in decision making;

- ✓ Reducing waiting times, to work towards the NICE waiting times guidance.

### How will we get there?

We will work together to develop a more consistent and clearer pathway for autism diagnosis to which health and social care services are aligned and via which people can access appropriate support.

This includes:

- Professionals understanding the systems and processes that are in place to support their work and using these skilfully and effectively;
- Ensuring parents/carers have access to information and support;
- Providing clear and accessible guidance to help people understand what support is available.

### Priority area

- Accommodation

### Objective

- People are supported to live independently

### Where we are now?

Children and young people with autism express a desire to live independently; however, some require support to do this.

There are queries about the quality of residential care for people with autism and the extent to which this care is focused on supporting people to progress rather than to maintain their status quo. Carers may also be anxious about what will happen to their family member and where will they live if they can no longer look after them.

### Where do we want to get to?

- ✓ A range of suitable housing options including supported and independent living;
- ✓ Support for people with autism to understand their housing options;
- ✓ Support for people to develop the life skills needed to live independently;
- ✓ Reduction in residential care where possible, through a shift to progression.

### How will we get there?

We will work together to ensure support for people to live independently and provide housing options.

This includes:

- Promoting the use of technology;

- Working with district and borough councils to influence developments;
- Developing a 'Shared Lives' scheme accessible to people with autism; Shared Lives is generally a scheme that supports eligible adults who need accommodation and support with an approved person/carer within their home.

## Priority area

- Employment

## Objective

- People are supported to access employment

### Where we are now?

National research shows that only small percentages of adults with autism are in full time employment. This has financial consequences and means people miss out on a route to independence and social inclusion.

Children and young people with autism express a desire to live independently and are generally ambitious about the type of work they want to do. People are however concerned about both the availability of jobs and about what support is available to access the opportunities that do exist. Employers are often reluctant to employ people with autism as they do not appreciate the benefits of this, do not understand the help that may be available or have unhelpful misconceptions about the condition.

### Where do we want to get to?

- ✓ Increased access to meaningful employment;
- ✓ Increased awareness and understanding of autism amongst employers;
- ✓ Schools, colleges and universities engaged in preparing young people with autism for employment;
- ✓ Parents/carers supportive and informed in relation to the benefits of employment.

### How will we get there?

We will work together to develop employment opportunities for people with autism. This includes:

- Developing and delivering an employment strategy;
- Supporting the development of autism inclusive pathways into employment;
- Encouraging businesses to offer work experience, training and employment opportunities for those with autism;
- Increase of internships and apprenticeships across social care and Health;
- Commission service providers to support people to access employment.

## Priority area

- Education and training

## Objective

- People have the foundations to build and live meaningful lives

### Where we are now?

Children and young people with autism benefit from accessing high quality education. Adults with autism also benefit from accessing education and training to enable them to obtain and sustain employment and to live meaningful, connected lives. Parents of children with autism have concerns about the quality and appropriateness of education provision, especially in relation to options for further and higher-level study. Parents often lack confidence in the ability of mainstream settings to manage their young people's needs. Schools and colleges want to do the best to help all children and young people achieve but they can also feel like they lack the support and resources to do this.

### Where do we want to get to?

- ✓ Inclusive educational provision for young people with autism across the county;
- ✓ A good level of awareness and understanding of autism across the education sector;
- ✓ A range of suitable educational provision across Essex including both mainstream and special schools;
- ✓ Good autism practice underpinned by understanding the individual, positive and effective relationships, enabling environments and learning and development;
- ✓ Accurate identification and assessment of young people's needs.

### How will we get there?

We will work together to develop educational provision for young people with autism which enables them to achieve to the best of their abilities. This includes:

- Effective training and development for education professionals;
- Autism Education Trust (AET) training delivered by professionals to early years, schools and post 16 settings.
- A holistic approach using the AET's evidence-based support programme and practical resources.
- Identifying learning priorities and measuring progress in areas which relate to young people's social, emotional, independence and learning needs.
- Developing the support available for mainstream schools in supporting young people with autism;
- Developing understanding and commitment to inclusivity across the education sector.

## Priority area

- Physical, emotional, social health and wellbeing

## Objective

- Communities and inclusive and supportive

### Where we are now?

People want inclusive and supportive communities and to feel safe when going out. When this is not the case it can cause social isolation and loneliness and can impact on mental and physical health.

Parents of children with autism report being anxious about going out with their child who has autism due to inconsistent understanding in the general public about the condition. People believe that simple adjustments could be made to community facilities to make them more autism inclusive.

People generally welcome what is done by the voluntary and community sector to provide groups, clubs etc., however provision is not consistent across the county and that some people, such as parents with older children, can struggle to find the right 'club' to join. Parents talk positively about the peer support they get from other parents.

### Where do we want to get to?

- ✓ People with autism feel happy within their local communities;
- ✓ People with autism can access community facilities;
- ✓ People with autism feel safe in their communities;
- ✓ The general population understands more about autism;
- ✓ People have access to /develop peer support networks.

### How will we get there?

We will work together to develop inclusive communities and an autism inclusive Essex. This includes:

- Raising awareness across communities and healthcare provision about autism;
- Working with voluntary and community partners and people to further develop peer support networks;
- Working with people and asking them how they feel to understand progress.

## Priority area

- Criminal Justice

## Objective

- People with autism are recognised and protected from harm

### Where we are now?

#### Criminal Justice

Autism and learning disability hate crime has now officially been reported as the most common form of disability hate crime. These statistics have been made available through the work with Dimensions and the Office of National Statistics.

Due to difficulties with communication, interaction and social imagination, people with autism can be vulnerable to misunderstanding others' intentions and / or poor judgement. The behaviour and intentions of people with autism can also be easily misinterpreted as aggression or lack of cooperation by professionals who lack understanding or sensitivity.

### Where do we want to get to?

- ✓ Improved understanding of autism across the criminal justice system;
- ✓ People with autism are effectively supported if they come into contact with the criminal justice system;
- ✓ Communities are friendlier and safer for people with autism;
- ✓ People with autism keep themselves safe and feel safe in their communities.

### How will we get there?

We will work together with the criminal justice system to improve awareness and recognition of people with autism and to review and influence reasonable adjustments made. This includes:

- Ensuring professionals access appropriate training;
- Ensuring that appropriate support services are made available to people with autism who are in the criminal justice system;
- Providing people with autism with the help, advice and guidance they need to keep themselves safe.

## 9. Action Plan

A detailed action plan has been developed to support the implementation of this Strategy. This is a working document which is updated regularly, and which has also been aligned to the criteria of the National Autism Self-Assessment Return. This action plan outlines the specific details of how we will achieve our intentions over the next five years. The action plan is monitored by the All Age Autism Partnership (AAAP) Group on a regular basis.

## 10. Governance

Many different organisations and groups are well placed to work with us to achieve the vision for an autism inclusive county. There is a need to co-ordinate efforts across partners, to achieve more together and to provide clear, transparent, and accountable leadership for services for people with autism and their families.

Essex has an All Age Autism Partnership (AAAP) Group which was established under the Essex Health and Wellbeing Board. The AAAP provides a single focal point and leadership body for autism in the county and a place from which the system can be viewed from the perspective of people with autism.

The AAAP facilitates positive partnership working and collaboration by creating a network of people with the responsibility, expertise and passion to take forward work together to improve outcomes, services and lives.

The Partnership consists of the All Age Autism Coordination Group which meets quarterly and the All Age Autism Wider Network Group which meets every 6 months.

The All Age Autism Coordination Group will monitor the progress and implementation of this strategy and will provide updates to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

## 11. Monitoring progress

We wish to ensure that we are making meaningful progress on the delivery of this strategy.

We will continue to deliver the action plan which will set out the specific actions, timescales and measures of success.

The action plan will continue to be reviewed on a regular basis by the All Age Autism Coordination Group. Challenges and barriers to progress will be proactively addressed by the partnership.

The strategy and action plan will be reviewed regularly to ensure its continued relevance and meaningfulness to people with autism and their families.

This information is issued by:  
**Essex County Council**  
**Children and Families and Adult Social Care**

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