



To: Health and Social Care Scrutiny Board (5)

Date: 9th October 2024

Subject: All Age Autism Strategy 2021-2026 Implementation Update

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 This report updates Health and Social Care Scrutiny Board on the delivery activity associated with the Coventry and Warwickshire Autism Strategy (2021 – 2026) (Appendix 1).

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Health and Social Care Scrutiny Board is recommended to:
- a) Note the progress and key achievements in delivery of the strategy to date.
 - b) Consider the risks that are highlighted in light of financial challenge of the Council and health partners.
 - c) Identify any comments/issues they may wish to raise with Cabinet Member for Adult Services.

3 Background and Information

- 3.1 Think Autism, the National Adults Autism Strategy defines Autism as a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people. Autism also affects how a person makes sense of the world around them. Autistic people often have difficulty, to a greater or lesser extent, with four main areas:
- a) Social communication: for example, problems using and understanding verbal and non-verbal language, such as gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice.
 - b) Social interaction: for example, problems in recognising and understanding other people's feelings and managing their own feelings.
 - c) Social imagination: for example, problems with predicting other people's intentions and behaviour and imagining situations outside their own routine.
 - d) Sensory differences: Many autistic people experience some form of sensory oversensitivity (hypersensitivity) or undersensitivity (hyposensitivity) for example to sounds, touch, tastes, smells, light or colours.
- 3.2 It is important to recognise there are positive aspects of autism, which underlines the importance of a strengths-based approach to our local strategy. This includes

attention to detail; an ability to focus deeply and avoid distractions; keen observation skills; an ability to absorb and retain facts, linked to high levels of expertise in particular topic areas; unique thought processes and creativity leading to innovative solutions; tenacity and resilience; and integrity and honesty.

- 3.3 Local Authorities and NHS Integrated Care Boards have statutory responsibilities to support autistic people as outlined in a range of policy and legislation including the Autism Act 2009, Equality Act 2010, Care Act 2014, Children and Families Act 2014, SEND Code of Practice, NHS Long Term Plan 2019 and Health and Care Act 2022.
- 3.4 In recognition of these statutory responsibilities and the inequalities faced by autistic people, the Coventry and Warwickshire All Age Autism Strategy (2021 – 2026) was developed and approved in February 2022. This joint five-year strategy is owned by:
 - Warwickshire County Council
 - Coventry City Council
 - NHS Coventry and Warwickshire Integrated Care Board
 - Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust
- 3.5 All partners are equally responsible and accountable in improving lives of Coventry and Warwickshire’s autistic citizens. The All-Age Coventry and Warwickshire Autism Partnership Board oversees the delivery of this strategy, comprising representatives from the social care, health and education sectors, community and voluntary sector as well as autistic people as experts by experience.
- 3.6 Co-production is a key enabler across the programme – experts by experience are recruited and engaged across the priority areas and have been integral to the outputs of the strategy.
- 3.7 Key achievements associated with the delivery of the strategy, to date, include:
 - a) Development of a co-produced information and advice offer including launch of an e-booklet resource, relaunch of Dimensions, an online tool providing self-care information and a quarterly stakeholder newsletter.
 - b) Delivery of a series of three Together with Autism conferences, attended by nearly 900 people in 2023/4. Following positive feedback from attendees, a further series are scheduled for Autumn 2024 with a Coventry based conference having been delivered on Saturday 14th September 2024. The conferences provide an opportunity for autistic people and those who support them to gather information, meet local support services, attend workshops and network with others.
 - c) Launch of a new commissioned All-Age Community Autism Support Service (CASS) in April 2023, to support people across Coventry and Warwickshire who may self-identify as autistic, those awaiting an autism assessment and those with an autism diagnosis. The service offers a range of practical and emotional support and a training/education offer for parents/carers and professionals on a range of topics. This service has recently been evaluated to assess its impact and guide future commissioning decisions – early data analysis highlights that the demand for this service is higher than the capacity commissioned, however, those who access the service report positive feedback. The education/training element is particularly well regarded by those supporting autistic people – 29 courses have been offered covering a range of topics and “on demand” video resources have been developed to enable convenient access. During the first year of the contract

1,569 Coventry residents have contacted the service for information, advice and support – 68% relating to an autistic child and 32% to adults.

- d) Significant investment has reduced the waiting times for diagnostic assessments for children and young people, from over 5 years to under 1 year, via investment into diagnostic capacity. Between January 2022 and July 2024 - 10,765 assessments were delivered against a target of 8,166 for children and young people. Diagnostic rates have remained around 80 – 82%. As at July 2024, the average waiting time is 47 weeks from referral with a mode wait of 31 weeks, supported by more efficient processes and increased resource.
- e) Co-produced a new model for the application of reasonable adjustments, to promote equitable access and positive outcomes for autistic people accessing services. This is called the 4 P's as it considers reasonable adjustments across four domains, Place, Person, Process and Partnerships. A video resource, with cast members from our local autistic population, is in development to assist with the promotion of this model. This is being developed with Coventry University's media department.
- f) Introduced a Neuro-Liaison Team supporting CWPT's mental health professionals who are working with autistic adults (or an adult suspected to be autistic) via training, diagnostic assessment and advising on reasonable adjustments in order to improve patient experience and accessibility of services.
- g) Secured funding for the continuation of the Neuro-Liaison approach and the development of a new MDT approach for autistic people who are experiencing escalating needs relating to their diagnosis – this is due to launch in Autumn 2024
- h) Developed training materials to raise awareness of autism and to support inclusive approaches to working with autistic people including e-learning modules and webinars. A local expert by experience delivered a live webinar focusing on neurodivergent language which attracted over 150 people interested in this topic. Subsequently, an informative video further exploring this was co-produced and promoted across the local system as resource to give people a better, more inclusive understanding of neurodivergence by dispelling common assumptions and stereotypes.
- i) Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust has led on the roll out of the national Oliver McGowan training on learning disability and autism. As at the end of July 2024, 3,982 people working across health and social care had received the level of training appropriate to their role. This training is delivered by people with lived experience and as such is offering paid employment opportunities for autistic people.
- j) A quarterly Coventry and Warwickshire Autism Stakeholder is issued to a growing stakeholder contact list, containing a broad range of articles and updates. Content for this is co-produced and local experts-by-experience support the content development.
- k) Fifteen Coventry primary schools are engaged in a new national project called Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS). Schools have completed self-evaluation surveys and will receive a tailored offer of support during the Autumn and Spring terms, with the aim of providing early interventions

at a whole school level, upskilling school staff and strengthening the partnerships between schools and parents/carers.

4 Commissioning

- 4.1 In recognition of the need to reduce the number of autistic people being admitted to mental health inpatient settings, we have commissioned a range of services aimed at preventing such admissions including:
- a) Community based Admission Avoidance Service for young people age 14+ and adults at risk of admission. This service also offers a 1 bed flat for adults requiring a short term stay whilst they receive support to manage a crisis situation – this provision will be recommissioned and expanded for 25/26.
 - b) A Key Worker Service for children and young people up to the age of 25 – to provide strategic support to the child and their family through identifying blockages and challenges in their support journey, so that reasonable adjustments are made and solutions can be reached, to avoid unnecessary hospital admission. This service also supports inpatients during the hospital discharge process.
 - c) An All Age Intensive Support Team, offering a specialist, multi-disciplinary approach delivered by Occupational Therapists, Clinical Psychologists, Nursing and Support Workers to assess and manage people’s needs and deliver personalised interventions.

5 Key Risks and Challenges

- 5.1 Key risks to ongoing delivery of the strategy are focused upon the growth in demand for assessment and subsequent support, and the challenging financial climate associated with resourcing this.
- 5.2 Although there has been significant progress in reducing diagnosis waiting times for children and young people, there remain challenges in respect of adults where significant waiting times are apparent due to demand far outweighing available capacity.
- 5.3 Continuation of the Community Autism Support Service is at risk as Coventry City Council is not currently able to identify a funding stream to continue this beyond 2024/25 – such a reduction in funding would destabilise the current Coventry and Warwickshire offer of preventative personalised support designed to ensure people are supported both prior to and after an autism diagnosis.

6 Health Inequalities Impact

- 6.1 The wider Learning Disability and Autism Programme has a focussed workstream progressing the health inequalities agenda, monitoring a range of projects in progress across the local system.
- 6.2 Delivery of the strategy is aimed at reducing inequalities and improving the experience of autistic citizens. As such, one of the priority areas of the strategy delivery is dedicated to this and the wider determinants of well-being. This priority area is led by a Coventry Public Health Consultant.

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