
All Age Autism Strategy 2026-2029

Committee considering report:	Executive
Date of Committee:	11 June 2026
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Patrick Clark
Report Author:	Hannah Cole

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to publish the All-Age Autism Strategy, a key document that outlines the council’s commitment to ensuring that people living with autism in the district can lead rewarding and fulfilling lives, and that they, their families, and their carers receive the support they need.
- 1.2 Autism spans a person’s entire life journey, and this strategy aims to improve outcomes for children and young people. The council will work collaboratively with its partners and with the autistic community in West Berkshire to achieve this.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the attached strategy is adopted.

3. Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	There are limited costs linked to the implementation of the strategy. Those costs are already in relevant budget plans.
Human Resource:	Officer time will be required to take forward implementation.
Legal:	The Care Act 2014 mandates that local authorities in England prioritize the wellbeing, prevention of needs, and independent living of autistic adults and their carers. Key duties include assessing needs regardless of eligibility, providing information and advocacy, and supporting carers through assessments and personalized care plans.

	<p>The adoption of the strategy will support compliance with those Care Act duties.</p> <p>Under the Children Act 1989 (specifically amendments made by the Children and Families Act 2014), local authorities have a legal duty to carry out a Parent Carer Needs Assessment (PCNA) if it appears to them that a parent carer of a disabled child may have needs for support, or if the parent requests one.</p> <p>The Care Quality Commission expects the council to have a dedicated Autism Strategy that supports the delivery of our duties to autistic people, their families, and their carers. In our information returns, we referenced the existing strategy.</p>			
Risk Management:	N/A			
Property:	N/A			
Policy:	<p>The proposed strategy is aligned with <i>The National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People and Adults 2021–2026</i>. It also aligns with key local policies, including the West Berkshire Council Strategy 2023–2027 and the West Berkshire SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024–2029.</p>			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
<p>A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?</p>	X			<p>The Strategy should strengthen support for autistic people and their families or carers, including those with protected characteristics such as disabilities.</p>

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B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	X			The Strategy should strengthen support for autistic people and their families or carers, including those with protected characteristics such as disabilities.
Environmental Impact:		X		
Health Impact:	X			Social Care needs are closely related to Health needs; the strategy refers to continued joint working with our health partners.
ICT Impact:		X		
Digital Services Impact:		X		
Council Strategy Priorities:	X			The All-Age Autism Strategy supports the priorities outlined in the Council's Strategy.
Core Business:	X			The All-Age Autism Strategy supports the priorities outlined in the Council's Strategy.
Data Impact:		X		

Consultation and Engagement:	<p>Consultation has taken place with key stakeholders and organisations during the development of the draft strategy. The partner organisations include representatives from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Advocacy People, Learning Disability Partnership Board - Autism Berkshire - Thames Valley Integrated Care Board - Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust - Berkshire Neurodivergent System Transformation Programme Lead
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Criminal Justice System- Thames Valley Police <p>Consultation also took place with Lesley Botchway Autism Team Co-ordinator.</p> <p>It is intended for a public consultation to be undertaken.</p>
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4. Executive Summary

4.1 There are important benefits to be derived from the publication of an All-Age Autism Strategy for adults and children. It provides the following:

- Clarity on how the council will collaborate with partner organisations to identify and enhance support for autistic children and adults, ensuring that provision is tailored to individual needs rather than driven solely by diagnosis, and grounded in a fully person-centred approach.
- Focus on strengthening the skills of educational professionals and ensuring that more autistic children can thrive within their local communities.
- Clarity on the council’s commitment to providing information and advice to autistic people, families and carers when they need it and at the right time.
- Aim is to strengthen public understanding, reduce stigma and loneliness, and support the development of services that are more inclusive of autistic people.
- Work with our partners to improve access to mainstream health services, reduce reliance on inpatient mental health settings, and strengthen support within the community.

4.2 A draft All-Age Autism Strategy has been developed and will progress through the governance process before public consultation.

5. Supporting Information

Introduction

5.1 The Adult Autism Strategy 2019–2022 is currently being reviewed and co-produced. Although it was originally developed as an adult-focused strategy, we intend to transition to an all-age approach to ensure alignment with the national strategy. Progress was delayed while we carried out a survey in 2023 to gather the views of autistic people in West Berkshire. The findings were published in 2024 and all form part to help shape the updated strategy.

Background

5.2 The process for the development of the draft All-Age Autism Strategy is as follows:

- (a) Formation of a sub-group of the Autism Partnership Board which has reviewed the existing strategy and developed an update version.
- (b) Development of an Action Plan which will be monitored by the Autism Partnership Board in the quarterly meetings.

Proposals

5.3 The proposal is for the draft strategy to be published.

6. Other options considered

To not develop an All-Age Autism Strategy. This is not advised as it will undermine the support to this important group.

7. Conclusion

The adoption of the All-Age Autism Strategy is an important step in ensuring that autistic people are appropriately supported by the council and partner agencies.

8. Appendices

- a. Appendix A – Equity Impact Assessment
- b. Appendix B – All-Age Autism Strategy 2026-2029 (Draft)
- c. Appendix C -Autism Survey Responses 2023

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval

Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council

Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position

Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees or Task Groups within preceding six months

Item is Urgent Key Decision

Report is to note only

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West Berkshire Council Equity Impact Assessment

February 2026

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Section 1: Summary details

<p>Directorate and Service Area</p>	<p>People Directorate, Adult Social Care</p>
<p>What is being assessed (e.g. name of policy, procedure, project, service or proposed service change).</p>	<p>All-Age Autism Strategy (Draft) 2026-2029</p> <p>The all-age autism strategy sets out a shared vision and direction for partner organisations supporting autistic people living in West Berkshire. It outlines our collective commitment and the key priorities we will focus on over the next three years. Our aim is to improve the experiences of autistic children and adults, along with their families and carers, and to achieve better outcomes for all.</p> <p>Under the Care Act 2014 local authorities have a legal duty to provide care and support for autistic adults, focusing on promoting wellbeing, preventing needs, and providing information. Key duties include conducting needs assessments, providing advocacy, ensuring tailored care plans, and facilitating the transition of young people into adult services.</p> <p>Key duties for local authorities regarding autistic people include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorities must assess any adult who appears to have care and support needs, focusing on their wellbeing and desired outcomes. • A duty to provide services to prevent, reduce, or delay the development of needs for care and support. • Providing accessible information about care, support, and services in the local area. • Providing an advocate if the person has substantial difficulty in being involved in the assessment or planning process. • Ensuring that all care and support functions, including decisions about services, promote the individual's wellbeing, control, and independence. • Working with the NHS to ensure joined-up care, including housing and social care services. • Assessing and supporting carers of autistic adults, without assuming what the carer is willing or able to do. <p>The strategy is underpinned by several key themes, including:</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A needs-led approach for children and adults, ensuring the right support is provided at the right time • Recognition and understanding of each child’s sensory profile • A strengths-based approach • Personalisation and person-centred practice • Enabling and empowering individuals and families • Building a strong ‘listening culture’ • Effective partnership working between home and school • Nurturing healthy, trusting relationships between parents and schools • Co-production, collaborating with our autistic community to shape meaningful solutions • Clear communication and shared expectations
<p>Is this a new or existing function or policy?</p>	<p>The existing strategy has been reviewed and updated.</p>
<p>Summary of assessment Briefly summarise the policy or proposed service change. Summarise possible impacts. Does the proposal bias, discriminate or unfairly disadvantage individuals or groups within the community? (following completion of the assessment).</p>	<p>The strategy aligns with the six priorities set out in the National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People and Adults 2012–2026 (DHSC). It aims to provide clarity on how the council intends to support autistic children, adults, and their families or carers, working with partner organisations including voluntary and community organisations. It will define West Berkshire’s offer to autistic people and those who support them.</p> <p>The accompanying action plan outlines how these commitments will be delivered. Key elements include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • targeted training for professionals working with autistic children and adults in health and social care settings • public awareness campaigns • education initiatives that promote school environments where autistic children can thrive, with a shift from diagnosis-led to needs-led support • workplace strategies and specialist employment services to better support autistic adults

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• identifying priority areas to reduce inequalities for autistic children and adults• involvement of community-based teams to support autistic young adults who have been detained in hospital, both during admission and after discharge <p>The delivery plan also includes gathering feedback from autistic people during psychiatric admissions, ensuring they have opportunities to shape the support they receive and helping the plan remain responsive to their evolving needs.</p> <p>The strategy does not create any bias, discriminate or unfairly disadvantage individual or groups within the community</p>
Completed By	Hannah Cole
Authorised By	Paul Coe
Date of Assessment	09.02.2026

Section 2: Detail of proposal

Context / Background Briefly summarise the background to the policy or proposed service change, including reasons for any changes from previous versions.	<p>The existing strategy is out of date and required a comprehensive review. As it currently focuses only on adults, there was a clear need to revise it into an all-age strategy aligned with the six priorities of the national strategy for autistic children and adults.</p> <p>To ensure the voices of autistic adults were captured, a survey was undertaken, and the results were published. The survey questions were designed around the six national priority areas, providing valuable insight to inform the revised strategy. We also held a focus group to gather the views of professionals who work with autistic people. The discussion was guided by questions aligned with the six national priority areas, ensuring consistency with the wider strategy development. Several key themes emerged repeatedly, providing important direction and helping to shape the revised strategy.</p> <p>The Autism Partnership Board has collaborated with partner organisations, including:</p>
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	<p>The Advocacy People</p> <p>Learning Disability Partnership Board</p> <p>Autism Berkshire</p> <p>Thames Valley Integrated Care Board</p> <p>It is important to note that the Board also includes internal council representatives, with members from Public Health and Education, including the SEND Strategy Officer and the Autism Schools Adviser.</p> <p>Consultation took place with :</p> <p>Criminal Justice System Partners</p> <p>Thames Valley Police</p> <p>Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust, Key Working Team</p> <p>Autism Lead Prospect Park Hospital</p> <p>Berkshire Neurodivergent System Transformation Programme Lead</p> <p>In addition, a sub-group of the Autism Partnership Board was established to lead the review of the existing strategy, with an autistic mother of three autistic children representing autistic people in the group.</p>
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<p>Proposals</p> <p>Explain the detail of the proposals, including why this has been decided as the best course of action.</p>	<p>Data information/research are all pointing to this direction and concerns seem to be the same.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. National Autism Strategy for Children and Adults 2021-20262. Autism Survey Results 20233. The 2024-2025 Adult Social Care Survey (ASCS) in England4. State of the District” Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) Report for West Berkshire, (November 2025)5. National Autistic Society website consultation6. The Care Act 20147. The Children Act 1989, 20048. The Equality Act 20109. Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework, West Berkshire Council 2024-202510. West Berkshire SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-202911. Health and Social Care Act 202212. The Childrens Commissioner October 2024 Report
<p>Evidence / Intelligence</p> <p>List and explain any data, consultation outcomes, research findings, feedback from service users and stakeholders etc, that supports your proposals and can help to inform the judgements you make about potential impact on different individuals, communities or groups and our ability to deliver our climate commitments.</p>	<p>The draft strategy will be open for public consultation for six weeks to gather feedback from service users and stakeholders.</p>

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Alternatives considered / rejected

Summarise any other approaches that have been considered in developing the policy or proposed service change, and the reasons why these were not adopted. This could include reasons why doing nothing is not an option.

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Protected Characteristics

Protected Characteristic	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Positive impact	Some older adults may have lived their entire lives without ever receiving a diagnosis or the right support for their neurodiversity. At the same time, many children with autism are still waiting for assessments and access to services. The All-Age Autism Strategy aims to address these inequalities and ensure that every autistic person regardless of their age receives fair and appropriate support.	Hannah Cole Service Manager and Principal Social Worker for Adults	2026-2029
Disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Positive impact	Autistic people are more likely to have co-occurring conditions such as ADHD and may face additional discrimination as a result. They also experience higher rates of physical health problems, and autistic adults are far	Hannah Cole Service Manager and Principal Social Worker for Adults	2026-2029

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					<p>more likely to live with long-term health issues. Accessing healthcare remains a major challenge: around 80% report difficulties seeing a GP, and 88% feel that health professionals do not fully understand their needs. Improving access to essential healthcare is therefore vital. The All-Age Autism Strategy will consider the wider neurodivergent population and work to reduce these inequalities.</p>		
Gender Reassignment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Positive impact	<p>Research indicates a significant, well-documented overlap between autism and being transgender or gender-diverse, with autistic individuals being more likely to identify as trans, non-binary, or gender-nonconforming than the general population. Studies have found that transgender and gender-diverse individuals are roughly 3 to 6 times more likely to be diagnosed</p>	<p>Hannah Cole Service Manager and Principal Social Worker for Adults</p>	2026-2029

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					with autism compared to cisgender individuals.		
Marriage & Civil Partnership	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No impact	No negative or differential impact currently identified.	Hannah Cole Service Manager and Principal Social Worker for Adults	2026-2029
Pregnancy & Maternity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No impact	No negative or differential impact currently identified.	Hannah Cole Service Manager and Principal Social Worker for Adults	2026-2029
Race	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Positive impact	Autism affects people across all communities, regardless of cultural or ethnic background. The All-Age Autism Strategy aims to address and reduce inequalities experienced by autistic people throughout their lives.	Hannah Cole Service Manager and Principal Social Worker for Adults	2026-2029

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<p>Sex</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Positive impact</p>	<p>Although research indicates that females are less likely to receive an autism diagnosis than males, the All-Age Autism Strategy aims to address these inequalities and improve support for autistic women and girls.</p>	<p>Hannah Cole Service Manager and Principal Social Worker for Adults</p>	<p>2026-2029</p>
<p>Sexual Orientation</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>No impact</p>	<p>No negative or differential impact currently identified.</p>	<p>Hannah Cole Service Manager and Principal Social Worker for Adults</p>	<p>2026-2029</p>
<p>Religion or Belief</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>No impact</p>	<p>No negative or differential impact currently identified.</p>	<p>Hannah Cole Service Manager and Principal Social Worker for Adults</p>	<p>2026-2029</p>

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Additional Community Impacts

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Rural communities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No impact	No negative or differential impact currently identified.	Hannah Cole Service Manager and Principal Social Worker for Adults	2026-2029
Areas of deprivation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Positive impact	We know that unemployment is higher among autistic people, and the national strategy aims to address this. We also know that difficulties in accessing assessments and support are increasing inequalities, with more people waiting for a diagnosis. There is a clear relationship between autism and	Hannah Cole Service Manager and Principal Social Worker for Adults	2026-2029

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Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
					socio-economic disadvantage. This strategy therefore aims to make a positive difference by improving access to identification, support, and opportunities for all autistic people locally.		
Displaced communities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No impact	No negative or differential impact currently identified.	Hannah Cole Service Manager and Principal Social Worker for Adults	2026-2029
Care experienced people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Positive impact	There is a proportion of children and young people in West Berkshire with special educational needs	Hannah Cole Service Manager and Principal	2026-2029

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Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
					and disabilities, and this strategy aims to make a positive difference by strengthening support for them and their families. Adult social care support autistic adults, many of whom have additional diagnoses, and we remain committed to supporting them and their families or carers.	Social Worker for Adults	
The Armed Forces Community	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No impact	No negative or differential impact currently identified.	Hannah Cole Service Manager and Principal Social Worker for Adults	2026-2029

Section 4: Review

Where bias, negative impact or disadvantage is identified, the proposal and/or implementation can be adapted or changed; meaning there is a need for regular review. This review may also be needed to reflect additional data and evidence for a fuller assessment (proportionate to the decision in question). Please state the agreed review timescale for the identified impacts of the policy implementation or service change.

Review Date	February 2027
Person Responsible for Review	Hannah Cole
Authorised By	Paul Coe

EDI employee related EQiA's should now be sent to Human Resources hrenquiries@westberks.gov.uk