

Report to: Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability

Date of meeting: 25 March 2025

By: Director of Children's Services

Title: East Sussex All Age Autism Action Plan

Purpose: The purpose of this report is to seek the approval of the East Sussex All Age Autism Action Plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Lead Member is recommended to approve the East Sussex All Age Autism Action plan, prior to it being launched in Autism Acceptance Week in early April 2025.

1 Background

1.1 Throughout 2024, the East Sussex Autism Partnership Board consulted with the East Sussex Autistic community and stakeholders to agree the priorities for an East Sussex All Age Autism Action Plan.

1.2 The plan is in response to the latest [National Autism Strategy](#) published in July 2021. This strategy extends the scope to children and young people for the first time (previous strategies were adult only). East Sussex has therefore developed an Autism Partnership Board membership and the action plan to align with the priorities of the national strategy for all ages.

1.3 This report seeks approval of the draft East Sussex All Age Autism Action plan which is found at Appendix 1.

2 Supporting information

2.1 The aim of the East Sussex All Age Autism Action Plan is to improve the lives of Autistic people, their families, carers, and wider support networks across East Sussex. This will be achieved through increasing autism awareness and improving education, employment, wellbeing and life opportunities for the Autistic community in East Sussex.

2.2 To inform the development of the Action Plan, during 2024 East Sussex County Council:

- Worked with Public Health officers to review local and national data to better understand the prevalence of autism in East Sussex.
- Carried out an online survey (April to June 2024) to gather the views of Autistic residents, parents and unpaid carers, and others with an interest on a range of topics. Over 320 responses were received.
- Held 3 focus groups (July to September 2024) with Young Healthwatch, and autistic people accessing day opportunities to better understand what works wells and what could be improved to support them in their day-to-day life.
- Held 4 stakeholder workshops (September to October 2024), attended by over 80 people, to discuss the learning from the feedback, along with national and local research. Through these workshops 26 actions were developed across 3 priority areas:
 - Improving the health and wellbeing of autistic people;
 - Improving autistic children and young people's access to education and supporting positive transitions into adulthood; and
 - Supporting autistic people into employment and sustaining their employment.

2.3 The plan has been co-produced through an Autism Action and Planning Group, primarily consisting of people with lived experience who are members of the East Sussex Autism Partnership Board (APB). They have worked with East Sussex County Council (ESCC) to develop the survey questions, plan the stakeholder workshops and develop the priorities and actions (using the learning from the consultation). The APB have also been updated at each meeting of progress and to agree key stages.

2.4 The plan and priorities have also been developed with ESCC colleagues in the Education Division and Employment and Skills Team, to ensure it is aligned with existing priorities such as those outlined in the East Sussex SEND Strategy, as well as NHS colleagues working in the Sussex Neurodevelopmental Pathway Programme. Prior to consideration of the Lead Member, the draft plan has already been endorsed by the East Sussex Autism Partnership Board.

2.5 If the Action Plan is approved, an accessible online version will be made available on the ESCC website alongside the document version as shown at Appendix 1. It is planned to launch the Action Plan during Autism Acceptance Week (2-8 April 2025) and a range of internal and external communications will be developed to support the launch.

2.6 Alongside the Action Plan, an Equalities Impact Assessment (Appendix 2) has been completed following consultation with various groups to obtain wider feedback, including:

- East Sussex Supported Employment Forum
- East Sussex Mental Health Community Transformation Group
- Disability Rights Reference Group

The responses from the consultation were used to inform the analysis carried out in the EqIA. The Lead Member must read and have regard to the EqIA when making the decision about this proposal.

3 Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 The approach taken to develop the plan recognises the importance and value of input from people with lived experience and wider public consultation to deliver a meaningful action plan which responds to local priorities.

3.2 The Lead Member is therefore recommended to approve the East Sussex All Age Autism Action plan, prior to it being launched in Autism Acceptance Week in early April 2025. Since the action plan covers both children and adults, the Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health considered and approved the action plan on 11 March 2025.

CAROLYN FAIR

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Local Members

All

Background Documents:

None