



## **REPORT TO ABERDEENSHIRE INTEGRATION JOINT BOARD 05 July 2023**

### **DRAFT ABERDEENSHIRE AUTISM STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS 2023-2028**

#### **1 Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Integration Joint Board (IJB):

- 1.2.1 Consider and comment on the Aberdeenshire Autism Strategy for Children, Young People and Adults 2023-2028
- 1.2.2 Consider and comment on the Aberdeenshire Autism Action Plan for Children, Young People and Adults 2023-2028
- 1.2.3 Approve the Aberdeenshire Autism Strategy for Children, Young People and Adults 2023-2028
- 1.2.4 Approve the Aberdeenshire Autism Action Plan for Children, Young People and Adults 2023-2028

#### **2 Directions**

- 2.1 No direction requires to be issued to Aberdeenshire Council or NHS Grampian as a result of this report.

#### **3 Risk**

- 3.1 IJB Risk 6/ID 2389 – IJB (Responsible Group) - Non-Clinical (Sub-group) Service/business alignment with current and future needs.

#### **4 Background**

- 4.1 At present, there is no legal obligation on Scottish Local Authorities to develop an Autism Strategy. However, the importance of having a strategy to support our autistic community in Aberdeenshire is acknowledged by both Aberdeenshire Health & Social Care Partnership and Aberdeenshire Council. The Aberdeenshire Autism Strategy and Action Plan for Children, Young People and Adults 2023-2028 aim to improve the lives of autistic individuals through our support services, community access and wider public knowledge and understanding.
- 4.2 Amongst many strategic drivers and key influencers, one of the main and current drivers is the [Learning/intellectual disability and autism: transformation plan<sup>1</sup>](#), which aims to also support autistic individuals across Scotland. This plan was

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<sup>1</sup> [Learning/Intellectual Disability and Autism Towards Transformation \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)



published jointly by Scottish Government and COSLA in March 2021, and its main purpose is to 'shape supports, services and attitudes to ensure that the human rights of autistic people and people with learning/intellectual disabilities are respected and protected and that they are empowered to live their lives, the same as everyone else'. In addition, key learning can be captured from the evaluation of the Scottish Autism Strategy 2011 which was undertaken in 2021.

- 4.3 The motivation behind developing an Autism Strategy is based on our ambition to improve the lives of autistic individuals through our support services and wider public knowledge and understanding.
- 4.4 The importance of having a strategy to support our autistic community in Aberdeenshire is acknowledged by both Aberdeenshire Health & Social Care Partnership and Aberdeenshire Council.
- 4.5 The Aberdeenshire Autism Strategy for Children, Young People and Adults 2023-2028 (SDP22-25\_Dec22\_02) is a joint Strategy developed by Aberdeenshire Council's Education and Children's Services (ECS) and Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership (AHSCP).
- 4.6 An Autism Strategy Planning Group was established in 2021 and has been co-chaired by the Interim Mental Health and Learning Disabilities Service Manager, AHSCP and a Quality Improvement Officer from within Education. Other members included autistic adults, parents, carers, representation from Autism Understanding Scotland, an individual who self-identifies as neurodivergent, a GP and other professionals.
- 4.7 A programme of **engagement** activities took place between April and September 2022 which aimed to understand the views of stakeholders in Aberdeenshire in relation to the content of the strategy being developed. The approach to engaging with a wide range of stakeholder included:
  - hosting **online-based discussion groups** which included autistic adults, parents, carers, family members, third sector and professionals from various backgrounds.
  - Promoting **online surveys**
  - **comment and provide feedback** on the key questions (see 3.6) via email.
  - School pupils being supported (via school staff members) to share their views by answering a selection of the key engagement questions.
  - **Working with a family (ies)** who have been supported by the Council's Asylum and Resettlement Team. This was supported by staff from the Council's English as an Additional Language Service.
  - reaching out to families whose children are home-educated through social media
  - creating a dedicated webpage (which hosted the online survey), email account and using social media as means of a 2-way communication.



- 4.8 Through the engagement process, stakeholders were asked to reflect on the following key areas in relation to support/services provided either by Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership or Aberdeenshire Council's Education & Children's Services.
1. What is currently working well?
  2. What is currently working but needs some improvements?
  3. What is currently not working well?
  4. What are the gaps and barriers?
  5. What needs to happen to improve planning, delivery of services and support for autistic children, autistic young people, autistic adults and older autistic adults in Aberdeenshire, and how?
- 4.9 The information gathered from the engagement period was analysed and the following **seven key themes** were identified and incorporated into the Autism Strategy and Action Plan:
1. **Whole Lifespan** – Meeting the needs of autistic people from birth to death by supporting them to access appropriate support and services from our organisations, third sector and from the wider community.
  2. **Diagnostic Pathways (Children, Young People, Adults and Older Adults)**: Supporting the delivery of a clear autistic assessment pathway and transitions process.
  3. **Training** - Supporting training, learning and development to improve knowledge and understanding for those who work in ECS and AHSCP who support autistic people.
  4. **Lifelong Learning** – Delivering inclusive support wherever learning takes place
  5. **Employment** – Enhancing employment opportunities and pathways to enhance the skills and experiences of autistic people.
  6. **Connecting**: Keeping autistic people and their families connected to information and their communities.
  7. **Community**: Building a community that is inclusive, accepting and knowledgeable.
- 4.10 The Draft Autism Strategy was launched for **Public Consultation** and feedback between February and April 2023. Activities included:
- Public Consultation **Drop-In Sessions** in Aboyne, Banff, Crimond, Ellon, Inverurie and Stonehaven
  - hosting **online-based consultation sessions**
  - hosting **autist led online and face to face sessions**
  - An **online-based survey** (easy read format and paper survey were also made available)
  - Information to parents via schools on how **children and young people** could comment and provide feedback
  - **comment and provide feedback** via email.



- using **dedicated webpage** (which hosted the online survey), **email account** and using **social media** as means of a 2-way communication.

4.11 Feedback and comments from the consultation phase were analysed and taken account of in the preparation of the final Draft Autism Strategy. These included:

- Autistic-led – further knowledge and learning should come from autistic people
- Transitioning across the whole lifespan – this needs to be addressed
- Extend collaborative working with the third sector and the autistic community
- More thoughts given towards collaborative and multi-agency working, such as Criminal Justice, Housing and Advocacy
- More support for teaching staff
- Other points to explore and learn more about are complex care, public awareness, rurality, bi-lingual autistic people, autistic carers, home-educated children and families and autistic women and girls.

## 5 Summary

5.1 The Autism Strategy is a five-year strategy jointly produced by the Health & Social Care Partnership and Education and Children's Services. The previous strategy [Aberdeenshire Council's 2014 Strategy for Autism<sup>2</sup>](#) pre-dated Health and Social Care Integration and had an educational focus.

5.2 This strategy supports a whole lifespan approach aiming to improve support and services for autistic people of all ages - children, young people, adults and older adults. The strategy has been developed in collaboration with autistic individuals, parents/ carers, third sector organisations and various professionals who support autistic individuals within Aberdeenshire.

5.3 Following on from the completion of the programme of engagement activities and identification of seven key themes, a Draft Autism Strategy report was then compiled. This was then taken to the following stages of governance for consultation:

Stage 1 - February 2023

Feedback and comments were sought from Strategic Planning Group, Education and Children Services Leadership Team and GIRFEC Strategic Group.

Stage 2- February-April 2023

Public Consultation - As part of the formal consultation process, feedback and comment on the draft strategy were sought via online surveys, face-to-face and

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<sup>2</sup> [Aberdeenshire Council's 2014 Strategy for Autism](#)



online public consultation sessions across Aberdeenshire in order to capture the views of all ages.

Feedback and comments were also sought from all Area Committees throughout the months of February and March 2023.

Stage 3- May-June 2023

Final approval sought from Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Integration Joint Board (IJB) and Aberdeenshire Council Education and Children's Services Committee.

- 5.4 Feedback and comments from the consultation and a feedback exercise/session were also used to further inform the final Draft Autism Strategy and Action Plan.
- 5.5 On 25th May 2023, the Draft Autism Strategy Report and Action Plan were put before Aberdeenshire Council's Education and Children's Services Committee, in which the Committee members approved both documents.
- 5.6 Further approval of the Autism Strategy and Action Plan is now being sought from Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership's Integration Joint Board (IJB).
- 5.7 The Chief Officer, along with the Chief Finance Officer and the Legal Monitoring Officers within Business Services of the Council have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments have been incorporated within the report.

## **6 Equalities, Staffing and Financial Implications**

- 6.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) has been carried out as part of the development of the proposals set out above. It is included as Appendix 6 and no impact has been identified.
- 6.2 There are no financial and staffing implications in the delivery of this Strategy.

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**Date:** 09.06.2023

**List of Appendices:**

Appendix 1: Aberdeenshire Autism Strategy for Children, Young People and Adults 2023-2028

Appendix 2 - Aberdeenshire Autism Action Plan for Children, Young People and Adults 2023-2028

Appendix 3: The Data

Appendix 4: Our Engagement Plan - summary of responses

Appendix 5: Our Consultation Plan - summary of Responses

Appendix 6: IIA Autism Strategy 21.02.2023

Appendix 7: Feedback and Responses from Area Committees