

Warrington Strategy for Autistic People

November 2024



WARRINGTON
Borough Council

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Warrington Voices

Welcome to Warrington's Strategy for Autistic People - our aim is to put the views, experiences and ambitions of autistic people, their families, friends and carers at the heart of our plans. We have listened to people's views and experiences and worked with them to create plans that seek to increase acceptance and to support people to lead the lives that they choose in the communities that they choose to live in. This strategy will continue to develop over time, and we will rise to the challenges raised and respond to the expectations and hopes that people have for their present and futures.

Our strategy begins here, with the views and aspirations of Warrington people. We will continue to include and check back with people and our partners and embed consultation, co-design and co-production in all that we do.

- When I left school, I was alone, and I found it hard to manage in a flat on my own. I couldn't cope. I just needed a bit more help.
- I was bullied at school and out and about because I am different. I hope it's different for children nowadays.
- There is great local support and information for families even before diagnosis through a local organisation, but we need more.
- I don't go to hospitals because they are like supermarkets, noisy and disorganised – they stress me out. They shouldn't be like that.
- I want a job where I can do well and be understood. Employers need to understand that difference isn't disability
- Things have improved for me in healthcare since I was a child, but they still need to get better
- My child was excluded from school. She needs strategies to keep her calm, but others need to understand them too. I am still waiting for a diagnosis
- Supporting the mental health of unpaid carers and families: "this is a massive issue"
- I found out that I was autistic as an adult and it was a relief, but then it was really hard to find any help. I love my support group!
- There needs to be a better understanding of neurodiversity in schools
- Growing up, it has felt normal not to be accepted. I want to feel normal being me
- Since getting the right help, I have been able to find a job that I enjoy, and I can ask questions when I need to

Introduction

Autism is a national priority, and in Warrington, we recognise that it is a local priority too. Our Strategy, sponsored by the Joint Warrington Autism Board, is a collaborative strategy and is not owned by any one organisation; it is owned by us all. Our Strategy has been coproduced by autistic people, unpaid carers and families, and professionals working with autistic people from across Warrington's system and, throughout the life of the Strategy, we will aim to involve others to highlight our joint ambition. Our Strategy will focus on ongoing improvement and will be constantly reviewed in an ever-changing environment.

Our ambition is to have communities and a whole system that ensures Warrington is an inclusive place to live and that autistic people can get the right support they need and when they need it. This Strategy and associated plans are for all autistic people, and those who support them, living in, working in and enjoying Warrington.

What is Autism

Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a lifelong difference in brain functioning that affects how people perceive, communicate, and interact with and experience the world around them and others. It is a neurodevelopmental difference (different brain wiring), a natural variation, and it is not a medical condition. Autism is also not a learning disability, although national figures suggest that approximately 4 in 10 autistic people do have a learning disability. Autism varies widely and is often referred to as a spectrum condition, because of the range of ways it can impact on people and the different level of support they may need across their lives. This is why, in Warrington, we are committed to seeing all people as individuals and taking a person centered approach in all that we do.

It is common for signs of autism to present themselves from a young age, so a recognition of neurodiversity is vital. In Warrington, we describe autism as a difference and not a deficit, and we seek to maximise opportunities for neurodivergent children and adults.

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is the natural variation in neurological functioning among individuals. There are many differences in cognitive and neurological abilities, such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia or dyspraxia, for example. These are not 'conditions' that require a cure, but aspects of individuals that create a diverse population. We believe that these differences should be accepted and valued in a place that promotes inclusivity and support for individuals with diverse neurological profiles. Embracing neurodiversity encourages a society that recognises the strengths and talents that accompany neurodiversity, promoting a more inclusive and equitable Warrington for all.

It's important to understand that the strengths and challenges associated with neurodiversity can vary widely, and not everyone will have the same experience. Accommodating all involves creating a more inclusive and accommodating society that values and supports neurodiverse individuals in their unique lives. Challenges can include social interaction issues, sensory sensitivities to noise, light, or touch and communication challenges which can lead to stigma and discrimination, but some benefits can include technical skills, enhanced memory, attention to detail, increased empathy, resilience, different ways of thinking for problem-solving and approaching challenges, which can lead to innovative solutions and creative insights, and increased empathy.

Why have a Strategy for Autistic People?

The National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People and Adults, 2021 places a statutory duty on local authorities, working in partnership with the NHS, the voluntary sector, and autistic people to implement actions in relation to the provision of services for autistic people.

The Autism Act (2009) highlights the need for the development and regular review of any strategy to make provision to meet the needs of autistic people, their families, carers and the professionals that support them. In Warrington, people have told us they have and do experience barriers when meeting their needs and fulfilling their goals and aspirations. Our Strategy aims to clearly state the priorities and goals, along with the actions that our town will take to bring about better understanding and acceptance, and improved lives in Warrington, and helping to address the barriers that people face.

Despite autism being a national priority, autistic people are disproportionately affected in various areas. Compared to non-autistic people, common inequalities experienced by autistic people include reduced access to public services and spaces, gaps in employment opportunities, poorer health outcomes, increased

likelihood to report a lower quality of life, and bullying and social isolation, which also impacts health. Preventing further widening of these gaps is vital.

Our Strategy for Autistic People spans 4 years from 2024 – 2028 but will be open to review and change. The strategy actions will be embedded in all our organisations, and in the wider community, to ensure sustainability, and ability to develop as needs change. We will achieve this through the creation of co-productive plans and work streams, that involve autistic people and people from across Warrington networks.

Our Vision for Warrington

For all autistic people in Warrington, and their families and carers to feel included in communities and enabled to live their best and healthiest lives through awareness, recognition, and support.

Development of the Strategy

Phase 1: Time was taken to understand life stories that have led to existing challenges and to identify potential opportunities for improvement through:

- Stakeholder engagement and conversations with real people who have experienced real challenges and successes.
- Review of strategic documents, and the current level of provision and support
- Understanding the local data and population health need

Phase 2: Co-production of a local vision and key priorities and action areas.

- Strategy development
- Developed a set of 'I' Statements that support and are upheld by our actions and priorities.
- Testing with autistic people, their families, and those who support them to ensure the strategy and focus reflected identified needs, was fit for purpose and adequately ambitious.

Phase 3: Creation of a set of workstreams that fit with our priorities.

- Developing workstreams to include all appropriate stakeholders from communities, public and voluntary sector and from the different groups in Warrington.
- Plans to match our priorities will continue to develop and grow through the workstreams reporting back through the Governance structures in place.
- Create ongoing video testimony of our strengths and challenges to keep the strategy current.
- Full review of the strategy and its achievements and challenges after three years.

Engagement: Now and ongoing

In Warrington, we spoke to a wide range of stakeholders, gaining feedback from people with lived experience including autistic people and their families, unpaid carers, voluntary sector organisations and professionals supporting autistic people.

During this engagement, we looked at topics such as diagnosis, health, family/carer support, social experience, local services, education, work, training and housing. It has shaped our understanding of the issues autistic people and their families face, and has helped, and will continue to help us to identify needs and to better understand where change is required. The insights that we have gained have helped us to shape the 'Strategy for Autistic People in Warrington' and the implementation plans that support it will aim to join up all relevant partners for each priority, to work collaboratively, breaking down barriers, tackling inequalities, and implementing the changes needed to achieve better outcomes.

Future Engagement

- Throughout the life of this Strategy and its associated workstreams, we will utilise social media platforms to engage with autistic people for feedback and input continuously.
- We will host, through the leadership of the *Joint Autism Board*, collaborative workshops that bring together stakeholders to review the Strategy as it develops over time.
- Return to the autistic people who helped to develop our priorities again and again by establishing advisory groups to include autistic people, their families, and carers providing ongoing feedback and input throughout the life of the Strategy and throughout the workstreams (led by the Joint Autism Board).
- We will develop further through ongoing updates and feedback from organisations and businesses that can or do support autistic people.
- Warrington Ambassadors that support change and growth of acceptance and understanding across the town will play a major role in achieving our aims.

Background: National and local context

There are an estimated 700,000 autistic people in the UK, that's over 1 in 100 and if you include their families, autism is a part of daily life for 2.8 million people. It is more commonly diagnosed in boys more than in girls and it is often reported that around four boys are diagnosed for every one girl. However, over recent years, and due to improved diagnostic criteria, more girls, as well as younger and older women are being diagnosed, so over the life of this Strategy, these figures are likely to change. Diagnosis rates and waiting lists remain a challenge and this is a key priority for national and local government alike.

According to the World Health Organisation, approximately 50% of people with a learning disability are affected by autism, but not all autistic people have a learning disability, which is why it is important for society to focus on people, acceptance and awareness and not just diagnosis.

Across the country, there has been a visible effort to increase initiatives in public spaces, including museums, theatres, and airports, aimed at creating more accessible and inclusive environments for autistic people, but further work is needed.

Autistic people have poorer health outcomes, and on average die 16 years younger than the general population (*Autistica, 2019*).

21.7% of autistic adults in the UK are in a form of paid employment (*Beyond Autism, 2021*)

It is estimated that 25% of people in prison have an attention deficit/ hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and around one in 10 (9%) have an autism spectrum disorder (*Prison Reform Trust, 2022*)

National Autistic Society School Report – 2021

- 72% of autistic children believe that they have been judged or misunderstood
- 40% of autistic children have been bullied in school
- 1 in 5 autistic children have been excluded from school

Warrington Facts

Autistic People in Warrington account for **6.3%** of people who use their services. They account for just under **15%** of the gross spend.

Warrington Borough Council individually supports 205 autistic people. 136 of those people have a learning disability.

Local organisations who specifically support autistic people receive little or no funding, but some public buildings have been made available.

By 2025, an additional 120 autistic people are predicted to be living in Warrington. However, with better diagnostic tools, this figure could rise significantly.

‘I’ Matter – Warrington Life Stories

Rory

Hi I’m Rory and I’m 28 and live and work in Warrington. I was educated at my local primary school, then went onto Green Lane school followed by Warrington Collegiate to do Vocational Studies and a supported internship programme.

During my internship, I started at a local café but unfortunately, although I made good friends with the staff I worked with the place didn’t give me the progression I wanted as a Barista and front of house. I left that placement and moved to a different café with support from Neil at Warrington Borough Council. Working with Neil and the team I got the progression and skills I wanted such as learning how to work as a Barista, serving customers and food prep where I gained a City and Guilds qualification while I worked there.

After completing my studies on the Internship, I managed to get a job at Debenhams café in the Golden Square in town centre. I really enjoyed my time working there as I felt confident that I could do the job as a Barista. I made lots of good friends throughout the store and felt part of the team as we had lots of work parties and social nights out. Unfortunately, during the Covid pandemic Debenhams went into administration and I was made redundant. This made me feel very low and sad and the worst part was no longer working with the team and being able to say goodbye.

Sometimes, with my Autism, I feel sad and I felt rejected when the store closed, but I also feel that Autism is my superpower as I feel unique, and I have a good memory for remembering things and I’m always on time and prepared for anything like appointments, interviews and meetings and the work at conferences I do with MacIntyre.

After feeling very low, I decided to volunteer on the MacIntyre Great Communities foodbank to give something back to the community. I then also decided to set up a cycling social group with MacIntyre, as I started cycling during the pandemic to get active and out of the house. The group is still going today.

Two years ago, I applied for a job at another café in Warrington and was successful and still work there now. I feel proud about getting another job although I did feel out of sync at the start as I'd been out of employment for a while. I enjoy working and earning my own money and I use the bus to get there independently.

Recently, I delivered a talk to the year 10 and 11 students at my old school, Green Lane, to talk about my journey into employment and the highs and lows I have been through which felt amazing. I am now also working as a reporter for Warrington for the MacIntyre national magazine sharing stories, like my day at Green Lane and a recent visit to watch Coldplay with 60,000 other people!

Anonymous

Growing up, I always knew I was different. I dodged school as I found the learning environment difficult and friendships difficult to maintain, with peers and adults alike. I would veer more towards adult relationships as they were easier.

As an adult in my 40's I confided in my manager that I struggled with some aspects of learning. I was encouraged to have an assessment for dyslexia. The result of the assessment was that I had dyspraxia, and it was most likely that I had combined adhd and autism. I approached my GP and was put forward for assessment for autism. After a wait of around 12 months, I had the assessment, and the outcome was that I am autistic.

I don't 'have' autism, it is not an add on - it is who I am. Since being given the diagnosis, I have had no follow up from any medical professional to offer support. This has never been acknowledged by my GP. I have disclosed that I am autistic in my workplace, and I have been able to make some positive changes in my place of work. I have been able to use my 'expert by experience' knowledge to educate others. I do not have a learning need. I have a different way of thinking only and I don't believe that it should be presumed that I have a learning need just because I am autistic. I believe that being autistic is a great strength, however, my experience is my experience.

'I' Matter – Statements

We aim to achieve our Warrington goals through people, communities and integrated systems, not just in Health and Social Care, but through housing, business and leisure and taking a whole community and system approach.

To develop our priorities, we need to start with people, so our 'I Statements' are the basis for all our priorities. Our priorities have then been developed into plans so that we are connected to autistic people and communities in all our words and actions.

Individual Outcomes – "I know what I need, and I am as independent as I can be"

- My community is my home too, and I am welcome in all parts of it and accepted for who I am.
- I have access to support early, including diagnosis
- My voice is listened to, and it makes a difference
- I feel in control and have choice about my support, and I am involved in all the decisions about my life

- I have people around me who I like – family / friends and they have help to support me
- I am supported to develop relationships and to find a partner if I want one
- I have access to employment opportunities and activities that will benefit me
- I have access to education and learning and support for my sensory needs

Community Outcomes that Build Communities for Everybody – “I can access the support that I need to maintain my life as I like it”

- I know what community support is available and I have ways to access it
- I feel safe, welcome, included and valued in my community and in my neighbouring communities
- I am able to access housing appropriate to my needs, but I am supported to stay where I am if I want to
- I get support to stay healthy and active with regular health checks
- I know how to access physical and mental health services when I need them, and they are offered to me when necessary
- I am able to access good community support that prevents me from becoming isolated and lonely
- I am supported to do the things that interest me

Integrated System Outcomes that Aim to Support People – “I can get the right support, in the right place at the right time and I can take the lead”

- I tell my story once to somebody who accepts and understands me, and there is a single record of my support
- I have access to the right support as I travel through my life, and I get older in the same way as everybody else
- I am able to communicate my needs in an emergency
- I have support which is coordinated, cooperative and works well together
- I know who to contact to change things
- I have support that is flexible and personalized
- I am given time and space to negotiate the pathway for my care and support, and I am not held back by a rigid system that does not understand me

Our Priorities

Acceptance & Awareness

- Acceptance of autistic people in local places, reducing barriers. Improved awareness of autism throughout communities.
- Creating a society and local environment that supports and empowers people through accessible and welcoming services, businesses and facilities.

A Good Start

- Ongoing improved understanding and awareness of autism and neurodiversity within the education system
- Aligned plans, including the SEND strategy

Preparing for Adulthood

- Improved pathways for autistic people exiting secondary education and children's services.

- Schools, staff and students understand and are aware of autism and respect the need for all autistic people to have equal access to future life chances.

Employment, Training and the best day possible

- Through understanding, awareness and acceptance, improved access to training and employment for people with who are autistic.
- People maximise their potential and confidence by accessing training, employment and other opportunities.
- People have the tools and opportunities to support an active life.

Healthy, Active Lives and Good Healthcare

- Reduced inequalities for access to health care and healthy lives
- Improved support for people through inpatient care and recognition of difference in health and care environments

Housing and Independent Lives

- The right support in the community, at the right time
- Housing Information and Advice that is accessible to people who are autistic.
- An environment that respects and integrates, rather than segregates - improving lives for autistic people

Staying Safe

- Greater awareness of the impact of autism on risk and need for autistic people involved with the Criminal Justice System.
- Improved risk management to support healthy relationships.

Family and Carer Support

- Autistic people, and their families and carers are given choices and are enabled to live healthy, full and active lives.
- Families and carers are supported and listened to throughout their communities

Priority 1 – Acceptance & Awareness - What does good look like?

An inclusive and supportive Warrington for autistic people involves several key things. It requires the establishment of environments throughout the town that embrace diversity and are welcoming and accommodating for all. These environments should prioritise the senses, perhaps offering areas with minimal noise and subdued lighting to prevent sensory overload.

Improved levels of awareness and knowledge about autism and its characteristics are essential, so education plays a crucial role in helping us to understand and accept autistic people within the wider community.

Schools and colleges must accommodate diverse learning styles, providing visual aids and hands-on activities appropriate to age, and cater to the needs of autistic and neurodiverse children and adults alike. Structured activities, inclusive classes, and accessible sports venues are also vital for people to develop social skills in a safe and supportive setting, and these opportunities should be readily available and accessible to all.

Clear policies and communication are necessary to promote inclusivity and accessibility for everybody and this may relate to public spaces and buildings, housing, leisure and transport

Encouragement for community engagement is also essential, improving social skills through community events where people can interact and connect with one another.

Finally, an inclusive Warrington will include support groups for autistic and neurodiverse people, as well as for parents and unpaid carers, providing valuable spaces for sharing experiences and learning from one another, further strengthening the support network for the autistic community in our town.

Where would autistic people in Warrington like to see change?

Through our engagement with autistic people, families, carers, services and professionals, key areas for improvement were highlighted:

Social Lives

- There is little awareness of what autism is, and of the environmental/sensory impact of community activity on autistic people.
- Bullying and exclusion from social events, pubs, clubs etc. is a common and significant problem. Autistic adults in Warrington spoke of the impact and of the isolation that this brings when not dealt with properly and speedily.
- There is one meeting place for autistic people in the area. It helps to meet others with a similar lived experience, so more opportunity and available space would really help.
- Social and sports clubs are not welcoming places for autistic people – they should be places for enjoyment and healthy lifestyles for all

Culture, Training and Acceptance

- Autistic people in Warrington are clear. They do not want to be defined by a condition, but it is important that people accept and understand who they are.
- Autism awareness raising sessions do happen, but they are limited, are usually online, and are not often provided by autistic people.
- People felt that more training/awareness raising/refresher courses are essential, and it cannot be a one off. “It should be a regular thing, as things move on, and people forget.” This is particularly important for healthcare and education professionals, shops and businesses, employers, and other professions.

Priority 1 – Acceptance & Awareness -What does good look like?

We Will:

- Create joint workstreams to achieve our Strategy. They will have appropriate representation (autistic adults with lived experience, appropriate professionals, and a range of services) so that strategic outcomes are representative of the autistic community in Warrington.
- Develop opportunities for more regular and informal engagement (autism forums) to create an avenue for real feedback and ideas, and so that people feel that they are listened to.
- Include an ‘autism strand’ when we review pathways of care, e.g. support, health, and education, to be sure that they recognise the specific needs of autistic people.

- Develop connectivity pathways that are open to adults over 25 who may or may not have a learning disability.
- Work in Partnership with Wigan partners to mirror best practice and develop Warrington Autism Friends. This will improve public understanding of autism and inclusion across Warrington by creating ambassadors within communities and reducing misconceptions.
- Devise training plans, including the *Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training*, where appropriate, across Health and Social Care. This will ensure that services, businesses, and organisations, including the private sector, are more autism inclusive within Warrington.
- Widen understanding through training and activity of sensory skimming and seeking.
- Develop, improve and evidence public understanding and acceptance, working with autistic people, their families and the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE)
- Raise awareness of existing pre and post diagnostic support provision, making it clear and easy to find.
- Review our use of spaces and buildings to identify potential opportunities for *ad hoc* or arranged social or structured gatherings.
- Address language and cultural barriers across statutory agencies, in the first instance, and then across Warrington.
- Recognise that many people don't need specialist services, but require universal services, schools, and communities to think differently and openly about how they support and welcome everybody. We will make it our business to bring this about.

Workstream 1 - What can we do? Three key things.

A society that supports and empowers autistic people to live fulfilling lives through culture change and acceptance – reducing barriers

Awareness: Autism awareness sessions: health and social care, education professionals, businesses & employers. Joint work to develop Warrington Autism Friends.

Campaign: Campaign against bullying and exclusion from social events, sports clubs, and events.

Environment: Better awareness of what autism is and the environmental/sensory impact on autistic people. Making change happen. People who make it their business to make things better. Places for people to meet.

We can make this happen across the board. It's everybody's business. This is about a grass roots campaign. We will take responsibility as groups and as individuals

Priority 2 – A Good Start - What does good look like?

Support for autistic children involves an approach that spans from timely diagnosis to long-term individual and strategic planning. Ongoing understanding of local data and national trends must inform the development of future provision.

Early intervention should involve multi-disciplinary teams that may include speech and occupational therapists and behaviour support experts. This provides an understanding of each child's needs, enabling appropriate short, medium, and long-term plans that emphasise individual strengths and interests, whilst addressing areas of challenge. Autistic children are known to thrive in structured and predictable environments where there are visual

supports and routines to guide their daily activities. A good environment will also accommodate sensory sensitivities with breaks and tools like weighted blankets and calming spaces, as needed.

Effective communication plans, including pictures,

symbols, and sign language, should be available for expressive and receptive communication, with play-based learning activities to improve engagement and social skill development. Play can also offer opportunities for better integration, processing and self-regulation.

Meaningful social interactions and peer connections should be encouraged, with explicit teaching of social skills, with close collaboration with families as an essential component, and with creating robust support systems that involve parents and carers in goal-setting and continuous learning at home.

Positive reinforcement strategies motivate and build self-confidence, with flexibility and adaptability in teaching approaches to suit each child's unique learning style and preferences. This individualised knowledge should continue throughout the child's educational and life journey.

Finally, professional development and training opportunities are vital for teachers, support professionals, and wider staff. This learning helps to enhance the understanding of autism and neurodiversity, improving the quality of services offered, ultimately benefitting all children, young people and adults and their communities.

Where would autistic people and their families and carers in Warrington like to see change?

Through our engagement with autistic people, family, carers and supporting services and professionals, key observations and areas for improvement were highlighted:

Social, Community and Services

- Statutory services that support children “don’t always get it and need to understand that not all autistic children have a learning disability”, “my child has been labelled as naughty” and there “needs to be consistency” whether dealing with teachers, social workers, GPs, and/or the police.
- Communities don’t always understand autistic children and there is a lack of understanding in leisure and everyday places by staff and other families.
- Sufficient Mental health support for autistic children and young people is key for a healthy and positive childhood to adulthood journey, and it is inconsistent.
- Although there is encouragement and some excellent resources such as ADDvanced Solutions; they support people with or without a diagnosis, there is “very little” financial support for services and/or organisations supporting families and carers, and direct financial support for disabled autistic people is limited.
- Bullying and exclusion from social events has been reported as a significant problem for autistic children and adults. Autistic adults in Warrington spoke of the significant impact of bullying during childhood on later life; “we would like to see real change for children growing up in Warrington now”.
- There are some good examples of inclusion, e.g. *Warrington Wolves*, but awareness and acceptance training for staff and patrons of social and sports clubs would be welcomed so that they are fit for purpose, and are open to all children.

Schools and Education

- Early diagnosis doesn’t always result in opportunities or planning in school. People can sometimes feel that they have nowhere to go following the diagnosis of a neurodiverse child.

- There is a responsive Autism in Schools Programme in place.
- Behaviour within schools is 'often' misunderstood resulting in exclusions and other inappropriate disciplinary action, such as isolation.
- Understanding of autism is still low, and training is needed for teachers, but there is a particular need for awareness and acceptance training for other children.
- Some schools support autistic children well, but this is not consistent across schools.
- Insufficient support and signposting during later school years or on completion of school, so young autistic people are not prepared to enter adult life or to find employment.
- Support for autistic children and young people needs to be individualised to ensure better educational outcomes throughout their time at school.
- Passing on of individual information, such as likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, communication etc. and data collection from schools needs to be meaningful and used to improve lives and the school experience overall.

Priority 2 – A Good Start - What will we do?

We Will:

- Include Autism in all our action planning in relation to the 2023 SEND inspection
- Introduce and implement the coproduced Warrington ASD Toolkit within all Warrington schools, as highlighted in the Warrington Autism in Schools Programme.
- Acknowledge that autistic children are individuals and should not be defined by a condition by ensuring that every autistic child has a person centred Warrington 'School Passport'
- Support autistic children and young people to ensure better outcomes throughout their education; more schools to make reasonable adjustments, with those improvements being monitored.
- Ensure data collection and audit of the diagnosis pathway takes place consistently, is recorded and informs commissioning in both children and adult services.
- Ensure that information about local support and activities is shared with children, families/carers as a matter of course.
- Support all professionals to ensure that families know about the Warrington 'Local Offer' and parent carer needs assessments.
- Review the online offer of support for autistic children by reviewing the language of the Warrington Local Offer for a neurodiverse audience.
- Continue discussions with Mersey Care CAMHS and Bridgewater to begin the development of a bridging offer between CAMHS and Community Paediatrics to embed a mental health support offer to Children and Young People.
- At a Warrington place level, and working closely with local partners, support the development of a model of neuro-developmental assessment and diagnoses to understand how we can ensure timely access to high quality care and outcomes.
- Build on our established ND pathway, growing our skills and capacity to be able to effectively screen referrals through the Early Help Front Door, reduce wait times for assessment and diagnoses and

develop our model to support the emotional and mental health needs for children and young people with neuro-diversity.

- Continue the project for LD keyworkers to support those with comorbid Autism.
- Horizon scan and consider mirroring the activities of our neighbours, whilst reviewing how we utilise our excellent local voluntary sector organisations.
- Commit to continue to address bullying towards autistic children in all educational establishments by ensuring that anti bullying policies are zero tolerance and reviewed and co-produced.
- Recognise that once is not enough, that refresher courses are essential, and training is often much more effective when delivered by experts by experience, whether they be young people or adults.
- Improve transitions planning for all (education/social care/health) between children and adult services – and we will ensure that Young People, families and carers are provided with robust information to support a positive future.

Workstream 2 - A Good Start: What can we do? Three key things.

A good understanding across schools, services and communities, awareness and respect for all children and young autistic people with equal access to education and life chances.

Connectivity: Better information, advice and support for children and families following diagnosis.

Recognition and awareness: Improved physical school environments offering safety and comfort for all pupils.

A better-informed workforce: Put in place training, resources and information that will improve the knowledge and skills of our workforce.

Collaborative education and children's social care. There are links to the [SEND plan](#) and some of this work is already beginning

Priority 3 – Preparing for Adulthood - What does good look like?

Early diagnosis and intervention play a crucial role in improving the lives of young autistic people. However, the process of screening and diagnosis must be accompanied by appropriate interventions aimed at supporting development into adulthood. Key to this support are tailored pathways and taking a person-centred approach, focusing on unique strengths, interests, needs, goals, and preferences.

Life skills training, including essential elements like communication, social skills, self-advocacy, and self-care, can significantly contribute to a successful life, as can the use of suitable technology to facilitate effective communication and learning. Providing support for young people to gain the work experience necessary to secure employment is essential; this is likely to include job coaching, volunteering opportunities, internships, and other appropriate work-based learning opportunities. This should work alongside the promotion of and a positive attitude towards further education (16+) among young autistic people.

A good society ensures good mental health support during the transition to adulthood and as part of this, it is vital to help young people to establish social connections, attain an independent home, and to have a sense of belonging. Lastly, growing self-advocacy skills in autistic young people empowers them to express their needs, and to make informed decisions. It also encourages independence, building on their strengths and self-sufficiency as they navigate, confidently, the transition to adulthood.

Where would autistic people in Warrington like to see change?

Through our engagement with autistic people, family, carers and supporting services and professionals, key areas for improvement were highlighted:

- Linked up support can be better across services for a smoother transition to adult services for young people.
- Better planning for adulthood, including social care after turning 18 and when finishing school/college (if later) for autistic people who do not have a learning disability.
- Diagnosis is becoming more common, but there is little follow up support or options.
- Mental health support for autistic young people as they transition to adulthood is limited and this can result in poor decision-making pathways.
- Support for young autistic people is needed to ensure better educational outcomes in secondary school, promoting hobbies and interests, as these can be a source of joy and provide potential career paths.
- Information sharing across departments and organisations to increase appropriate use of local support and activities, so that people can access them independently after leaving school.
- Increased support to get ahead after completing school is needed; more internships, apprenticeships, volunteering opportunities and meaningful work experience for young people would enhance prospects.
- Support to reduce the social isolation of young autistic people with a learning disability can improve. There are some good support and friendship groups, but there needs to be more. This is particularly difficult for those people living independently and transitioning from family life to independence; it can have a big impact on adult life.
- Support networks are important: family, friends, and mentors who can provide guidance and encouragement.
- Financial literacy skills and budgeting and money management need to be part of the transition journey. Some people reported getting into financial difficulties soon after leaving school and/or home and didn't know where to go for help.

Priority 3 – Preparing for Adulthood -What will we do?

We Will:

- Work across organisational and cultural boundaries to support smooth and seamless transitions to adult services for all young people through individual planning meetings.
- Develop thinking and a plan to improve connectivity with both children's and adults' Mental Health services.
- Support the development of preventative pathways that support wellbeing and improve outcomes for children and young people as they move into adulthood.
- Refer to the coproduced Warrington Autism in Schools Toolkit and update and include the individual's "My School Passport" to make a document that supports the strengths and choices of every individual into adulthood, sharing it widely within appropriate networks.
- Ensure that health and school passports are used widely and advertised and welcomed across Warrington, particularly in educational, health and social care settings.

- Increase support and connectivity from the age of 16. For example, working strategically, across disciplines creating more choice, employment opportunities, work experience etc.
- Support for young autistic people moving into adulthood through appropriate volunteering opportunities that can offer new life skills and opportunities for future employment. Provide effective planning from 14+ for adulthood after turning 18. This will include social care, where appropriate, for those without a learning disability leaving mainstream school/college. Provide more accurate information for young people and family members through Warrington's Local Offer and MyLifeWarrington.
- Encourage peer mentoring or pairing with older autistic individuals who can provide guidance and support.
- Research the possibility of social peer groups for young adults with shared interests and/or neurodiversity

Workstream 3 - What can we do? Three key things.

A good understanding across services and communities, awareness and respect for all young autistic people with equal access to life chances as they move from childhood to adulthood

Connectivity: A plan to improve the insufficient support and signposting after completing school or to enter employment or other appropriate activities.

Diagnosis and recognition: There is improved diagnosis in Warrington (could still be better). Better recognition and understanding with reduced exclusions, reduced bullying and better prospects for young autistic people.

Person centred planning: Better person-centred planning for young autistic people, with or without different or additional needs.

Resources are scarce how can we better use what we have?

Priority 4 – Employment, training and the best day possible -What does good look like?

In a 'good' society, there are clear and positive opportunities for autistic people to access work, job coaching, work experience and volunteering opportunities through the design of pathways and sector support. Across the job market, it is important to take a person-centred approach, offering individual support, and providing training and mentorship to empower people to build the necessary skills and confidence to succeed in their job roles and lives.

It is necessary for employers to be educated about the unique strengths and challenges of autistic people, so that they can promote awareness, acceptance and sensitivity among their employees, bringing about a better understanding of neurodiversity. Open and welcoming workplaces encourage feedback and suggestions from autistic employees, and implement change, creating a level playing field for all. They also provide model job descriptions and application processes that avoid discouraging language, offering recruitment processes that support with extended deadlines, alternative communication methods, and flexible interview formats. Good employers can offer transitional support, especially during the initial training phases.

Job centres, businesses and organisations collaborate in a 'good' community, identifying autistic job seekers and learning about the unique challenges they face in the job market, whilst recognising the benefits of their expertise. The diversity of the workforce is valued and all job seekers, including those who are autistic or neurodiverse, feel valued and supported.

In addition to work-related opportunities, it is key to offer non-work-related day opportunities tailored to support autistic people, particularly for those with learning disabilities, taking a non-traditional approach. Expanding the availability of training, activities, and non-work-related day opportunities, all with a focus on tailoring to individual needs, will support pathways to better life outcomes. When there are buildings-based day opportunities, they must be fit for purpose, flexible, welcoming, non-institutional and supportive of autistic people, regardless of their abilities.

A 'good society is committed to creating an environment that embraces diversity, promotes inclusion, and offers comprehensive support for autistic and neurodiverse people throughout their professional and personal journeys.

Where would autistic people in Warrington like to see change?

Many of the autistic people that we spoke to in Warrington who don't work, want to work, are able to and would value support and awareness of pathways and available opportunities for employment. For those that are not involved in the job market, they are keen to be active and involved as much as possible in their local community.

Through our engagement with autistic people, family, carers and supporting services and professionals, key areas for improvement are:

Training, Employment and Benefits

- Understanding, acceptance, and guidelines for employers around autism, including reasonable adjustments and support for autistic people to enter the workforce.
- Bullying in the workplace has been reported as part of the lived experience for a significant number of autistic people in Warrington and as such, must be tackled.
- Improved support and employment assistance for autistic people over the age of 25.
- A plan to specifically support young autistic people into the workplace is required. This should be coproduced with people with lived experience and professionals involved in the job market.
- There are very few clear pathways through school, and from school or further and higher education, into vocational training and work opportunities.
- Mentorship programmes could benefit people to find the right fit for them and support employers to find the best people for the job.
- Support is needed for people who receive a late diagnosis and are already in employment.
- Increased understanding of benefits system barriers and support to overcome them.
- Support for autistic people to get into employment and support during that employment is needed; reasonable adjustments for autistic employees must be improved and recognised.
- Increased employment opportunities with partners and local employers will help to make the job market more vibrant for autistic people.
- Organisational members of the Joint Autism Board should seek recognition and promote themselves as inclusive employers, leading by example, making it easier when approaching commercial/ industry partners.
- Equal access to the job market through the job centre and other mainstream agencies is needed.

Day Opportunities

- There are some excellent opportunities for autistic people who have a learning disability, such as the McIntyre Friendship Group and the Choir. However, more is needed.
- There are no day opportunities for autistic people who do not work and this has increased social isolation and reduced chances of gaining employment or accessing other opportunities.
- Access to existing day opportunities can be limited as services do not take autism into account when designing and/or reviewing them.

Priority 4 – Employment, training and the best day possible - What will we do?

We Will:

- Develop and implement an age-appropriate tiered model for day support that ranges from specialist to community activities and short-term enablement.
- Complete a review and deliver recommendations to remodel day opportunities for older people in Warrington including those with more complex support needs (e.g. dementia and autism). Ensure that all updated information and services are available online across online resources such as MyLifeWarrington.
- Improved training for Jobcentre Plus staff to understand the communication needs of autistic people with Oliver McGowan Training being expanded across disciplines.
- Create sensory-friendly job seeker environments with appropriate lighting, noise control, and comfortable waiting areas to reduce sensory overload, with flexible appointment scheduling to accommodate individual routines and preferences.
- Use our knowledge and expertise to offer advice to employers to adapt working environments to welcome all.
- Deliver pathways to support young people through transition to adulthood by ensuring that professional reports and interventions accompany adults into employment where relevant.
- Research internships, apprenticeships, volunteering opportunities and meaningful work experience for young people which enhance prospects for autistic people, as part of the Employment/Training and PFA Workstreams.
- Develop strategies to assist autistic people to develop their long-term career plans and achievable goals through school, job centre plus and local partners.
- Devise training plans to ensure that services, businesses, and organisations, including the private sector, are more autism inclusive within Warrington.
- Develop and implement an age-appropriate tiered model for day support that ranges from specialist to community activities and short-term enablement.
- Complete a review and deliver recommendations to remodel day opportunities for older people in Warrington including those with more complex support needs (e.g. dementia and autism). Ensure that all updated information and services are available online across online resources such as MyLifeWarrington.
- Improved training for Jobcentre Plus staff to understand the communication needs of autistic people with Oliver McGowan Training being expanded across disciplines.

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- Use our knowledge and expertise to offer advice to employers to adapt working environments to welcome all.
- Deliver pathways to support young people through transition to adulthood by ensuring that professional reports and interventions accompany adults into employment where relevant.
- Research internships, apprenticeships, volunteering opportunities and meaningful work experience for young people which enhance prospects for autistic people, as part of the Employment/Training and PFA Workstreams.
- Develop strategies to assist autistic people to develop their long-term career plans and achievable goals through school, job centre plus and local partners.
- Devise training plans to ensure that services, businesses, and organisations, including the private sector, are more autism inclusive within Warrington.
- Improve understanding of autism and inclusion across Warrington by developing workplace ambassadors, particularly through our workstreams, reducing misconceptions.
- Ensure the SEND Employment Forum is valued and fit for purpose: all appropriate stakeholders are regular attendees, the forum has autonomy, is recognised, and results in more paid employment and/or meaningful occupation with better outcomes for autistic people.
- Work across partners, particularly with Warrington Job Centre Plus (JCP) to bring local colleges on board and to support careers fairs so that they are open to autistic people.
- Support employer events aimed at particular jobseekers, and hold 'quiet time' job fairs.
- Address employment issues by improving understanding and guidelines for employers, including reasonable adjustments.
- Investigate the Wigan 'Health Model Office' jobcentre that tests out ideas and initiatives to make sure that customers with health conditions and disabilities are supported appropriately. We will look to mirror best practice in this area.
- Establish partnerships with employers to create a more inclusive and accepting work culture for neurodiverse employees, and ultimately, to develop potential mentoring relationships and to increase opportunities.
- Consider opportunities for the facilitation of networking events or workshops to connect autistic individuals with employers and professionals from various industries.
- Create an ideas forum, involving JCP, to include local support groups such as Speak Up, Creating Adventures, MacIntyre and WANDS, where suggestions that may improve job seeking opportunities for people are raised and taken forward e.g. reverse jobs fairs.

Workstream 4 - What can we do? Three key things

Understanding across employment and day opportunities so that autistic people can become and remain integrated as part of society, gaining recognition and confidence.

Connectivity: A plan to improve insufficient job coaching, work experience, volunteering and training through organisational processes and sector support.

Better opportunities: Partners and local employers work together to increase employment opportunities and job support for all autistic adults of working age. Better reasonable adjustments both during recruitment and in employment.

Leading by example: Autism Board plan for members to seek and promote their recognition as employers of people with disabilities, leading by example when recruiting and campaigning.

This is about hearts and minds, just as much as it is about resource.

Priority 5 - Healthy, Active Lives and Good Healthcare - What good looks like?

To improve health outcomes for people, it is vital to recognise and reduce the health inequalities that autistic people face. This can partly be achieved through the close collaboration of commissioners and services to develop approaches and pathways across the entire health system. Care and treatment must be safe, timely, and reasonably adjusted, and delivered by staff who are well-versed in understanding the unique needs of autistic people. Pathways can be developed to ensure that people have a voice and choice in their care and treatment decisions.

Good health settings must promote wellbeing, by delivering care and treatment in appropriate facilities. This should include an emphasis on creating sensory-friendly environments within primary health settings and hospitals, where individuals can feel at ease and free from sensory overload triggers, such as loud noises, bright lights, and strong smells.

For people to feel safe and comfortable, communication aids and flexible appointment scheduling, the avoidance of busy times, allowance for extra time during appointments, and the inclusion of communication plans and coping strategies should be readily available. Health and primary care leaders can promote a culture of support, understanding, and provision of appropriate care, by including the use of plain language and the avoidance of medical jargon. Robust advocacy and support networks, both at an individual and group level can help to ensure that voices are heard, and needs are met.

Alignment with the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, as well as other relevant policy across social care, housing, and communities, both at the local and regional levels, is vital to create an environment that supports the wellbeing of all and the reduction of reliance of public services. This means collaboration between healthcare providers and other professionals involved in the lives of autistic children and adults. In addition to this, access to healthy and active living campaigns and opportunities must be facilitated through public health initiatives, creating a well-rounded approach to wellbeing. Lastly, a unified message across Warrington, ensuring that autistic people play a positive and active part in communities is an important way of achieving our aim to a healthier, more active society.

Where would autistic people in Warrington like to see change?

Through our engagement with autistic people, parents, carers and supporting services and professionals, key areas for improvement were highlighted:

- Although it is reported that there has been an improvement, there are still long waiting times for diagnosis for all ages “Waiting lists are horrendous on ND pathway”
- Although there are more adults receiving a diagnosis, there are few post diagnosis resources.
- There needs to be better awareness of what autism is and the environmental/sensory impact on autistic people within healthcare settings.
- Access to appropriate mental health services that understand autism and can make reasonable adjustments need to be prioritised.

- Specialist support and pathways needed to address complex health concerns and other neuro-diversities.
- Communication across all services between both professionals to professionals and professionals to parent/ Carer/families needs to improve and parents suggest the introduction of a communication strategy across the whole service.
- Training for hospital staff and GPs about autism, mental health and how to respond to autistic people including what other support services are available in the community.
- There needs to be continuity of health professionals, such as a GP or Dentist and a recognition of differing needs. For example, it was reported that missing a dental appointment can result in losing the service altogether.
- Wellbeing is important to health and many of the activities that are for young people are very good but acceptance and understanding is key.
- Autistic adults who have received a late diagnosis are likely to have different support needs to those who have grown up knowing that they are autistic. Local services for autistic adults who work and/or live independently are very limited and this impacts on mental health and wellbeing.
- Health passports are often not recognised, and they need to be a tool for supporting people when they go to A&E.
- GP surgery staff don't always understand that autistic people may not be able to fully follow the booking and process rules. There are many examples of people losing appointments or not being able to access services because of a lack of neurodiversity awareness.
- Wellbeing is hugely improved by access to the support group at WANDS. "We need one for every postcode".
- "Healthcare has improved for autistic people, but there is still a lot to do."
- The occupational therapy service is good, but the wait is too long to be seen (although data shows recent improvement).
- Staffing capacity is not in line with service subscription - two part time ADHD/ASD Nurse Specialists and 1 ASD NS is not enough.
- Review the ND pathway to allow flexibility of the differing ND conditions to speed up assessment and diagnosis.
- Parents suggest a separate Mental Health service for neurodiverse people. Not all CAMHS practitioners have ND knowledge or training.
- Consistency of use for the Health Passports as this is an issue that lots of families' experience.

Priority 5 - Healthy, Active Lives and Good Healthcare - What will we do?

We will:

- Link the Health and Wellbeing Workstream to all other local health focused strategies relating to Autism and/or Learning Disability and include them in localised planning and delivery.
- Work across Health, Public Health and Social Care to improve outcomes and to create better integrated pathways to better healthcare.

- Continue to work to reduce waiting times for assessment for children, young people and adults and manage resources to bring those waiting times down.
- Carry out our statutory duty across health organisations to ensure that all staff complete the Oliver McGowan Mandatory training in Learning Disability and Autism, so that staff feel confident in supporting the individual needs of autistic children, young people and adults with or without a learning disability.
- Consider alternative funding streams for the improvement of understanding of health-related information and advice to autistic people in Warrington.
- Focus on ensuring that there are no barriers to accessing health services for autistic people, including access to age 14+ Annual Health Checks for those with a Learning Disability. Suitable environments, people who understand need and suitable adjustments will be prioritised.
- Tackle morbidity and preventable death in autistic people, providing regular physical health checks, where required, and maintain clinical research.
- Ensure that autistic people are not prevented from accessing healthy and active living campaigns and opportunities. Groups for adults, especially social clubs for diverse interests in spaces appropriate for autistic people.
- Look at ways to prevent the loneliness and isolation in order to improve physical and mental health outcomes for autistic people by working together with support organisations to provide better information, advice and guidance, and activities to reduce loneliness and isolation.

Priority 5 - Healthy, Active Lives and Good Healthcare -What will we do?

We will also work collaboratively to support our Mersey Care Health partners with their priorities, as they:

- Transform the delivery of services to reduce health inequalities, increase access and ensure people are living healthier lives.
- Review and transform services for autistic children and young people with learning disabilities or who are to make sure they can access timely and safe person-centred care and a robust transition into adult services when required.
- Build and develop the right estate to meet the needs of people with learning disabilities and autistic people.
- Develop an enhanced focus on patient experience and safety through continuous improvement and learning.
- Provide high quality reasonably adjusted and accessible services.
- Ensure a well-trained and skilled workforce which provides high quality person centred holistic care.
- Support the continued integration of services, through partnership working with primary and community care, social care, mental health, and specialist services.
- Develop existing data analytic systems as a means of collating, analysing, and acting on population health data to inform future service delivery and reduce risk of health inequalities. This means we will use the data about people's health, educational and social lives to help us to develop services.
- Contribute to system wide development in research for people with learning disabilities and autistic people.

Workstream 5 - What can we do? Three key things

Better outcomes and fewer health and care inequalities for autistic people. Building the right support in the community, and supporting people in inpatient care

Health environments: A plan to make environmental improvements, small or large, to where people access their healthcare.

Better connected strategy: Partners work together to link strategic aims with better integration through frontline planning and approaches.

Access to healthy lifestyles: Access to healthy and active living campaigns and opportunities from public health drives to active opportunities. Groups for adults, especially social clubs for diverse interests in spaces appropriate for autistic people.

An integrated approach both at strategic and operational level.

Priority 6 - Housing and Independent lives - What does good look like?

Housing is important for everybody, and where we live has a big impact on the wellbeing of us all. For autistic people and their families, housing needs to offer a safe and inclusive environment that is flexible and built to accommodate changing needs, within easy reach of support staff and/or family and has transport links to offer appropriate independence. Advice and education, ensuring that people are well informed about homelessness, housing options, application processes, tenancy agreements, and financial support must be available, accurate and appropriate.

Supported housing options should be tailored to the unique needs of people, with support offered as required. This means developing safe, inclusive environments that are adaptable to changing needs, promoting independence. A good society commits to accessibility and flexibility, meaning that new housing options can be modified to accommodate specific needs, such as adding sensory-friendly features or assistive technology. The same approach within the residential care home market will ensure that autistic people are able to access it in the same way as everybody else.

Access to advocacy support networks and resources can assist in finding and retaining suitable housing. However, specific financial support and advice is also important for maintaining

independent living, particularly for those facing challenges in affording and remaining in suitable housing. Bill management support and employment assistance bring stability, while supportive housing communities allow individuals to connect with others who share their experiences and interests. Ongoing independent living skills training, when necessary, empowers individuals with the skills needed for living and maintaining a home.

Through a collaborative approach between housing providers, healthcare professionals, and support staff, we ensure that everyone involved works together with the autistic person to achieve their housing goals, promoting a holistic and supportive environment for all.

Where would autistic people in Warrington like to see change?

Housing and Independent Lives

- There is no real access to specific support through housing services in relation to autistic people who approach for homelessness assistance (outside of ASC). When there is relevant advice available, this is curtailed by limited appropriate options for housing.

- General needs accommodation is not always suitable for autistic people, and there are risks that the pressure of living independently can lead to chaotic lifestyles, potentially resulting in rent arrears, eviction and homelessness.
- Training for front-line housing staff is needed to better understand the needs of autistic people.
- Safe accommodation options should be available and/or adapted for autistic people and those with specific neurodiverse needs through a safe and easily accessible housing system.
- Data to help inform future commissioning of adapted/specialist housing that is suitable for autistic people needs to improve.
- Autistic adults do not always know where to go for support to access suitable accommodation.
- Housing-related staff and providers need to be involved more widely in local awareness and acceptance training plans.
- It would be helpful to address the specific needs of autistic adults in future housing and homelessness strategies, and to make better use of existing specialist housing.
- Autistic people and their families say that it is not always easy to find information in Warrington about available options and reliable support away from their family carers. Many parent carers provide an enormous amount of support to keep their loved ones healthy and safe, sometimes at a cost to their physical and emotional health.
- There is a perceived lack of understanding around the importance of some children being unable to share bedrooms, so securing suitable housing leads to family stress. The process for these families is time consuming due to the lack of social housing. This needs to be considered, including adaptations, as part of the wider housing strategy, particularly for urgent cases.

Priority 6 - Housing and Independent lives - What will we do?

We Will:

- Include representation from housing provision and advice as part of the Housing and Independent lives workstream.
- Work collaboratively across the system to ensure that future accommodation that is either commissioned or developed is autism friendly.
- Understand data and information better to influence forecasts and future investment to develop sufficient supported accommodation that can meet known needs within and across the borough, for example, with good transport links, access to community and learning opportunities and open spaces.
- Develop more flexible and creative approaches to support individuals to remain living in their own homes or in their family home through the improvement of outreach and other support services with consideration for autistic people.
- Develop thinking around transition from residential to more independent housing options.
- Review targeted Respite Care/Short Breaks for young adults and autistic adults with a learning disability and/or complex needs.
- Develop an assistive technology strategy that includes the needs of autistic people.

- Develop liaison to assure that autism is included in all future housing related and supported accommodation strategies in the future.
- Ensure that our specialist housing works well for all, including autistic people. Consider the bespoke models of supported housing, such as Bewsey House and the Keyring model of floating support.
- Work with housing and environmental partners, so that local communities, housing and open spaces work for everybody.
- Consider the inclusion of housing-related support staff and providers in Oliver McGowan autism training plans.
- Support autistic people who wish to remain with their families and/or carers to maintain an environment that is suitable for their needs through person centred planning.
- Review community activities and consider the level of opportunity and support that they offer.
- Build within our plans the education of housing providers about associated traits and how environments can exacerbate ASD presentation.
- Consider a collaborative approach with a housing provider that understands neurodevelopmental conditions.

Workstream 6 - What can we do? Three key things.

Safe, sufficient and appropriate accommodation for autistic people, whether that be with family, friends or living alone.

Housing strategy: Work with Housing partners to establish autistic people into housing and homelessness policy and processes.

Training and awareness: Partners work together to link and include housing-related staff and providers into autism training plans

Technology and support: Plan for improved aids, adaptations and technologies to further support independent living, specifically for autistic people

Increasing recognition and understanding of the housing needs of autistic people.

Priority 7 - Staying Safe 2 - What does good look like?

Criminal justice

The Criminal Justice System (CJS) can be frightening, and keeping people away from it to begin with is obviously preferable. Support and advice provided to young autistic people, particularly those with a learning disability or mental health need, is vital to prevent their involvement in crime and the CJS. Prevention can involve enabling people to maintain connections with others and their personal support networks, especially after leaving school, and to understand social acceptability.

Should autistic people enter the CJS, education to inform them and their families or carers about the system and their legal rights should be readily available, with well-trained personnel who understand autism, effective communication and de-escalation techniques. A good CJS will have accessible and understandable

legal proceedings, with plain language explanations of terms and processes. Alternative methods, such as mediation, are advocated for those who may struggle with traditional courtroom settings, promoting a more inclusive and accommodating approach.

Finally, flexible community support in the long term, ensures that individuals can live their lives safely in the community of their choice, promoting autonomy and wellbeing.

Positive relationships and communities

Community support that is flexible and adaptable is essential for ensuring the safety and wellbeing of autistic people in their chosen communities. Special attention should be given to those with learning disabilities, supporting them in maintaining friendships and other relationships. These goals can be achieved by direct reference to autism within the *Joint Learning Disability Strategy*, with an inclusive and understanding environment that empowers autistic people to stay safe and thrive.

Promoting healthy relationships and the importance of consent supports positive social interactions and overall wellbeing. Sex and sexual health education and information should be easily accessible, ensuring that the content is straightforward and comprehensible. Developing self-advocacy skills to effectively express needs and to establish personal boundaries in relationships is also part of this.

Families and carers play a significant role in promoting positive relationships, and also require access to resources and support that facilitates healthy conversations and engagement.

Additionally, social support is crucial in building relationships, and support groups or social events catered to autistic people can provide a platform for meaningful interactions. It is vital to create an accepting and understanding society that refrains from bullying and harmful relationships, ensuring a safe environment for all.

Where would autistic people in Warrington like to see change?

Staying Safe

- There are reports that young autistic men are becoming involved in the CJS inappropriately. This needs further investigation and understanding. If it is the case, there needs to be prevention and reduction of inappropriate involvement with the CJS for autistic people (particularly young men) and a reduction in offending.
- Increased support and education is needed for young autistic people exiting the education system about how to avoid pathways into the CJS.
- Support for rehabilitation, early identification of potential offenders and victims, and support to prevent entry into the CJS is vital.
- Within the CJS, things are improving, and people within it are more aware of autism and the traits associated with it. There is greater recognition, less stigma and better access to care, but there is still a lack of acceptance and people are still getting caught up in the system inappropriately.
- There is anecdotal information and better monitoring is needed so that we can build a picture and follow trends to tackle issues as they arise.
- Again, there are reports that suggest that young autistic women are more likely to become involved in “controlling or abusive” relationships. This has not been tested fully in Warrington, but there is acceptance that there needs to be further evidence-based research.
- More direct references to autism through the Joint Learning Disability Strategy will allow the Strategy for Autistic People to focus on inclusion and safety for all.

- The strategy for autistic people needs to run alongside all other safeguarding strategies and plans, with safeguarding being everybody's business.

Priority 7 - Staying Safe - What will we do?

We Will:

- Create a joint workstream, with appropriate leadership and representation (autistic adults with lived experience, appropriate professionals) to learn more about the landscape in Warrington, and to develop and review outcomes and to implement plans across the town. This will involve local research and wider conversations.
- Effectively understand the demand and be better placed to provide support where appropriate, and work with partners to better understand the representation and needs of autistic people within the CJS.
- In keeping with National guidance, work with partners so there is a wider understanding of "mate crime" and "cuckooing" as a preventative measure, within all sectors and the wider community.
- Understand and support collaborative and targeted work with police officers and others in the CJS, so that interactions are more positive and preventative.
- Support people who are vulnerable, including teaching anti-victimisation and personal safety skills.
- Consider cross commissioner small grants to support organisations providing information advice and guidance, and activities to reduce loneliness and isolation.
- Support autistic people with paid employment (WS4) and fixed activity routines, so that they feel safe and confident.
- Work with mainstream services/local organisations in partnership to identify those at risk of being drawn into extremism, assess and offer appropriate support plans to suit individual's need
- Implement the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training across Health and Social Care but will consider its benefit throughout other areas of the system.
- Review the terms of the Joint Learning Disability Strategy and Steering Group and ensure that "Autism" and learning disability are represented fully in the right space.

Workstream 7 - What can we do? Three key things.

Safe, sufficient, preventative and appropriate support for autistic people, whether that be with family, friends or living alone.

Criminal justice: A local approach to keeping young people out of the CJS. Include a positive plan to reduce loneliness and isolation.

Training and awareness: Partners work together to link and include CJS staff and support providers in autism training, with a focus on early signs of involvement.

Strategy and support: Devise a plan, that links to other relevant local policy, for a better understanding of safe, healthy emotional friendships and sexual relationships for autistic people of all ages and abilities.

Further thought and discussion with the CJS, police and Youth Services required over the life of the strategy.

Priority 8 – Family and Carer Support

What does good look like?

To support individuals and families affected by autism and neurodiversity, it is crucial to provide the right communities and the right support. This means ensuring access to relevant health and wellbeing services and having local and individualised plans in place. It is also essential to recognise the prevalence of dual diagnosis and ensure that all people are heard and receive tailored care.

There are number of ways that families and carers can be supported, such as offering appropriate and sufficient respite services, facilitating connections between families and other carers through support groups, both in-person and online, to provide a supportive community of people who understand their experiences. Access to mental health services should also be readily available for families who experience anxiety related to their responsibilities as a preventative resource.

Practical support, such as transportation services, community offers, technological assistance, and home adaptations, must be well-advertised to ensure accessibility. This can also include education about autism and its potential impacts, with an emphasis on effective communication strategies. A proactive 'Carers' Strategy' should be in place to meet the needs of families, promoting self-care practices like exercise, meditation, and socialising to maintain overall health and wellbeing. Encouraging flexible work arrangements and offering support through benefits and financial advice can also support family life.

Where would autistic people in like to see change?

Family and Carer Support

- Improved connectivity to other resources, and communication to keep people informed of individual and wider progress will support people to be more self-sufficient and will reduce frustration.
- People welcome that the strategy is all age, but access and involvement in decision making through the joint board and through the development of an ongoing co-productive structure is required.
- Unpaid carers want to feel that they are an integral part of the wider support network and are supported accordingly. People need “an actual service for mental health support for families with children, young people or adults with neurodiversity as it doesn’t exist”.
- Clarity is needed about the pathway to diagnosis and to support neurodiversity, and there is a need for improved and more realistic information about waiting times.
- More facilitated support groups for families and carers with more spaces where families can connect, share experiences, and learn from one another.
- Safe places where autistic people can go and be with other people with a similar lived experience. There is only one group where autistic people can meet socially, and it is available one evening per week. This is an unfunded group, but it does have the use of a publicly owned building. Is it possible to replicate this for people in other areas of Warrington?
- There is good support from local partners, such as ADDvanced Solutions, for families of children who have recently been diagnosed as autistic or are neurodiverse, and for those that haven't, but neighbouring authorities have more. Can this be accessed for Warrington residents?
- More options and access to breaks for families and carers would be welcome.
- Better child-care provision and activities during half-term and school holidays or weekend clubs needed for primary school age children.

- The CETR process, ensuring the right care, education and treatment of children and young people with a learning disability, autism or both and their families is recognised across the system as working well.

Priority 8 – Family and Carer Support - What will we do?

We Will:

- Create a strong workstream, with appropriate leadership and representation (including families/carers) so that we can learn more about the landscape in Warrington, develop and review outcomes and implement plans across the town.
- Review use of the Community Led Support offer so that local community and voluntary sector organisations lead from the front and bring further trust within the autistic community, their families and carers.
- Consider cross commissioner access to current funding (not just LA, but other Health, Charitable offers etc.) to support organisations providing information advice and guidance for unpaid carers, and activities that reduce loneliness, improving carer/life balance.
- Recognise that a diagnosis can often be a dual diagnosis and ensure that pathways are clear for all.
- Continue to prioritise CETR (Care, Education and Treatment Reviews) as a way to understand people and their families, and to deliver the right support at the right time.
- Improve information regarding individuals and data collection regarding carers and families so that we can target areas, communities and services where they are needed most.
- Better links across regions and through local authority, health and voluntary sector partners so that commissioned resources can be shared and used more smartly.
- Wider discussion regarding solutions to the need for mental health support for unpaid carers.
- Work with partners to review the use of available public buildings and consider the possibility of use for neurodiverse groups.

Workstream 8 - What can we do? Three key things.

Support, communication and understanding so that autistic people, and their families and carers can live healthy, active lives as they wish.

Peer support: Support families to set up and maintain networks and social groups.

Strategic links: Research and planning for better use of respite options for both autistic people and their families and carers.

Strategy and support: Link to the Warrington Carers' Strategy to support autistic people, and their families and carers to lead a healthy and active lives.

Increasing recognition and understanding of the housing needs of autistic people.

Our key ideas for success

Acceptance and awareness

- Autism awareness sessions: health and social care, education professionals, businesses & employers. Joint work to develop Autism Friends in Warrington.
- Campaign against bullying and exclusion from social events, sports clubs, and events. This is a common, significant problem for autistic people.
- Better awareness of what autism is and the environmental/sensory impact on autistic people. Making change happen. People who make it their business to make things better. Create places for people to meet.

A good start

- Better information, advice and support for children and families following diagnosis.
- Improved physical school environments offering safety and comfort to all pupils
- Put in place training, resources and information that improves the knowledge and skills of our workforce.

Preparing for Adulthood

- A plan to improve the insufficient support and signposting after completing school or to enter employment or other appropriate activities.
- There is improved diagnosis in Warrington (could still be better). Better recognition and understanding with reduced exclusions, reduced bullying and better prospects for young autistic people
- Better person-centred planning for young autistic people, with or without different or additional needs.

Employment, training and the best day possible

- A plan to improve insufficient job coaching, work experience, volunteering and training through organisational processes and sector support.
- Partners and local employers work together to increase employment opportunities and job support for all autistic adults of working age. Better reasonable adjustments both during recruitment and in employment.
- Autism Board plan for members to seek and promote their recognition as employers of people with disabilities, leading by example when recruiting and campaigning

Healthy, active lives and good healthcare

- A plan to make environmental improvements, small or large, to where people access their healthcare.
- Partners work together to link strategic aims with better integration through frontline planning and approaches.
- Access to healthy and active living campaigns and opportunities from public health drives to active opportunities. Groups for adults, especially social clubs for diverse interests in spaces appropriate for autistic people.

Housing and independent lives

- Work with Housing partners to establish autistic people into housing and homelessness policy and processes.
- Plan for improved aids, adaptations and technologies to further support independent living, specifically for autistic people.
- Partners work together to link and include housing-related staff and providers into autism training plans.

Staying safe

- A local approach to keeping young people out of the CJS. Include a positive plan to reduce loneliness and isolation.
- Partners work together to link and include CJS staff and support providers in autism training, with a focus on early signs of involvement.
- Devise a plan, that links to other relevant local policy, for a better understanding of safe, healthy emotional friendships and sexual relationships for autistic people of all ages and abilities.

Family and carer support

- Support families to set up and maintain networks and social groups.
- Research and planning for better use of respite options for both autistic people and their families and carers.
- Link to the Warrington Carer's Strategy to support autistic people, and their families and carers to lead a healthy and active lives.

Next steps: coproduction and working in partnership

Co-production and Co-design is an important part of how we deliver services and grow sustainable communities, and we want to continue to hear the voices of autistic people in Warrington. We know that the 'experts' on communities and care are often the people that live in our town and receive support, and we recognise that we need to listen to and utilise this knowledge.

We aim to develop mutual and reciprocal partnerships through our eight priority workstreams, enabling peer support and decision making. We will bring together local networks with professionals so that we can co-produce solutions as part of our day-to-day work.

Co-production begins with strengths and supports the development of those strengths, building on resources that we have, people's existing capabilities and their growing confidence as people take more control. In line with other local strategies, we will develop our plans with people across communities, to facilitate acceptance and awareness, developing self-sufficiency and ensuring that autistic people have equal and timely access to a range of affordable and good quality, community-based support.

Following the principles of the *Think Local Act Personal (TLAP) Ladder of Co-Production*, we will improve our listening through the workstreams to involve people, providers and voluntary and community sector organisations. They are our links to communities and hold a wealth of knowledge and understanding of

people with lived experience. Better consultation will lead to improved connectivity and control for autistic people through the sharing of innovative practice.

Next steps: strategy and governance

Linked key strategies and plans

If we are to successfully deliver our vision and change the way that we create and support communities, we need to connect to other strategies and plans. These may be led by other organisations or departments within health or the council and are likely to be jointly delivered. Some also further develop themes from within our Strategy for Autistic People, with more detail provided on specific services, areas or communities.

Supporting people to live well:

- Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Warrington Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
- Adult Social Care Market Position Statement
- Workforce Capacity and Development Plan
- Assistive Technology Strategy
- Warrington Learning Disability Strategy
- Drug and Alcohol Strategy
- Active and Supportive Communities
- Carers Strategy
- Housing Strategy
- Autism Strategy
- Active Warrington Strategy
- Warrington Town Deal Plan
- Dementia Strategy
- Warrington Together
- Mental Health Strategy
- Local Health Autism and other associated strategies

Governance and Accountability

Our Strategy will be monitored through regular held to account by our existing internal oversight, arrangements and via the new 'Place' related Governance and through real resident contact and feedback.

Key Outcomes:

- Improved wellbeing and experience of life for autistic people in Warrington
- Better experience of health and social care services for autistic people
- Cross organisational financial support and value for money for residents

How will we know if we have succeeded?

Over the life of this strategy, we will deliver our specific targets through the eight key priorities that we have identified. We are committed to creating a long-term plan with people, communities and systems working

together and that is overseen by the Governance in place referenced on page x. We will return to our outcomes and report on our success and challenges continuously.

Year one

- All workstreams in place and including the right people from all parts of the community
- Embedded plans with feedback and collaboration mechanisms in place
- Autism Friends is in place and is beginning to have an impact on local employers, communities and lives

Year three

- Good local information and data about the autistic people that live in our communities and attend our schools
- Good information and advice in place for autistic people, their families and carers before and after diagnosis
- Local communities and employers are better informed and accepting of autistic people

Ongoing

- Autistic people are involved in policy making and building design to ensure that they are fit for purpose for all
- All local businesses and organisations have links to Autism Friends, and it is known across Warrington
- Autistic people don't need a strategy, because our community includes them