



Telford & Wrekin
Co-operative Council

Protect, care and invest
to create a better borough

Telford & Wrekin Autism Strategy

Adult Social Care (including
transition into adulthood)

2023-2028

Acknowledgements



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Co-operative Council

Protect, care and invest
to create a better borough



Midlands Partnership
NHS Foundation Trust
A Keele University Teaching Trust



**Shropshire, Telford
and Wrekin**

autism
west midlands



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FOREWORD

Welcome to the Autism Strategy 2023-2028 developed by adult social care.

It is such an important time for autistic people in Telford and Wrekin. The publication of the Autism Strategy provides views and opinions on how to shape local services, what is needed to become more autism friendly and to ensure a safer community for autistic people in the local borough. The Autism Strategy also highlights the importance of partnership working, in particular, the work that continues with our engagement partners CVS and the Telford Autism Hub and The Autism Partnership Board.

Working alongside our partners and autistic people, their families, carers and other professionals we are committed to ensuring children, young people and adults, have a sense of purpose, aspiration and belonging in their local communities. It will also support initiatives that create inclusive spaces, raise awareness and acceptance throughout Telford and Wrekin with meaningful and transparent engagement. By focusing on partner agencies and working together to celebrate good work and provide challenge in making access to services easier. We are committed to focusing on the areas that autistic people told us were key in ensuring they were able to live a good life.

It is also important to acknowledge the role of families and carers in ensuring autistic people achieve and have the best possible access to education, recreation, employment, housing, finance information, advice and guidance, pre-and post-assessment support. We all want to make sure Telford understands and accepts autism and we create an inclusive community for all.

The Autism Strategy is ambitious and sets out the vision for Telford and Wrekin to be a place that offers opportunities for people to live healthy and fulfilling lives, where people are supported and valued and where no-one is left behind. We are all proud to be involved in the development and implementation of the Autism Strategy and will continue to ensure the priorities will be delivered in full for all autistic people.



Cllr Andy Burford
(Labour) Cabinet
Member for
adult social
care and health,
integration and
transformation



Simon Fraser
Autism Practice
Lead,
Telford & Wrekin
Council



Debbie Gibbon
CEO,
Telford and
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Introduction

This adults Autism Strategy is a five-year strategy which supports our aim for Telford and Wrekin to be an autism friendly borough where people can live full, healthy and rewarding lives, in a society that is inclusive.

The strategy has been co-produced with autistic adults, young people and their families to capture what is important to them and their lived experience, recognising that autism is lifelong.

It is recognised that autism is a fundamental part of who someone is and it is therefore important to use the right language. It is recognised that there are individual preferences (that should be used) however, following the advice from the National Autistic Society, opposite are some commonly used terms that should or should not be used.

The strategy has been developed with support from Autism West Midlands, taking data from national and local sources to provide up to date information on autism and to assist the understanding of the makeup of our borough. Partners have been working together to ensure a shared understanding of what is currently being delivered and where services and systems can work together.

The autism consultation has enabled valuable insight into the lived experiences of people who participated in the workshops, conversations and completed the autism consultation questionnaire.

Our vision and priorities include:

- good information, advice and guidance
- supporting raising awareness/acceptance
- supporting to improve inclusion
- focusing on education, training and employment opportunities
- supporting healthy living
- supporting young people in preparing for adulthood
- working with the criminal justice system

YES

Autistic adult/
child/person
...is autistic
...has an autism
diagnosis
Disabled person
Asperger
syndrome, a
form of autism
(pronounced with
a hard 'g')
Providing support
or adjustments
Traits or
characteristics
To the infinity
symbol

NO

...has autism
An autistic
...suffers from
autism
High/low
functioning
Normal (referring
to non-autistic
people)
Living with autism
Treating
symptoms
No to the jigsaw
symbol
We are NOT all a
little bit autistic

Context

The key to developing an autism strategy is knowing and understanding the;

- National context
- Local context
- Local autistic population
- Existing autism specific services by mapping them and identifying gaps
- Views of local autistic people and their families by involving them in the process and recognising where they experience good practice and where their experiences reflect a need for improvement.

National Context

What is Autism?

Autism is a spectrum condition that affects people in different ways, and, like all people, autistic people have their own strengths and weaknesses. The National Autistic Society state “autism is a life-long developmental disability which affects how people communicate, interact with the world and experience their senses”.

Although national statistics vary, it is believed that one in 100 people are on the spectrum and there are around 700,000 autistic adults in the UK, 79% of autistic adults live with other mental health difficulties (co-morbidities) and that as many as 4 times more males than females are diagnosed (beyondautism.co.uk).



Autism is reported in all racial, ethnic and socio-economic groups around the world however, it is recognised that there are groups of people who are harder to reach or identify. There is a lack of research in this area often meaning getting the right help and support can be even harder for minority groups. It is known that some of the barriers include language and understanding the processes involved in accessing support, that negative assumptions are made about certain behaviours within minority groups and that there is the feeling of being judged by professionals and members of a community resulting in dealing with things within the family structure.

It is also widely accepted that girls and women are often overlooked for an autism assessment or are commonly misdiagnosed. It is known that autism often presents differently in girls and women and that the ability to mask and camouflage difficulties results in professionals missing identifiers. Non-diagnosis or a misdiagnosis can have a significant impact on women and girls’ development and outcomes in all stages of life.

The National Autistic Society provides more information in this area and are currently undertaking more research. In recognising there are harder to reach groups Telford & Wrekin Council are developing the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy with the difficulties associated with autism and hard to reach groups forming a big part of this strategy.

Local Context

In response to the legislation and national drivers the following organisations have been working together to deliver and improve services for the autistic community:

- Telford & Wrekin Council
- Third Sector
- Parent/carer representative organisations
- Shropshire Council
- Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin Clinical Commissioning Group
- Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust
- Shropshire Community NHS Foundation Trust
- Shropshire and Telford Hospitals



This programme has transitioned in the past 12 months to the system-wide Learning Disabilities and Autism Programme which has created a 3 Year Road Map¹. The road map sets a number of key priorities and this includes a local focus on autism.

Understanding the local autistic population – who do we know about?

Telford and Wrekin is a relatively new town with an estimated population of 185,600². The population is growing at a faster rate than the England population, it is younger than the national average, and is becoming more diverse. Estimated numbers of people with autism³ aged 15 years and over are given in table 33. This table is an indication of prevalence only and further data is explored from other sources available locally.

Table 33. Estimated number of autistic people aged 15 years and over

	15-44	45-65	65+	Total
Lakeside south	200	100	100	
Hadley Castle	300	200	100	
The Wrekin	200	200	100	
Telford & Wrekin	700	500	300	1500



GP records estimate the population to be 1,185⁴. This data set identifies those people who have a diagnosis of autism. The Local authority adult social care service supports 224⁵ autistic people and the Telford Autism Hub has supported 300 people in the year 2021/22, with 60 people supported to go through the autism diagnosis process.

¹See Appendix XX for STP 3 year road map

²Telford & Wrekin Census 2021

³Counts have been independently rounded to the nearest 100. Prevalence rates from POPPI/PANSI have been applied to national statistics, 2017 mid-year estimates by output area.

⁴Taken from CCG COVID-19 Vaccination data set as supplied by GPs

⁵Data as at 31.03.2022

Involving local autistic people and their families

What did we do?

The approach taken locally was to ask people about their life in the borough. A questionnaire was co-produced with autistic adults based on the national autism strategy to draw responses from people about their everyday life experiences in partnership with Autism West Midlands.

Hilary McGlynn, Operations Manager at Autism West Midlands:

“We very much welcome the autism consultation launched together with Telford & Wrekin Council.”

“It’s a great opportunity to hear directly from autistic residents, their families and carers across the borough about how we can continue to best support them to live healthy, active and independent lives.”

The analysis of the pre-engagement responses was completed by an Autism West Midlands autistic employee who provided a report detailing the feedback and putting them into themes aligned to the national strategy.

Who responded?

A variety of ways to engage was offered to make accessibility easier for autistic people to share their thoughts and input into the development of the draft autism strategy this included completing an online questionnaire, face to face sessions and group events.

The pre-engagement questionnaire was centred around the following themes:

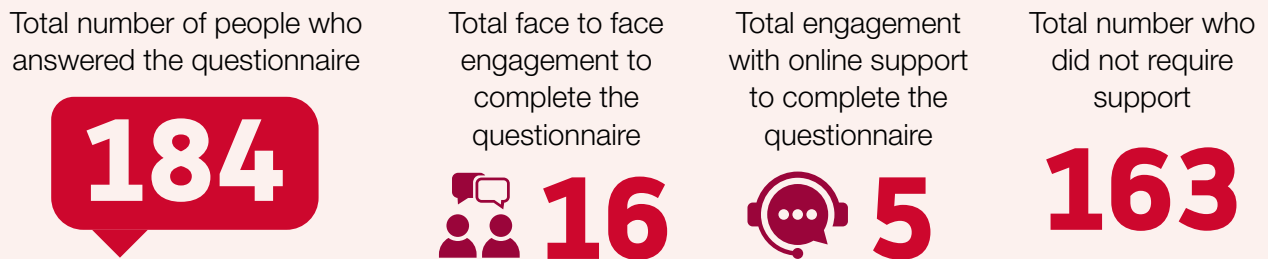
- Housing
- Health, care and well-being
- Getting out and about
- Diagnosis and Support
- Education, training and employment

The level of response is given over the page:

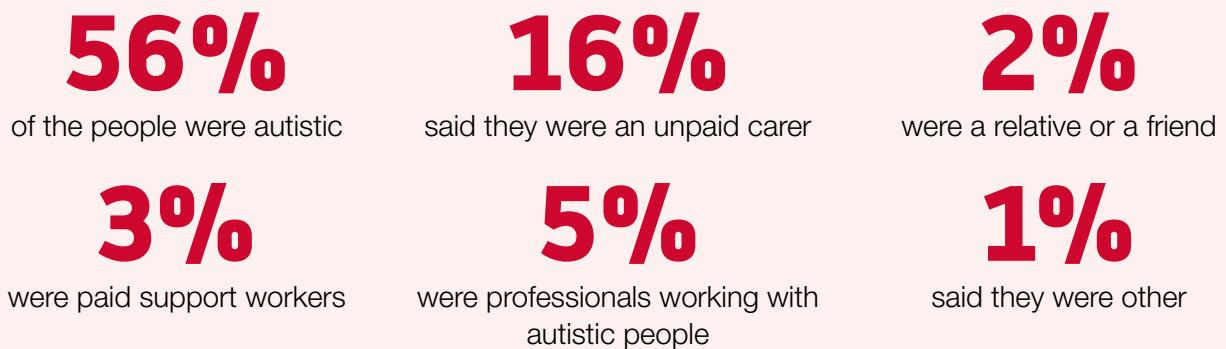
Engagement via the Council's Social Media Channels



Responses to the Questionnaire



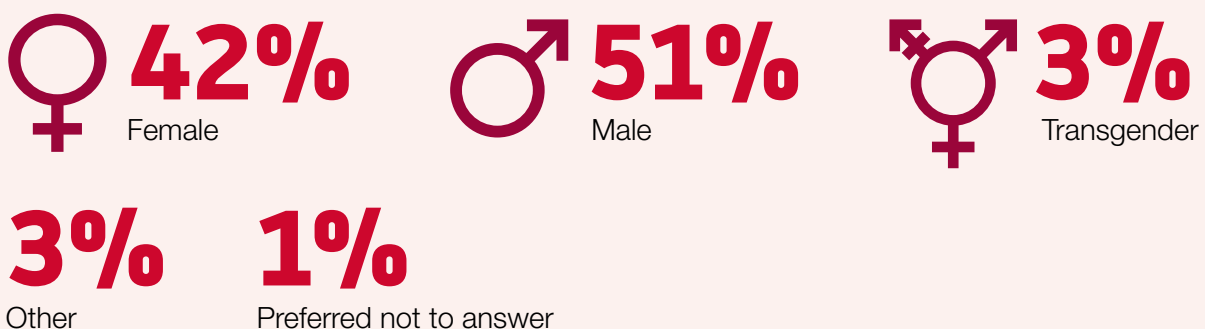
Demographic - we had lots of responses from different people including:



Individuals may be included in more than one category

Responses included a range of different roles and professions, such as social workers, carers, 3rd sector workers, parents, family practitioners.

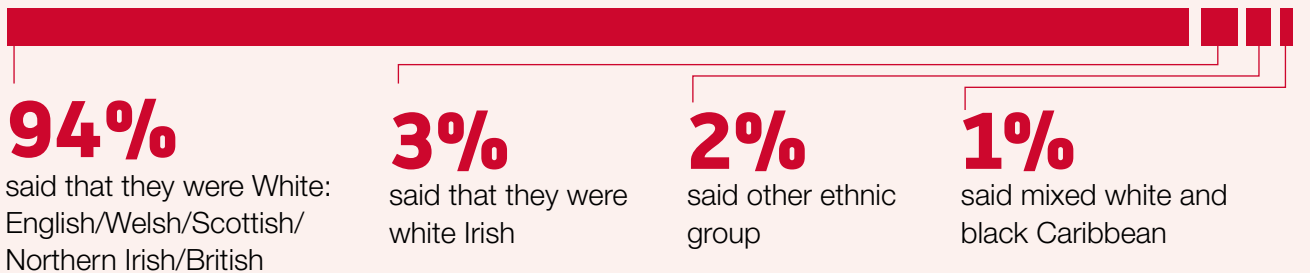
Gender - the gender split was as follows:



Where people lived or worked



Ethnic groups



What did people say?

Responses identified a general lack of understanding and acceptance of autism in society. This causes barriers and challenges across all areas of life, from accessing GP and other medical appointments, receiving support in education, recruitment and employment, transport, shops and community services and social.



"I think the strategy alongside the NHS long term plan will improve the lives of all autistic people and their families by building on and improving existing services: there is an important priority section in the strategy covering improvements to access of community support including preventative services e.g. autism hubs, one stop shops, mental health services improved advocacy and housing options - thus enabling autistic people to live full and rewarding lives."

"The lack of awareness of the general population around autism is very frustrating. People don't see that it's a spectrum.

"People in general understand and accept autism and autistic differences."

It was also considered important that autistic people should be involved in the development of anything to support them.

"Things need to be developed in conjunction with autistic people."

The Individual experience

Autistic people experience autism very individually. This means that every individual has a different autistic profile, different sensory needs, communication needs and support needs. Support needs can vary for an individual too, this may mean support needs to be tailored and flexible at times.

"Those with greater need often already have advocates in place and so their needs are clearer. Those who have functioned in society to a certain extent but are starting to struggle despite seemingly holding down marriages and families and jobs still need help to access what is made available to them. Providing no support to access will result eventually in a deterioration of their situation and increased support needs."

Feeling accepted and understood

The word understanding was used in the responses 61 times. A focus on removing barriers and improving autism understanding and acceptance would assist in creating more inclusive services and communities.

Getting it Right

Some people described autistic people falling through the gaps of services because autism is not a mental health condition or a physical health condition.

It is important autistic people know where to get help from with their emotional health and well-being. Signposting to suitable services, getting advice, information and activities all assist. People identified a need to be supported in a holistic way and having access to professionals who understand autism and associated conditions.

People described that it would be helpful to have access to peer support such as a mentor or groups to share experiences and support each other. It was also identified that having practical help with day-to-day challenges would help to improve emotional health and wellbeing.

You said...we will do

We asked people what was important to them, or the person they supported and/or worked with in the following areas:

- Housing
- Health, care and well-being
- Getting out and about
- Diagnosis and support
- Education, training and employment

The following section of this strategy outlines what people told us during this engagement and what we are going to do in response.

Home

People told us that they don't always need support, but may need some assistance if their circumstances change.

People said:

- Trades people understanding and accepting autism was important
- Being able to communicate in different ways with Trades people would be beneficial
- Having a 'trusted trader' scheme locally would be helpful
- Knowing where to go if housing repairs were needed would help
- Housing association staff not having the knowledge about autism could be problematic
- Knowing about Assistive Technology/Digital support at home – prompting and sequencing in particular would help with being independent
- Learning skills in the home that will develop independence would also help with being more independent
- Support with learning skills to plan and budget money would help in everyday life

What we will do...

- Make sure we work with housing providers throughout the borough to raise awareness/acceptance of neurodiversity
- Work with Trading Standards to raise acceptance/awareness of autism – promote the Trading Standards Accredited website
- Support autism awareness training to staff with partner agencies in partnership with the Autism Hub
- Promote the Independent Living Centre for Assistive Technology and digital solutions at home
- Promote community services that support independence skills – raise awareness/acceptance of autism at community venues
- Promote services that support budgeting and financial planning – including the use of Assistive Technology and digital solutions
- Work with supermarkets, markets, shops to extend autism friendly hours
- Support development of specialist accommodation

Quotes

"Access to Trusted Trader scheme (if that still exists), in the same way that senior citizens do, as allowing a stranger into your home to complete trade work is very distressing to an ASD person."

"The assistance of someone autism friendly to help guide me to the relevant services,' if any' who can advise and support my needs without belittling me!"

"Assistance with doing everyday things, somewhere to go nearby to give independence lessons."

"Easy access."

"Approachable customer services."

Health, wellbeing and care

COVID

It is important to acknowledge the context of this piece of work being undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic: services were stretched, moved to deliver different priorities and therefore may not have been delivering at full capacity during the period of this consultation. Research has identified that rates of depression and anxiety during and post pandemic have significantly increased in the general population however, the negative impact of Covid-19 has been more significant within the autistic population.

People told us being healthy was important to them, their physical, emotional and mental health.

They said:

- Leisure services should be more inclusive and accessible
- Create more quiet times in leisure centres
- Having accessible information about healthy diets and healthy living would support to have a healthier lifestyle
- GP's need to be more inclusive – offer appointments via text, needing appointments to be made in advance, be understanding and flexible if late
- Mental health support needs to be more available with reasonable adjustments made if and when needed

- Create more spaces for peers to get together
- Provide more information about inclusive spaces and what is available in the community
- Provide more information about inclusive secondary health services that are autism friendly

What we will do...

- Make sure we are always listening to people about what is important to them about healthy living
- Work with Public Health to promote more inclusive information, advice and guidance about healthy lifestyles
- Work with leisure services to be more inclusive
- Support training, awareness raising and acceptance in more community spaces
- Promote literature about healthy lifestyles and health diets
- Promote autism friendly services wider
- Work with community centres and venues to raise awareness and create inclusive spaces
- Work with universal, community and specialist health services to ensure they are more inclusive
- Ensure training to staff is in line with national developments

Quotes

"Support person to help with advice and access to leisure."

"Exercise classes with a trainer who understands autism at local leisure centres would be beneficial."

"Access to local facilities and the extra guidance on how to exercise rather than the general service provided."

"Doctors at GP surgeries could do with being better educated about communication issues that cause difficulties for autistics seeking healthcare."

"Having time to do so, or having more classes available, with teachers who get autism or at the very least get that noisy music along with loud voices can cause overload - (i don't need special classes, i just would love it if all classes were as good as say the Body Balance on a Friday at Wellington, the teacher there is awesome and gets it!) I have to work long hours and make a real effort to make sure I exercise. I love the facilities at T&W a discount would be nice to make it a little more affordable but it is something that I value highly."

"Quiet areas in leisure facilities."

Getting out and about

People told us being a part of their local community was important to them but they can feel anxious when going somewhere for the first time, and/or unfamiliar places.

People told us:

- They wanted to volunteer/work in places local to them
- They want staff in universal services to be patient and give more time to process what they need to do when out and about
- Knowing where to go for help, if needed, is really important
- Having staff in places that are autism aware
- More quiet times in universal services are needed
- Public transport should be more inclusive

- Having spaces for peers and/or friends to get together was important
- To have spaces that encourage and welcome autistic people to attend/access was important
- Taxi companies to have training of autism was vital to support safe travel

What we will do...

- Work with individuals and communities to link people together with similar interests
- Explore how we can enable people to access support in the community if/when they need it
- Further promote and develop Live Well Telford to provide advice, information and guidance of provisions within the borough
- Continue to work with the Autism Hub to promote, develop and support activities
- Work with universal services to improve inclusivity, including Taxi companies and public transport
- Work with DWP to support more autistic people into work
- Work with public transport providers to support awareness raising and training for more inclusive public transport
- Promote the use of digital technology/Assistive Technology when out and about to support with managing anxiety

Quotes

"Due to my autism I don't go out very often, as I don't like being around crowds of people. I've considered volunteering at my local community centre, but haven't as yet."

"We access some local community services but to be honest we don't know exactly what local community services there is. it is not common knowledge what's available and to who. is there anything specifically for autistic adults a community information booklet would be a fantastic idea."

"I can find all of the above places overwhelming at times and they often lack an area to escape to for a sensory break."

Diagnosis and Support

83% of people who responded told us they have a formal diagnosis of autism and 12% were waiting for an assessment for a formal diagnosis.

You told us:

- More, advice, guidance and support is needed for autistic people
- Having support, advice and guidance about the diagnostic process would be beneficial
- Employers need more information about autism and reasonable adjustments that can be made once a diagnosis is received or if an employee asks for support at work with their neurodiversity
- Regular updates about the timeframe when waiting for an assessment would be beneficial
- Being signposted to support services sooner while waiting for a diagnosis would be helpful
- Support for carers through the diagnostic/assessment process and after diagnosis is important

What we will do...

- Support to create and promote more information and guidance on post assessment services and support
- Work with the Autism Hub to create content for Live Well Telford

- Work with DWP to raise awareness about the assessment process and post assessment support and reasonable adjustments in the workplace
- Work with the Autism Hub to include regular keep in touch points during the assessment pathway
- Promote the autism drop in service
- Promote the Carers Centre to support unpaid carers of autistic people, including those waiting for an assessment

Quotes

"Long time to wait for assessment."

"The Support worker at West Midlands Autism at the time, was vey good, very helpful and understanding. He made me understand autism and the impact it can have on you."

"The Autism Hub helped me with all aspects of my diagnosis."

"I did not get diagnosed until I was 23 years old, always knew I felt different and struggled socially throughout school, still I went undiagnosed and I struggled. My mum requested an assessment from the Autism Hub and finally got a diagnosis."

Education, training and employment

We asked people about their experiences in education, training and employment. People described a variety of experiences which have supported them, but also the challenges they may have faced too.

People told us;

- They had positive experiences when, even without a diagnosis, adjustments are made in education or in the workplace
- Some people enjoyed the online learning/working during the pandemic
- More information about adult learning in Telford would be beneficial
- Some people preferred online training when in the workplace
- More support services to assist people to find work are vital
- When in work to have support if needed
- Assistance with interview skills, job application and CV writing would help with finding or getting back to work
- Having an individual approach about what works best is vital
- They want to be busy and keeping active both physically and mentally is really important

What we will do...

- Support universal employers with more information about autism in the work place
- Work with DWP, EAST and Telford Job Box to create more opportunities for employment with information and guidance for employers
- Work with the Autism Hub to continue to raise awareness and acceptance of autism
- Promote adult learning opportunities available in Telford
- Work with education providers and SEN/SEND services to start conversations early about aspirations into employment
- Work with partners to reduce barriers into employment/education/training and when in employment/education/training

Quotes

"Being self employed, where they could work in their home environment, could switch off when they needed too and can limit stimulation."

"Training everyone in the work place to understand autism as they presume one size fits all and everyone who is autistic is the same as the next person and they aren't its individual to each individual with varying needs."

"Awareness. Flexibility on the part of employers. I could write a thesis on this."

"Allowances could have been made earlier on and better understanding of what difficulties can occur with autism. Better teacher training/awareness and educating children on differences and problems."

"Better access to online courses and Zoom-based meetings rather than traditional brick and mortar college classes."

"I think the trainer could ask at the start of a course about learning styles, say anyone of a different neurotype or with a disability can sit out of any activity/do an alternative with no questions asked."

"An understanding employer in a quiet safe environment with necessary adjustments put into place."

"Help and support from services to help find employment, currently there are no services who specialise in autistic people getting into paid employment."

"Something I struggled with greatly when I was applying for jobs was interviews. I struggled to formulate sentences very well and it came out like garbled mess. I think in school/college they should have practice interviews to teach you how to answer questions, read between lines of questions and general interview behaviour."

"My son is 8. I would like to know what the pathways are for adulthood for him. This has not been discussed with me. It is never too early."

Making it Real – what happens next

How will we make it happen (governance and action plans)

Following the strategy action plan which will detail the actions adult social care and partners will need to take to implement this strategy. We will focus on co-production ensuring autistic people, their families, carers and the people important to them are at the centre of delivery.

The All Age Autism Partnership Board will support the implementation of the strategy. The board and its members will all play an active role in delivering the strategy to ensure its longevity and success. The board is made up of people with lived experience, carers, staff from the council, NHS, Police, the third sector and voluntary organisations.

Representation from adult social care will report to the Telford and Wrekin Integrated Place Partnership on a regular basis outlining progress made and what difference the action plan is making to autistic people and their families and/or carers. This update will also be presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board and Learning Disability and Autism Board. Please see Appendix 2 for governance structure.

How will we know it's working

There is already a lot of good work to support autistic people in Telford and Wrekin but we know this can be challenging at times with limited resources across health and social care as we continue to recover from the Covid pandemic in the borough.

We will continue to monitor our development, progress and impact of this strategy and our action plan, with our partners, to ensure we are delivering and supporting individuals, carers/families within the borough. This will be monitored with support from the All Age Autism Partnership Board and its governance structure.

Looking to the future

During the time of the pre-engagement consultation that informed the development of this adults strategy the National Autism strategy had advanced into an All-age autism strategy. Whilst completing our pre-engagement consultation and our strategy consultation we were, and continue to be mindful of the 'all age' changes the national strategy. It is the aspirations of Telford and Wrekin Council and its partners that this adults focused strategy develops further with Children's Services, Special Educational Needs (with Disabilities) and education partners into an all age autism strategy.

Our all-age Autism partnership board, is run and delivered in partnership with CVS; the adults and children's Autism Hub's, is already supporting an all age agenda with key organisations already around the table working together to make Telford and Wrekin a more autism inclusive community. However, we know we need to do more. Further consultation with children, young people, carers, professionals and services etc. across the borough is still needed to compliment and enhance the developments already taking place in children's and younger peoples services, including education. A separate consultation would produce a range of responses that may have been lost if completed at this time.

We recognise the alignment that will be needed and over time, once a further consultation has taken place, the feedback from children, young people, parents, carers, professionals and partners etc. can be captured and a true all age autism strategy can be developed.

Appendix 1 – National Law, Policy and Guidance

2009 – Autism Act

Campaigning resulted in recognition of a gap in service provision. This led to the Autism Act 2009 and subsequent strategy and statutory guidance. The Autism Act 2009 www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/15/contents was the first autism specific legislation issued by central government placing duties on local authorities and clinical commissioning groups to implement local strategies.

2010 – Autism Strategy – Fulfilling & Rewarding Lives

The Autism Strategy 2010 www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/15/section/1 laid clear the requirement for people to be recognised for being individuals where someone's experience of autism may not be the same as someone else's, that reasonable adjustments to support access to the community, work and social activities would mobilise people, awareness would ensure people around them would understand and accept them and support from public services would be timely and co-ordinated.

2014 – Autism Strategy (revision) – Think Autism

The initial vision of Fulfilling & Rewarding Lives still remained and Think Autism added to it. It shared a full implementation which was key to meeting the vision. With it came the Innovation Fund.

2014 – Care Act

The Care Act 2014 www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/23/contents/enacted quantified national eligibility criteria. A duty to provide preventative care and a duty of assessments to be carried out by someone with autism expertise – Care & Support (Assessment) Regulations) 2014.

2015 – Building the right Support Transforming Care Partnerships

This strategy placed responsibilities on local health and social care systems to ensure the whole spectrum of services from hospital to home were considered in strategic planning across systems, making it clear that hospital was not home for those learning-disabled people with complex needs, including those with a mental health condition in in-patient facilities.

2021 – NHS Long Term Plan

The Long Term Plan sets out action to ensure patients get the care they need, fast through closer alignment of services, proactive care and support upfront to relieve pressure on A&Es.

2021 – National All-Age Autism Strategy

The National Strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 – 2026 www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-strategy-for-autistic-children-young-people-and-adults-2021-to-2026/the-national-strategy-for-autistic-children-young-people-and-adults-2021-to-2026 is the latest document which follows 6 themes which can be measured and evaluated; understanding and acceptance, improving access to education and positive transitions, employment, tackling health inequalities, building the right support and inpatient care and improving support within the criminal and youth justice systems.

Supporting Local Partnerships and Strategies

- Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin Long Term Plan
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy, 2020-2025
- Telford & Wrekin Integrated Place Partnership Strategic Plan, 2020-2022
- Telford & Wrekin's Making it Real Board
- Telford & Wrekin Council Plan
- Telford & Wrekin Community Safety Strategy, 2017-2019
- Telford & Wrekin Safeguarding multi-agency safeguarding arrangements
- Specialist Housing and Accommodation policy
- Market Position Statement