

Scrutiny Health & Social Care Sub-Committee Agenda



To: Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Chair), Councillor Richard Chatterjee (Vice-Chair), Pat Clouder, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Steve Hollands, Andrew Pelling and Gordon Kay

Reserve Members: Jan Buttinger, Patsy Cummings, Clive Fraser, Toni Letts and Helen Redfern

A meeting of the **Scrutiny Health & Social Care Sub-Committee** which you are hereby summoned to attend, will be held on **Tuesday, 9 March 2021** at **6.30 pm**. This meeting will be held remotely.

Jacqueline Harris Baker
Council Solicitor & Monitoring Officer
London Borough of Croydon
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www.croydon.gov.uk/meetings
Monday, 1 March 2021

Members of the public are welcome to view the webcast both live and after the meeting has completed at <http://webcasting.croydon.gov.uk>

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If you require any assistance, please contact Simon Trevaskis 02087266000 as detailed above.

AGENDA – PART A

1. Apologies for Absence

To receive any apologies for absence from any members of the Committee.

2. Disclosure of Interests

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct and the statutory provisions of the Localism Act, Members and co-opted Members of the Council are reminded that it is a requirement to register disclosable pecuniary interests (DPIs) and gifts and hospitality to the value of which exceeds £50 or multiple gifts and/or instances of hospitality with a cumulative value of £50 or more when received from a single donor within a rolling twelve month period. In addition, Members and co-opted Members are reminded that unless their disclosable pecuniary interest is registered on the register of interests or is the subject of a pending notification to the Monitoring Officer, they are required to disclose those disclosable pecuniary interests at the meeting. This should be done by completing the Disclosure of Interest form and handing it to the Democratic Services representative at the start of the meeting. The Chair will then invite Members to make their disclosure orally at the commencement of Agenda item 3. Completed disclosure forms will be provided to the Monitoring Officer for inclusion on the Register of Members' Interests.

3. Urgent Business (if any)

To receive notice of any business not on the agenda which in the opinion of the Chair, by reason of special circumstances, be considered as a matter of urgency.

4. Update on the Croydon Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic

For the Sub-Committee to receive an update on the ongoing response in Croydon to the Covid-19 Pandemic, including progress made on the vaccination programme.

A presentation will be given at the meeting, with the slides published shortly before the meeting, to ensure the information provided is as up to date as possible.

5. Croydon's Autism Strategy 2021-24 (Pages 5 - 44)

For the Sub-Committee to consider an early draft of Croydon's Autism Strategy 2021-24, with a view to providing feedback that can be taken into account during the preparation of the final version.

6. Update from Healthwatch Croydon

For the Sub-Committee to receive a verbal update on the activities of the Healthwatch Croydon, from the Healthwatch Croydon Manager, Gordon Kay.

7. Exclusion of the Press and Public

The following motion is to be moved and seconded where it is proposed to exclude the press and public from the remainder of a meeting:

“That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information falling within those paragraphs indicated in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended.”

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REPORT TO:	Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee 9 th March 2021
SUBJECT:	Croydon's Autism Strategy 2021-24 – work in progress / draft
LEAD OFFICER:	Annette McPartland, Director of Operations, Adult Social Care
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr Janet Campbell, Cabinet Members for Families, Health and Social Care
PUBLIC/EXEMPT:	Public

<p>POLICY CONTEXT/AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON:</p> <p>Include here a brief statement on how the recommendations address one or more of the Council's priorities:</p> <p>Corporate Plan for Croydon 2018-2022</p> <p>The recommendations here address all aspects of life for autistic people, and therefore cover both of our most significant priorities. These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will live within our means, balance the books and provide value for money for our residents. • We will focus on providing the best quality core service we can afford. First and foremost, providing social care services that keep our most vulnerable residents safe and healthy. And to keep our streets clean and safe.
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ORIGIN OF ITEM:	Policy development is a key part of the role of Scrutiny and this report has been provided to allow the Sub-Committee to feed into the development of Croydon's Autism Strategy.
BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE:	To note the draft Autism Strategy, provide feedback, comments and suggestions to the author, and to ask any questions prior to the finalising, approval and publication of the Strategy.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This is an early, incomplete draft of what will become Croydon's first all-age, multi-agency Autism Strategy. This is not a statutory document but producing and implementing an Autism Strategy is commonplace and considered to be good practice.
- 1.2. This is a multi-agency strategy, not just a Croydon Council one. We have worked closely with health bodies, especially, and other partners to ensure that as many key players as possible in the lives of autistic people are signatories to this document.

- 1.3. The document is designed to be able to be read by the majority of members of the public, not just autistic people or professionals. Ultimately we aim to raise awareness and understanding of autism, and improve our support to autistic residents, across the borough.
- 1.4. It is very important that this document is viewed as the unapproved, incomplete draft which it is. No organisations named in the document have yet formally signed up to the content, as this will happen once the document is nearing completion. This document does not necessarily (yet) represent policy or direction of travel for any organisation mentioned within at present.

2. Croydon's Autism Strategy 2021-24 – work in progress / draft

The as-yet incomplete, draft strategy is included as an Appendix to this document.

Background

- 2.1. Croydon's work on Autism is led by our Autism Partnership Board. This is an invitational body which contains several autistic members; parents and carers of autistic residents; and a wide variety of professionals from across Croydon's key organisations. The board is chaired by Cllr Jerry Fitzpatrick, Borough Autism Champion.
- 2.2. In the past, it is fair to say that Croydon's reputation for supporting autistic people has not been great, and the Autism Partnership Board was formed around two and a half years ago partly to address this known weakness, and partly to work better across agencies and with our autistic residents themselves.
- 2.3. The role of Autism Inclusion Lead was created as a secondment to (amongst other things) create and oversee the delivery of this strategy, and the incumbent and author of this report started in post in June 2020.
- 2.4. We began the process of putting the strategy together by carrying out an Equalities Impact Assessment, creating draft priorities, and carrying out a six-week public consultation via the council website. In total we have consulted with well over 500 people in creating this document.
- 2.5. Throughout the process, we have been supported and advised by our Working Party group – comprised mainly of volunteer members of the public, who are either autistic or parents / carers of those who are, as well as a small number of relevant professionals from Croydon Council, Croydon Mencap, etc. (To note: the author is a trustee of Croydon Mencap.)
- 2.6. The document has thus far gone through three significant iterations, this being the third. Scrutiny members will clearly see that there are sections yet to be completed and this is being worked on daily. The timing of the meeting, though, ensures that scrutiny members have the opportunity to provide meaningful input into the document before it is completed and agreed.

Issues

- 3.1 We have worked throughout on the basis that no additional financial commitments should be made that were not already in place, and that where possible, we should look for opportunities to work more efficiently.
- 3.2 This is made more complex by a growing autistic population locally, and across London. It is impossible to know precisely how many autistic people there are in Croydon, or any other borough; but we know from diagnosis figures, research and demand for services that there has been a significant increase in numbers of known autistic people in recent years.
- 3.3 We have continually been awaiting the publication of a new national Autism Strategy throughout this process. Initially this was due around a year ago; it now appears that there may not be an entirely new strategy, but rather a refresh of the previous one from 2011. If a new national strategy is published, we will need to consider whether our local strategy needs revising as a result.
- 3.4 We continue to work hard to re-gain the trust of members of our autistic community, many of whom felt that they had been left behind and not supported as well as they could have been by public bodies in the borough.

Options

- 4.1 No other options were considered, as there was considerable support and demand for the production of an Autism Strategy.

Recommendations and Next Steps

- 5.1 Scrutiny members are asked to note the content of the draft strategy; to consider and raise any questions or suggestions they may have, either about the content of the document or about autism itself; and to consider in their day-to-day dealings how they can help support and include residents and co-workers who are, or may be, autistic.

CONTACT OFFICER: **Kevin Oakhill, Autism Inclusion Lead**
 kevin.oakhill@croydon.gov.uk

APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT

1. Draft Autism Strategy v3.0 (this is a work-in-progress).

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An autism-friendly Croydon

Croydon's Autism Strategy 2021-24

A partnership strategy

Logos here of participating organisations, e.g.

CROYDON
www.croydon.gov.uk

Introduction

An introduction here from one or two senior leaders, chairs or councillors from across the Partnership. Include photos.

What is autism, and how can we help autistic people?

Every autistic person is different, but one thing that they almost all share is that their day-to-day life is harder because they are autistic. Autism is what's called a neurological disorder – put simply, the brain is wired differently to other people - and because society is made up mainly of people who aren't autistic, things are often accidentally made harder for autistic people.

Autism isn't a condition which can be treated or cured. This doesn't mean that an autistic person will always experience things in the same way, though. In fact, autistic people often experience huge variations from day to day in their ability to interact with others and to function "normally". Many autistic people are also able to "mask" – this means that they can appear to fit in with society or to be OK, but it is likely to be very tiring for them and use a great deal of effort to keep doing this.

Autistic people are also much more likely to have other medical conditions than most people, and those who do face multiple barriers to being accepted and to functioning from day to day.

There are simple, mainly cost-free things which the public, employers and those working and interacting with autistic people can do, which will help the majority of autistic people. These include:

- Not making loud or unexpected noises
- Not using bright or harsh artificial lighting – autistic people are frequently sensitive to what's called sensory input, which can include light, sound and smells
- Explaining things simply and clearly, but without being patronising
- Maintaining a routine and trying as hard as possible not to change this unnecessarily. For a lot of autistic people, having a clear routine each day or each week gives them a sense of being in control of their life.
- Making sure that signposts and instructions are clear and obvious in public places, such as hospitals, schools and colleges or railway stations
- Not forcing autistic people to do things they don't want to do because "everyone else is doing it." Everyone else probably isn't autistic!
- Avoiding unnecessary physical contact if you don't know someone well. Some autistic people do not like to be touched and need their personal space to feel safe.

- **Having at least a basic understanding of what autism is, by undertaking autism awareness and understanding training**
- **Treating autistic people like human beings and believing what they say. Autistic people, even those who are non-verbal, will communicate their views and needs to others – listening and understanding is the best way of all to help.**

Many public organisations, including a lot of the partners in this strategy such as the NHS and local councils, also have legal responsibilities or duties to provide certain types of support to autistic people. Some of these are responsibilities which relate to everyone, but where they must consider if autistic people need to be supported differently due to their autism. Others are specific requirements to support autistic people. A list of some of these duties is included at Appendix X.

About this strategy

In Croydon we want everyone to be able to live a happy and productive life. For our 8-11,000 autistic residents and their families this is often harder, but we can all help to change this.

Every autistic person is different. Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC), as it is also known, means there are differences in how people communicate, process and understand information, and interact with the world around them.

A lot of the challenges faced by autistic people happen because there is a lack of understanding of autism in our society; and because the world is made up mostly of people who aren't autistic, it is not designed for those who are. We want as many people as possible to understand what autism is, and for them to help us to make society and services include autistic people as much as possible. We will also need some services which are designed specifically to help autistic people.

This strategy isn't just about autistic people, or just about autism. Most of all we want businesses, professionals and the public to think more about autism, and the simple changes that they can make without lots of time or cost, which will help autistic people – but will also help lots of other people as well. By understanding autism more, we can make Croydon a better place to live for everyone, and make the most of the talents and potential of our autistic residents.

We want to thank all the people who contributed to this strategy. Special thanks go to everyone who completed our online survey or provided feedback, particularly autistic residents themselves. Thank you, too, to our Autism Working Party, made up of autistic residents, families and carers, who provided guidance and support to help make this happen. And enormous thanks to all of the staff and pupils at Bensham Manor School who helped to make this possible.

You can find out more about autism here ([links](#)).

Who we are

To support our autistic residents, there is a regular meeting called the Autism Partnership Board. This group includes autistic residents; family members and carers; and people who work to support them, such as staff from schools and colleges, council staff, health professionals and many more.

The Autism Partnership Board has helped to develop this strategy. They will also help to create an action plan afterwards, and make sure that over the next three years we do what the strategy and action plan says.

We are very grateful to all of the organisations who have agreed to be named partners in this strategy. We know that no person or organisation on their own can make all of the changes that are needed to help our autistic residents. The first partner organisations are **(all TBC)**:

Croydon College

Croydon Council

Croydon Health Services

South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust

South West London Clinical Commissioning Group

Explanation of each signatory; quotes from key individuals.

If you represent an organisation and would like to join us in this work, please use the contact detail at the end of the document. We would be delighted to add more organisations to our partnership.

Executive Summary of recommendations

Over the next pages of the document, we will look at lots of different things, from health to education to care in old age, which are likely to form part of an autistic person's life. Each page looks in more detail at one area, with some more detailed recommendations. However, some things we will do cross several of these areas, or are particularly important. These are some of the most important commitments which we will make to help our autistic residents.

- **We will raise awareness and understanding of autism throughout Croydon, via a training and awareness programme offered to professionals, businesses and the public**
- **We will ensure that autistic people are aware of their basic rights, and that public organisations are aware of their duties and responsibilities which relate to autistic people**
- **We will improve the pathways for children and adults seeking an autism diagnosis, from first contact through to support after diagnosis**
- **We will seek to provide support as early as possible, and to avoid crisis or meltdown further along, particularly when supporting mental health and wellbeing for autistic people**
- **We will recognise that many autistic people without Learning Disabilities, who do not usually receive services, can still frequently struggle and require support to stay on track**
- **We will recognise that many autistic people have multiple diagnoses, and work to tailor services to meet these needs**
- **We will also recognise that many autistic people face multiple barriers to success, and work to understand and overcome these barriers with them**
- **We will seek to involve autistic people and their families in all major decisions we take relating to autistic people**
- **We will seek to make buildings and public spaces where autistic people regularly go, as autism-friendly as possible**
- **We will produce a detailed action plan, which shows who is in charge of making each of these actions happen, and by when**
- **We will provide updates on our progress annually, and revise the strategy every three years, or earlier if needed.**

Our stories

Every autistic person has their own story to tell. Here are just a small number of stories from our autism community in Croydon, out of the hundreds of people who have told us what autism means to them and their family.

Case studies, photos, TBC – how many? What types?

Real names and photos or stock images and pseudonyms?

Our vision

“Our vision is that Croydon will be a place where autistic people feel welcomed, understood and supported to live happy and productive lives.”

To make this happen, we need to think about every part of a person’s life and dreams, and what will make them happen. We also need to think about rights and responsibilities – what support autistic people should receive, and which organisations should provide this support.

We asked people in the autism community, including families and support workers, what matters to them, and listened carefully to what they said.

We sorted their answers into three categories, which we have split into more detailed sections. These are the priority areas for our Autism Strategy and will help us to meet our aim of being an autism-friendly borough.

Our priority areas

Improving the support we offer

- Early support and intervention
- Education and training
- Health
 - Diagnosis and support
 - Mental health
 - Other health conditions
- Housing
- Social care and getting older
- Work

Improving our community

- Community and social activities
- Improving our information and data
- Raising awareness and understanding of autism
- Safe public spaces and autism-friendly environments

Improving equality

- Supporting BAME autistic residents
- Co-production – listening to the autistic voice
- Supporting autistic people without Learning Difficulties
- Supporting parents and carers
- Supporting women and girls who are autistic
- Supporting LGBTQ+ autistic people

Early support and intervention

PRIORITY 1: AUTISTIC CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES SHOULD BE SUPPORTED SO THAT THEIR NEEDS ARE UNDERSTOOD AND MET AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE



The right support early in someone's life can make a huge difference to their development as they get older.

Young autistic children should have their needs identified as early as possible, and be given the most appropriate health and educational support to meet these needs.

You said:

"The assessment time is too long. That's (key time for) early intervention lost."

"More support for early years staff and health visitors please"

We will:

- Improve the autism diagnosis pathway for children, following a recent review
- Continue and expand our delivery of the Autism Education Trust early years training programme
- Look at early interventions across health organisations, to prevent greater support needs later in childhood
- Provide clear information online about what support is available at what stage

Education and training

PRIORITY 2: AUTISTIC RESIDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO ATTEND SUITABLE EDUCATION OR TRAINING, IN AN ENVIRONMENT THAT IS APPROPRIATE FOR THEM AND THEIR PEERS



All autistic children and young adults under 25 with an Education, Health and Care Plan have the right to an appropriate education or training placement.

Autistic people and their families should have a strong voice in what this placement looks like, and it should focus on developing their skills, knowledge and independence as they grow up.

You said:

“Teach (all pupils) understanding of autism from an early age”

“Schools should celebrate Autism Awareness Week”

“Ensure schools are inclusive and have sufficient SEND training.”

We will:

- Work with all of our schools to improve staff and pupils’ understanding of autism
- Look to expand our Autism Education Trust training programme, with the aim of training primary, secondary school and college staff in autism awareness and understanding
- Continue the development of our special schools to better cater for autistic pupils locally
- Seek to develop Supported Internships and other work-related training courses in Croydon

Health - Introduction

PRIORITY 3: AUTISTIC RESIDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO ACCESS HEALTH SERVICES WHICH MEET THEIR NEEDS AND CAN ADAPT TO SUPPORT THEM



There is nothing more important for autistic people than their health and wellbeing. That's why this section has a number pages looking at different health needs.

We want all autistic people to be able to access the support and treatment that they need, in a way that works for them, but also to think about their wellbeing more generally to avoid crises, and the need for emergency medical support.

You said:

"Many people with ASD...might feel they can't go to a GP or will feel nervous about going"

"I sometimes have to wait ages at the hospital"

We will:

- Work to make clinical settings, particularly Croydon's Emergency Department and doctors' surgeries, more autism-friendly
- Train more staff in autism awareness and understanding
- Work to improve our data about autistic patients so that we can treat each person in the most appropriate way for them – including a digital "flag" for autistic patients
- Listen to autistic people and their views when we commission and develop health services
- Wait for the outcome of a national pilot on a health check for autistic patients, and consider doing this locally

Health – Diagnosis and support

PRIORITY 3a: AUTISTIC RESIDENTS, OR THOSE WHO THINK THEY MAY BE, SHOULD BE ABLE TO ACCESS A QUICK DIAGNOSIS, AND CLEAR INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROCESS AND SUPPORT AVAILABLE AFTERWARDS



When an individual or their family thinks they may be autistic, they should be able to quickly understand what their diagnostic and support options are, and what to do next.

There needs to be a full and clear “diagnostic pathway” – not just the process of being diagnosed, but clear support and information about what happens after someone has been diagnosed as autistic.

You said:

“Early diagnosis (or) provide official support without diagnosis”
“Shorter waiting times for diagnosis”

We will:

- Improve the diagnostic pathway for children (see early years section above)
- Introduce a multi-borough adult diagnostic pathway, working with Lambeth and Lewisham, to offer a better service
- Review the changes to both the children and adult pathways to make sure that they are working well
- Set clear targets in our action plan for diagnosis times, with a view to making the process quicker
- Provide clear information about what to expect from the process
- Consider how use of technology can make diagnosis easier for some autistic people

Mental health

PRIORITY 3b: AUTISTIC RESIDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO ACCESS MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT TAILORED TO THEIR NEEDS, INCLUDING EARLY SUPPORT TO PREVENT CRISIS



Autistic people are more than three times as likely to have mental health problems than neurotypical people.

Mental health services need to take into account the particular needs of autistic patients. They also need to consider what early support is available to help people as mental health problems start, to avoid greater problems or even crises later on.

You said:

“I would like to see mental health services (be) more accessible”
“There should be autism champions in mental health teams”

We will:

- Support mental health professionals to improve their understanding and awareness of autism
- Consider what early support for autistic people – particularly those without learning disabilities – might reduce the need for crisis support later
- Think about how the buildings which house mental health services can be as friendly and accessible as possible for autistic service users
- Consider how the use of technology can support mental health services (for some autistic people, not all)

Health - other related health conditions

PRIORITY 3c: AUTISTIC RESIDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO ACCESS SUPPORT WHICH ALSO MEETS THEIR OTHER MEDICAL NEEDS



Many autistic people also have other conditions or medical needs. Just as a few examples, autistic people are more likely to be dyslexic or dyscalculic, and have ADHD, epilepsy or a number of other diagnoses than neurotypical people.

Autistic people are much more than just their medical needs. But the best support for any individual needs to take into account all of their requirements: a one-size-fits-all approach won't work for autistic people any more than it does for anyone else.

You said:

"ASD is not the cause of all problems (even when you have) the diagnosis"

"Nothing seems to be available to support (someone) with Autism, Epilepsy, ADD (and more)".

We will:

- Train staff to understand not just about autistic people, but also autistic people with additional conditions
- Look to understand more about commonly co-occurring diagnoses amongst our autism community, so that we can support them better
- Listen carefully to autistic people and their families, to understand what their conditions mean for them in practice

Housing and accommodation

PRIORITY 4: AUTISTIC RESIDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO LIVE IN SUITABLE ACCOMMODATION WHICH MEETS THEIR OWN NEEDS.



A stable and calm home environment is very important for autistic people. It is also important for their family or carers.

Autistic people should have the same level of choice about where they live as everyone else does. Some people will want to live on their own; some people with friends, family or partners. But everyone should have a say in where they live and who they live with.

You said:

“There (is little) supported accommodation to support adults with autism if they don’t have a learning disability”

“More and better housing opportunities please”

“I don’t want to live with my parents forever.”

We will:

- Work with housing providers to offer autism awareness and understanding training for their staff
- Look at our offer of Supported Housing and Supported Living accommodation locally to see if it is meeting the needs of autistic residents
- Work with autistic people as we commission housing services for autistic people
- Consider the wishes of autistic people, as far as is possible, when making any housing placement

Social Care and getting older

PRIORITY 5: AUTISTIC RESIDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO ACCESS APPROPRIATE SOCIAL CARE, AND UNDERSTAND HOW THEY WILL BE SUPPORTED AS THEY GET OLDER



There is an increasing number of older autistic people. In previous generations, most of these people would not have been identified as autistic, or would not have been expected to live as long and healthy a life as they are able to now.

Of course, this is a very good thing. But we need to ensure that there is social care and support which can meet the needs of this group, and that people understand how they will be cared for in their later years.

You said:

“(Think more about) needs that relate to people ageing with autism, particularly as support networks such as parents age and become less accessible”

“More support and training for social care workers”

We will:

- Seek to understand how many older autistic residents we have locally, and what their needs are likely to be
- Include autism as a specific category when commissioning care services locally
- Review our offer of specialist care support for autistic people with the highest level of need
- Ensure commissioners work with autistic people and their families to understand more about how to make our care services as inclusive as possible for autistic people
- Consider the possible impact of likely under-diagnosis amongst older autistic people

Work

PRIORITY 6: AUTISTIC RESIDENTS SHOULD BE SUPPORTED TO WORK OR VOLUNTEER IF POSSIBLE, AND TO BE UNDERSTOOD AND SUPPORTED IN THEIR WORKPLACE



We know that only 16% of autistic adults across the country are in full-time employment, and that over two-thirds are not in any paid employment, but also that the vast majority want to work.

Autistic adults should be able to gain the skills and training they need, and support to access appropriate jobs. We also need to work with local employers to understand the significant contribution which autistic employees can make, as well as support they may need.

You said:

“Support into meaningful employment – opportunities to do more skilled work and not just shelf-filling or cleaning!”

“Access to work opportunities after school”

“It is hard for people with autism to get voluntary or paid work”

We will:

- Offer autism awareness and understanding training to local employers
- Support employers to develop Autism Champions in the workplace, and develop an Autism Pledge for employers
- Provide and promote case studies of autistic people who have successfully transitioned into work, and share these widely
- Review our offer of job-related training for autistic adults, including Inclusive Apprenticeships
- Work with autistic adults to develop the training which they want and need

Community and social activities

PRIORITY 7: AUTISTIC RESIDENTS SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO APPROPRIATE COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES, WHETHER OR NOT THESE ARE WITH OTHER AUTISTIC PEOPLE



It is hugely important that everyone should be able to feel like they are part of their community, and be able to take part in activities that they enjoy.

There should be a clear programme of activities aimed at autistic residents, but also better understanding of autism more generally so that autistic people can be supported to access any community activities taking place in Croydon.

You said:

“There are not enough clubs available for the autistic community within Croydon”

“I’m an adult with autism and I’ve no idea what’s available to me.”

We will:

- Provide a directory of services which will include community and social activities for autistic people, to make sure people are aware of everything on offer
- Seek to make as many other community groups and activities as possible – particularly those funded by our organisations – mindful and inclusive of our autistic residents.
- Promote the excellent work done in this area by our community and voluntary sector as widely as possible
- Consider how to use technology in a way which promotes community, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic

Improving our information and data

PRIORITY 8: WE WILL IMPROVE HOW WE COLLECT, SHARE AND USE DATA TO UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT OUR AUTISTIC RESIDENTS



We know too little about our autistic residents because the data and information which we have is incomplete. Some of this is a national issue – autism information is often wrongly placed together with mental health or learning disability. We also often don't know much about autistic residents who aren't accessing any services.

However, we can do more to improve what we do locally. Public organisations, particularly, should work together better to help us understand and support autistic residents more effectively.

You said:

"Information should be centralised so there's equality of access."

We will:

- Consider how we can use data better within, and across our organisations (without breaking data protection laws).
- Expand the membership of our Autism Data Group, reporting to the Autism Partnership Board, to make this happen
- Use our improved data to be able to commission more effective services
- Flag in NHS data when patients are diagnosed or declare that they are autistic – see health section above
- Keep all residents informed about what we're using data for and why

Raising awareness and understanding of autism

PRIORITY 9: WE WANT EVERYONE ACROSS CROYDON, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO COME INTO REGULAR CONTACT WITH AUTISTIC PEOPLE, TO UNDERSTAND AUTISM BETTER



To really make Croydon more autism-friendly, we need as many people in our community as possible to understand more about what autism is, and how their actions might affect autistic residents.

Basic information and training should be available for all residents, and businesses, so that more people are aware of, and understand, our autistic community.

You said:

“Consider more community awareness promotions”

“Train people to understand autism, not just be aware of it”

We will:

- Encourage our schools to speak with pupils about what autism is, not just undertake training for staff
- Provide information and / or web links on our website about autism, and autism in Croydon
- Offer autism awareness and understanding training to residents and businesses
- Publicise the launch of our strategy widely, including on our websites
- Encourage organisations to appoint Autism Champions
- Look to create an autism homepage on the Croydon Council website

Safe public spaces and autism-friendly environments

PRIORITY 10: AUTISTIC RESIDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO ACCESS SAFE PUBLIC SPACES, AND BUILDINGS WHICH TAKE ACCOUNT OF THEIR NEEDS



Being out in noisy, busy public places can sometimes be very challenging for autistic people.

Autistic people need safe spaces and quiet places where they can get away from crowds when they need to. There are also simple changes which can be made to the layout of public areas and buildings, which can help make it easier for autistic people to feel comfortable.

You said:

“More places to go, more accessibility, safe spaces”

“Croydon is so loud. Can there be somewhere we can escape to calm down?”

We will:

- Ask our community if they can provide safe, quiet spaces where autistic people can go if they need a break
- Provide basic guidance on ways to improve buildings, layouts, etc, so that they are more helpful for autistic people
- Think about the buildings and sites which our own organisations operate, and what more we can do to make them autism-friendly
- Lead by example – think more about what else our own organisations can do to be more inclusive for autistic staff and visitors

Supporting BAME autistic residents

PRIORITY 11: AUTISTIC RESIDENTS FROM BAME COMMUNITIES SHOULD NOT HAVE TO FACE ANY ADDITIONAL BARRIERS IN RELATION TO ANY OF THESE PRIORITIES



We know from our survey, and many other discussions, that autistic people from our BAME communities can face multiple barriers to accessing the support that they and their families need.

It is vital that we identify issues that make accessing support more difficult for BAME autistic residents and their families and carers, and work together to give every resident the best chance to achieve their goals.

You said:

“Being BAME and with two disabled children I get disempowered at every request”

“Why are the needs of black boys not addressed earlier?”

We will:

- Be open about recognising that autistic people from BAME backgrounds face additional challenges that we need to meet
- Listen specifically to BAME residents who are autistic, or their families and carers, to understand more about any additional barriers which they face, and what needs to be done
- Lobby for more research to be done on this subject – there is very limited information about BAME groups and autism currently and needs to be more
- Tackle both direct and indirect discrimination
- Seek to ensure that our workforces are representative of the communities which we serve, including both autistic and BAME voices

Co-production – working alongside autistic people to develop services

PRIORITY 12: AUTISTIC RESIDENTS SHOULD BE CONSULTED ABOUT, AND WHEREVER POSSIBLE CO-PRODUCE, SERVICES FOR AUTISTIC PEOPLE



Autistic people, and their families, are best placed to understand what they need and want from public services.

All organisations who run services for autistic people should work with our autistic community to develop or review these services. We should also include autistic residents when developing other services, to make sure that they are accessible and autism-friendly.

You said:

“This is very important.”

“(Yes), as long as consultation is with a wide demographic.”

We will:

- Use our Autism Working Party meetings as a way for commissioners to discuss planned changes to services with autistic residents and their families
- Look to co-produce services with autistic residents wherever possible
- Look at our sub-contracts, and ensure that our contractors are being inclusive and supportive of autistic residents
- Regularly review the effectiveness of our services, with our service users, including autistic residents
- Seek to make mainstream services as inclusive and autism-friendly as possible

Supporting autistic people without Learning Disabilities

PRIORITY 13: AUTISTIC RESIDENTS WITHOUT LEARNING DISABILITIES SHOULD BE ABLE TO HAVE THEIR NEEDS CONSIDERED AND MET, EVEN IF THEY ARE NOT ACCESSING AUTISM SERVICES.



Around 30% of autistic people also have learning disabilities. The majority do not, but there is less support available for this group of people, both in Croydon and across the country.

We need to think specifically about what will make life easier for this large group of our autistic residents. Many will be living independently, and will not be accessing public services related to autism. There are simple changes and improvements we can make which will benefit the majority of autistic people.

You said:

“People only pay attention to (those) with a visible need.”

“People (often) don’t recognise the difficulties of high functioning folk and...judge them to be dismissive, rude or shy”

We will:

- Think about all autistic people when creating our directory of services, and not only list services which are just for autistic people
- Seek to be inclusive first – think about how we can make all services accessible to autistic people whenever possible, rather than creating a separate pathway
- Aim to create a borough where autistic people do not feel marginalised or uncomfortable
- Look to build an online community for autistic residents
- Use our data improvements to enable bids for external funding to support this group

Supporting parents and carers

PRIORITY 14: PARENTS AND CARERS OF AUTISTIC RESIDENTS SHOULD BE SUPPORTED WITH THEIR OWN HEALTH AND WELLBEING, AS WELL AS WITH THE NEEDS OF THEIR CHILDREN.



Parents and carers have told us, both through our survey and from wider conversations, that they need more support with their own health and wellbeing.

We need to recognise the significant contribution made by parents and carers, but also understand more about what will help them to look after their children, and look after themselves.

You said:

“Speak to parents and carers regularly, not just as a one-off.”

“There is very little support for parents during the (diagnostic process)”.

“It is vital that families of those with autism are supported.”

We will:

- Be as clear as possible about processes and support available, particularly in the Early Years and Primary phases when the majority of diagnosis takes place.
- Provide access to groups, online and face to face, for parents to meet and discuss autism and parenting
- Sign-post people to national support if we are unable to provide it locally

Supporting autistic women and girls

PRIORITY 15: THE NEEDS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH AUTISM SHOULD BE CONSIDERED SPECIFICALLY, GIVEN THAT THEY CAN OFTEN BE VERY DIFFERENT TO THOSE OF AUTISTIC MEN.



Until recently, autism research focussed on men and boys, meaning we know very little about autism in women and girls, although we know it can present very differently. This means that autism remains under-diagnosed in women and girls.

As a result of this, we need to think differently about how we support autistic women and girls, and whether specific support or changes would help us be more inclusive for them.

You said:

"We need different early interventions for girls."

"What provision is there for higher attaining girls?"

"Autism is often diagnosed late in girls...and the support is geared more to boys and men."

"Professionals often have a limited view of autism (in this respect)."

We will:

- Speak to autistic women and their families, to understand better how their needs may be different from autistic men
- Use this information to think about what changes may need to be made to our services or information available
- Consider whether our autism training accurately reflects what we know about autistic women
- Revise our local projections about the number of autistic female residents, based on new national data

Supporting LGBTQ+ autistic residents

PRIORITY 16: WE WILL SEEK TO UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT THE NEEDS OF AUTISTIC PEOPLE WHO ARE LGBTQ+, AND OPENLY RECOGNISE THE ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES THAT THEY FACE



We know that a higher percentage of autistic people are part of the LGBTQ+ community than neurotypical people. This is well-known anecdotally but there is increasing research to back this up.

As a result of this, we need to think differently about how we support LGBTQ+ individuals with autism, and how we understand the intersectionality between different communities to ensure that individuals feel accepted and supported.

You said:

This was not initially included as a category in our survey, but has been added as a result of a number of conversations, and an increasing research base.

We will:

- Recognise that autistic people are more likely to identify as homosexual, bi- or pan-sexual, and/ or gender-fluid, and that this may bring additional support needs and challenges
- Work with organisations and individuals supporting the LGBTQ+ communities, to ensure that there is recognition and understanding amongst both groups of the crossover
- Seek to challenge possible infantilisation of autistic people – the perception that autistic people, especially those with LD, may not be aware of their sexuality or gender when this is not the case
- Try to be as open as possible about discussing complex issues like these

Developing awareness and understanding of autism – a core thread running through the strategy

A significant number of the recommendations above relate to improving public awareness and understanding of autism, or expanding training programmes to support staff working with autistic people.

It is important to consider this as one programme of work, rather than trying to devise separate training for each one of the priorities.

One of the first actions from this strategy will be to work on a training and awareness-raising programme, to build confidence and understanding of what autism is, and removing any concerns or myths people may have about autistic people.

We will look to work on this as a partnership across our organisations. We are also likely to want to work with other partners, such as our local voluntary, community and charitable sector.

Ideally all training would be developed and delivered by, or with, autistic people. It may be that for delivery this isn't practical, but it is something we should aim for.

We also need to consider what we have already and not duplicate effort. We deliver the Autism Education Trust training to Early Years / nursery staff across Croydon, and the Council's Autism Service has often delivered training across a variety of settings. We also need to consider a stronger presence on the Internet, including a focal point for the awareness training, and again, it may be that we consider using the Autism Service as a base for this.

What will happen next?

Now that we have agreed this strategy, we must work to make it happen. It is important that there are clear targets in place to deliver our priorities, and that we know which organisation and which people are in charge of each one.

To do this, over the next few months we will develop a more detailed plan, which will explain how we intend to do what we have set out in the strategy.

The Action Plan will have SMART targets – these make it easier for us to tell what will be done, when it will be done by, and who is in charge of making it happen.

The Autism Partnership Board, and the Autism Working Party, will look in more detail at all of the targets, and keep checking to make sure that this work is happening.

To help with the strategy, we have spoken a lot with different groups of people about what autistic people need. We will keep listening to autistic people and their families in the future, so that as things change, we understand if the things our autistic residents need or want have changed as well. We will also make sure that people can give us their view on what we have got right, and what we haven't.

We will keep people updated on how we are getting on with our work, too. We will publish the action plan online when it's ready, and provide annual updates on what has changed as a result of this work.

At the time this is being written, we are expecting a new national strategy about autism to be published by the government. We're not sure exactly when this will be ready but it is expected soon. The last one is called Think Autism, and is from 2011.

If there are major changes in this document, particularly if they affect what we can or must do for autistic people, we may update Croydon's strategy straight away. Otherwise we expect to update it before the strategy's end date, in 2024.

How you can get involved

We would love for you to join us to make this vision a reality, and we need as many people as possible to help.

If you're an autistic person, or a parent or carer, you can consider joining one of our working groups, where your views will help to determine what services for autistic people look like. Or you can get in touch with us, and we can contact you with updates, or invite you to future consultation sessions we may run.

If you're a professional working with autistic people – have you undertaken autism awareness and understanding training? Have your staff done this? And does your department or your organisation have an Autism Champion, helping others to learn more about autistic people and what they can offer? Please get in touch if you'd like to hear or do more.

If you're running or working for a business locally – are your premises as autism-friendly as they could be? Are your staff autism-aware? Again, do you have an Autism Champion who could help and advise other staff if they have queries or concerns? And could you offer anywhere as a safe space for autistic people in the community to drop in if they need one? Again, please get in touch with us if you can help.

And whatever your interest – if you're a member of the Croydon community who just wants to know more, we'd be pleased to hear from you as we develop this work.

Contact details

Appendix 1

Contributors to this strategy

To be completed

Appendix 2

Links to useful information and relevant documents

To be completed

Appendix 3

Glossary of terms used in this strategy

To be completed

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