

CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

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# AUTISM STRATEGY FOR ADULTS IN BIRMINGHAM

2013 – 2016

**HELPING ADULTS WITH AUTISM TO ACHIEVE FULFILLING  
AND REWARDING LIVES**

RAISING AWARENESS TO INFORM, IMPLEMENT AND IMPROVE

## INTRODUCTION



Welcome to Birmingham's first Autism strategy for adults aged 18 and over. The strategy has been developed by the Birmingham Autism Partnership Board (BAPB). The Board is a partnership between health, social care, voluntary sector and people with autism and their families and carers.

Autism is a lifelong neurological disorder affecting the development of the brain, characterised by impairments in social interaction, communication (verbal and non verbal) and imagination. Autism is neither a Learning Disability nor a Mental Health condition in its pure sense. However, autism is known to be strongly associated with the presence of learning disabilities and mental health problems as well as other co-morbidities such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Many people live with autism for their entire life without ever getting a formal diagnosis. Often this is simply because autism has not been widely recognised or understood when they were growing up. For adults, a diagnosis of autism can help to explain why they have always found certain things difficult. Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them.

Up to now there has not been a clear system to support the management of autism within the City. I believe the Autism Act 2009 has produced a clear vision to address this. Therefore I am pleased to be able to deliver the City's first overarching strategy for meeting the needs and delivering better outcomes for those people with the condition and supporting their families living in Birmingham to care for them.

**Councillor Steve Bedser, Cabinet Member for Health & Well Being**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE STRATEGY

The Autism Act of 2009 was brought in by Government in response to an identified gap in provision for adults with Autism. The Act specified that a national strategy be in place by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010. ‘Fulfilling and rewarding lives: the strategy for adults with autism in England’ was published on 3 March 2010, the strategy sets a clear framework for all mainstream services across the public sector to work together for adults with autism.

### The Vision

Birmingham’s Autism Partnership Boards vision is that all people with autism, whatever their age, have the same opportunities as anyone else to live rewarding and fulfilling lives.

There are six main areas in which we intend to deliver progress:

- 1. Implement Training and Raise Awareness**
- 2. Implement Pathways for Diagnosis**
- 3. Improve on Opportunities for Employment & Education**
- 4. Improve Access to Services**
- 5. Improve Transitions from childhood**
- 6. Improve Interactions with the Criminal Justice System**

We want to ensure we are drawing upon resources and skills from local people and communities to create a more inclusive City for people with autism.

### STRATEGY AIMS

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The aim of this strategy is to improve the lives of all those with autism. For some, this means the development and delivery of more effective support that can address significant challenges in communication and health. For others, it means increasing acceptance, respect and support.

**Dr Ashok Roy, Chair, Birmingham Autism Partnership Board**

## 1. RAISING AWARENESS AND IMPROVING TRAINING

A lack of understanding of autism can lead to inappropriate or stereotypical views being held by staff that support people with autism and this can have a negative impact.

Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives makes it clear that the most important step towards improving services for adults with autism is to increase awareness and understanding of autism across all public services.

An autism awareness package is being developed with the core aim that staff are able to identify potential signs of autism and understand how to make reasonable adjustments in their behaviour, communication and service for people with a diagnosis of autism or who display these characteristics.

To improve general awareness of autism we will seek to:

- Ensure that the e-learning programme for autism awareness training is made widely available to as many agencies as possible;
- Provide general autism awareness raising training for staff working in health, social care, community based organisations, housing officers/support staff and retail;
- Provide specialist training for staff working in key roles such as GPs, social workers, health professionals. Ensuring recognition and signposting to the diagnostic pathway;
- Ensure expert level of training (2013/2014) so that all diagnostic assessments are undertaken by professionals who are trained and competent;
- Actively involve people with autism, parents and carers in the development and delivery of the training programme;
- Ensure that autism training and learning opportunities are publicised to health and social care staff and other stakeholders;
- Develop a network of autism co-ordinators/advisors.

## 2. IMPLEMENT PATHWAYS FOR DIAGNOSIS

One of the aims of our strategy is to ensure everybody suspected of having autism has access to the local identification and assessment pathway. It is widely accepted that people with autism have been poorly served in this respect in the past. This has led to people being misdiagnosed and ending up in services that are not appropriate.

A centre known as the Specialist Adult Autism Assessment and Resource Centre (SPARC) will provide specialist assessments and diagnosis for adults with autism or suspected autism and a link to advice and signposting to support services also being developed currently.

The pathway as we envisage it is detailed below -

Step 1 – contact with public sector organisations such as NHS including GPs, social services, and police. Awareness raising at this level should lead to provision of support for people with autism and referral for people whose diagnosis is in doubt

Step 2 – Referral to Mental Health and Learning Disability teams (including psychiatrists and psychologists). This should lead to a further assessment which should help arrive at a diagnosis with advice and support in a majority of cases.

Step 3 – A small proportion of people may still face uncertainties with the diagnosis. A referral to Specialist Adult Autism Assessment and Resource Centre (SPARC) will lead to 3 sessions provided by SPARC as part of the specialist diagnosis and assessment and commencement of a coordinated management plan if necessary.

A person centred needs assessment (examining individual, social and environmental factors) will be required to determine the level of support required by an individual. Individual factors may include mental illnesses, social and communication problems and sensory difficulties and other agreed priority areas such as relationships, occupation and leisure.

### 3. IMPROVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION

The aim is to ensure Birmingham citizens with autism who want to work or receive training are able to access the same employment, education and training opportunities as 'neurotypical' citizens.

Birmingham City Council co-ordinates the Employment Sub-Group of the BAPB where partners, including the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), Autism West Midlands and Birmingham City Council's Disability Employment Service are working together to improve the opportunities for people with autism, who are disadvantaged in the workplace.

To improve education and employment opportunities for people with autism in Birmingham we will seek to:

- Encourage employers to have autism friendly recruitment and retention strategies being aware of the impact poor employment can have on the individual;
- Raise the profile of employment for people with autism and increase their opportunities into paid employment/voluntary work placements;
- Develop an effective pathway, information, advice and signposting service to citizens, their families and carers;
- Autism champions will be encouraged in organisations to support managing work routines, social interactions, job performance and career development to ensure job retention;
- Work to develop knowledge of good local employers. Identifying job roles where people with autism excel, what the person can offer to the employer and vice versa;
- Roll out the E-Learning training package to employers and their employees to help with understanding and awareness raising.

## 4. IMPROVE ACCESS TO SERVICES

Improving access to services and support is a long-term goal and will require a cultural change within public services, ensuring they are reflective and more personalised for adults with autism.

The overall vision is that:

“They (adults with autism) can depend on mainstream public services to treat them fairly as individuals”.

To improve access for people with autism we will seek to:-

- Ensure that service specifications for Mental Health and Learning Disabilities demonstrate how reasonable adjustments for adults with autism will be made;
- Deliver housing related support to help people maintain their tenancy or supported accommodation;
- Enable adults with autism to access personal budgets and direct payments, in line with the assessment of their needs;
- Develop Third sector approaches and access to advocacy services and autism co-ordinators;
- Involve GPs further in the role they can play in high level screening by providing information, training and support;
- Support travel training to help build confidence in using public transport;
- Improve access to Health services such as primary care services, specialist services and health and wellbeing initiatives.

## 5. IMPROVE TRANSITIONS FROM CHILDHOOD

Children with autism and their families/carers should have access to support that helps them to achieve their potential and promote inclusion. Without effective transition planning this support will disappear once people with autism reach adulthood.

Currently transitions in Birmingham includes 17 – 25 year olds with the intention to cover 14 year olds by 2016. Referrals are received from a diverse range of sources with around half coming from the children with disabilities service

The Birmingham Autism Partnership Board and Learning Disabilities Partnership Board are working in partnership and have a transition to adult life group and a newly formed consultation group.

To improve transitions for young people with autism we will seek to:

- Map day opportunities for young people with social care needs;
- Ensure where appropriate, that young people are offered the assistance of a specialist trained advocate;
- Ensure that all professionals are involved in transitions for young people with autism have received appropriate autism training;
- Ensure that children with co existing mental health needs receiving services move seamlessly to adult services;
- Ensure that young people with autism and their families and carers are involved in transition planning;
- Ensure adequate information and signposting;
- Develop a health pathway for mental health needs, GP care and acute health care needs to be in place. A GP will determine if someone has a need for a health assessment.



## 6. IMPROVE INTERACTIONS WITH THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

In December 2012, a report was provided to the Health and Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Birmingham City Council entitled: Adults with Autism and the Criminal Justice System.

The report highlights the worry for families that the autistic person can get in to trouble with the police when they have not done anything wrong. All too often the autistic person will be frightened and stressed and this can be misinterpreted, leading to the police apprehending them.

Currently neither the police, courts or prison services has reliable accessible data on the number of autistic people with whom their organisation interacts.

There appears to be little by way of provision for the adult with autism in law and in the way they are managed through the court process. Specialist support may reduce the burden on the courts and save on the public purse as a consequence.

In response to the Scrutiny report we will:

- Encourage Adults with autism to obtain and carry an Autism West Midlands Attention card
- Staff in each Accident and Emergency unit be provided with the guidance note: dealing with patients with autism
- Front line Police Officers will be trained in autism awareness
- Commission creation of a pathway to develop social skills in autistic offenders

## HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

We want to know what you think about our Autism Strategy 2013 – 2016

Please tell us what you think by visiting:

- Website: <https://www.birminghambeheard.org.uk/>
- Sending us an email to [JointCommissioningTeam@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:JointCommissioningTeam@birmingham.gov.uk)
- Phoning us on 0121 303 3893
- Writing to us at:  
Autism Strategy Consultation  
Freepost RSYS-HKBC-XBLA  
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**Thank you for taking part in our consultation**