

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

POLICY CONTEXT/AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON:

Include here a brief statement on how the recommendations address one or more of the Council's priorities:

[Corporate Plan for Croydon 2018-2022](#)

The recommendations here address all aspects of life for autistic people, and therefore cover both of our most significant priorities. These are:

- 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.

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.

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APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT

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