

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet – 15 September 2025

Report Title

Rotherham All-Age Autism Strategy 2024-2027 Update

Is this a Key Decision, and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No, but it has been included on the Forward Plan

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Ian Spicer, Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health

Report Author(s)

Garry Parvin, Joint Head of Service, Learning Disability and Autism Commissioning, Strategic Commissioning, Adult Care, Housing and Public Health

Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

The report provides Cabinet with an update on the delivery of Rotherham's All Age Autism Strategy 2024-2027, which was adopted by Cabinet on 12 February 2024.

The report sets out:

- Progress by Rotherham Place partners to deliver the ambition set in the All-Age Autism Strategy 2024-2027, which is focused on ensuring services in Rotherham are accessible and inclusive.
- Changes since 2024 in data and prevalence of autism in Rotherham.
- The co-produced priorities for the Strategy and how these have been progressed.
- Plans to embed the voice and experience of autistic people by refreshing the structure of the Rotherham Autism Partnership Board, which will support the delivery of the Strategy and plan for the next iteration of the Strategy.

Recommendations

That Cabinet:

1. Note the progress being made by Place partners to improve the lives of autistic people living and working in Rotherham.

2. Support the recommended proposal for the transformation of Rotherham's Autism Partnership Board, led by Rotherham Parent Carers Forum.
3. Approve the commencement of co-producing the next Rotherham All Age Autism Strategy.

List of Appendices Included

- Appendix 1 Rotherham All Age Autism Strategy 2024 – 2027: Annual Review 2024/25
- Appendix 2: Rotherham All Age Autism Strategy 2024 - 2027: Priorities check in for the delivery plan project
- Appendix 3: Part A – Initial Equality Screening Assessment
- Appendix 4: Part B – Equality Analysis Form
- Appendix 5: Climate Impact Assessment

Background Papers

[Cabinet report: Rotherham All Age Autism Strategy 2024 - 2027](#)

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Rotherham All-Age Autism Strategy 2024-2027 Update

1. Background

- 1.1 Rotherham's All Age Autism Strategy 2024 - 2027 is built on the principles of co-production. It retained the 2020 - 2023 vision:

'You can get a timely diagnosis with support, meet professionals with a good understanding of autism, find services, organisations and employers that make reasonable adjustments when required, and where people can feel safe, aspire and fulfil their potential, be independent, and become a full member of the local community.'

- 1.2 Rotherham's All Age Autism Strategy 2024 - 2027 was co-produced by Rotherham Parent Carers Forum, which provided an invaluable, rich insight for Place partners into the priorities for autistic people living and working in Rotherham.

- 1.3 The Strategy restructured Rotherham's priorities to align to the Rotherham Four Cornerstones – Welcome and Care, Value and Include, Communicate, and Work in Partnership. This was to ensure a golden thread between Children and Young People's Services and Adult Services, as well as Housing.

- 1.4 The priorities were and continue to be:

1. **Welcome and Care** - Support young people with care and support needs to prepare for adulthood.
2. **Value and Include** - Tackling health and care inequalities for autistic people and provide more opportunities for care and support closer to home.
3. **Communicate** - Provide accessible information and advice to support making informed choices.
4. **Work in Partnership** - Support more people to enjoy a positive experience of working or volunteering and increase housing options.

Finally, all priorities were to be underpinned by the foundation of co-production.

- 1.5 The Strategy was published on Rotherham Council's website alongside an easy-read version. An annual audit was completed in January 2025 to review progress against the delivery of the priorities, and this is covered in section 2.1.

2. Key Issues

This section of the report sets out the work being undertaken by Place Partners to implement Rotherham's All Age Autism Strategy 2024 – 2027.

This section highlights progress made, the changes in Rotherham's autistic population as well as challenges in relation to national programmes of work, and the NHS re-organisation.

2.1 Our Rotherham Place partners are:

- Rotherham Council (RMBC)
- Rotherham Place, South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (SY ICB)
- Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber NHS Foundation Trust (RDASH)
- The Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust (TRFT)
- Primary Care Networks (PCNs)
- Voluntary Action Rotherham (VAR)
- Voluntary and community groups.

2.2 **Progress since February 2024:**

In January 2025, Rotherham Place partners were asked to provide updates on the work being undertaken to implement Rotherham's All Age Autism Strategy. A comprehensive report was compiled and is attached as Appendix 1. The summary of progress and impact across the health and care system is as follows:

2.3 ***Welcome and Care: Support young people with care and support needs to prepare for adulthood.***

- Expansion of the Promoting Inclusion and Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) Project: Rotherham has joined the *Promoting Inclusion and Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS)* project, which is now being implemented in 10 primary education settings across the Borough. The project aims to build the knowledge, confidence, and skills of teachers and support staff to better support neurodiverse pupils, including autistic children. The Department for Education (DfE) has confirmed that the PINS project will be extended nationally until March 2026, providing an opportunity for sustained impact and learning within participating schools.
- Relaunch of the Rotherham Neurodevelopmental Pathway and Development of the Rotherham SEND Hub: Rotherham has relaunched its Neurodevelopmental Pathway, which provides assessment and support for children and young people aged 5–18 who may have neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism or ADHD. The pathway focuses on meeting needs regardless of a formal diagnosis and takes a holistic approach to support. Where appropriate, referrals may be made to other services, such as CAMHS, for mental health support.
- In parallel, preparations are underway for the opening of the Rotherham SEND Hub, a joint initiative between Rotherham Parent Carers Forum and Rotherham Council. The Hub will be based at the Eric Manns Building in Rotherham Town Centre and is designed to be an inclusive and welcoming space that reflects the diverse needs of the SEND community.

2.4 **Value and Include:** *Tackling health and care inequalities for autistic people and providing more opportunities for care and support closer to home.*

- At the 31 March 2024 most assessments and diagnosis were completed within 18 months. The original target set was to reduce this significantly to less than 18 weeks. Rotherham Doncaster and South Humber NHS FT (RDaSH) is committed to reducing waiting times for autism assessments further to a maximum of four weeks by 2026, as part of its regional improvement ambitions.
- The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has recently issued Statutory Guidance regarding the *Oliver McGowan* mandatory training for staff in Care Quality Commission (CQC) registered health and social care providers. This training is recognised as a crucial component of the wider transformation needed to improve outcomes for autistic people and individuals with a learning disability. Funding to support the Oliver McGowan mandatory training will cease in November 2026. Following this, training will become part of each organisation's Business as Usual (BAU) arrangements, including ongoing cost and delivery plans. Regional collaborative planning is currently underway to ensure the sustainability of this essential training beyond the funded period, as mainstream activity.
- As part of Rotherham's ongoing suicide prevention efforts, a dedicated task and finish group has been established to review the *Be the One* campaign. The Group's focus is to explore ways to make the campaign more accessible and effective in reaching autistic adults and other neurodivergent communities. The Task and Finish Group includes representation from: Speak Up, Rotherham Adult Neurodiversity Support Service (RANSS), RDaSH and the Council.

2.5 **Communicate:** *Provide accessible information and advice to support making informed choices.*

- Rotherham Place partners, including RDaSH, The Rotherham Foundation Trust (TRFT), South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (SY ICB) and the Council are actively working together to implement the Accessible Information Standard. The standard ensures information and communication supports the needs of patients, service users, carers, and parents who have disabilities, impairments, or sensory loss are met.
- Kooth and Qwell are commissioned online mental wellbeing platforms that provide free, safe, and anonymous support for children, young people (Kooth) and adults (Qwell) in Rotherham. Their clinical model, i-RESPOND, has been adapted to provide greater flexibility in supporting neurodivergent individuals. This includes structured approaches tailored to working effectively with autistic people and others with neurodevelopmental conditions, ensuring that support is personalised, inclusive, and responsive.

- RDaSH have shared examples of making reasonable adjustments to enable autistic people to access talking therapies. These adjustments included meeting an autistic person outside the premises so they would not have to sit in a crowded waiting room and avoiding the receptionist's questions, agreeing to longer sessions or promoting the use of fidget spinners during appointments.

2.6 ***Work in Partnership:*** *Support more people to enjoy a positive experience of working or volunteering and increase housing options.*

- The Buckland Review of Autism Employment found that only 3 in 10 working-age autistic people are in work. In South Yorkshire, several projects are addressing this, including *Working Win*; *Pathways to Work*; *Employment is for Everyone*; and the Council's Supported Employment Team. This academic year, 36 supported interns have enrolled, 4 hosted by the Council and 3 by the NHS. In Rotherham, 50 autistic people and people with a learning disability have gained employment.
- Rotherham has launched its Flexible Purchasing System (FPS) for care and support for supported living. The FPS includes a lot of specialist providers who can provide specialist care and support for autistic people.

2.7 While progress continues, several challenges are being addressed. Autistic people report that not all services are reasonably adjusted, and there remains a need for accessible, trusted information. These issues are further explored in Section 2.8 on the development of the Action Plan.

2.8 Rotherham benefits from a strong tradition of partnership working between the Council and the NHS, particularly through the Rotherham Place Board. However, ongoing NHS re-organisation related to the Integrated Care Board (ICB) is currently creating some uncertainty within the system. This is being carefully managed by all partners.

2.9 **Changes in Rotherham's Autistic population since 2024**

Rotherham prevalence rates and GP data:

In the UK, the estimated prevalence in adults is about 1.1%, with relative consistency across studies [Huang, 2020; NCCWCH, 2022; BMJ Best Practice, 2023; NCCMH, 2023].

The British Medical Association estimates that around 700,000 people in the UK have a diagnosis of autism. One in 100 children in the UK have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder.

In Rotherham, based on a diagnosis of 7,578 individuals registered to a Rotherham general practice with Autism in July 2025 and a total of 276,225 patients registered to a Rotherham general practice, the estimated autism prevalence is around 2.7% in the Borough. It is believed that the improvements in diagnosis and reduction in waiting times is behind this variance to the national picture.

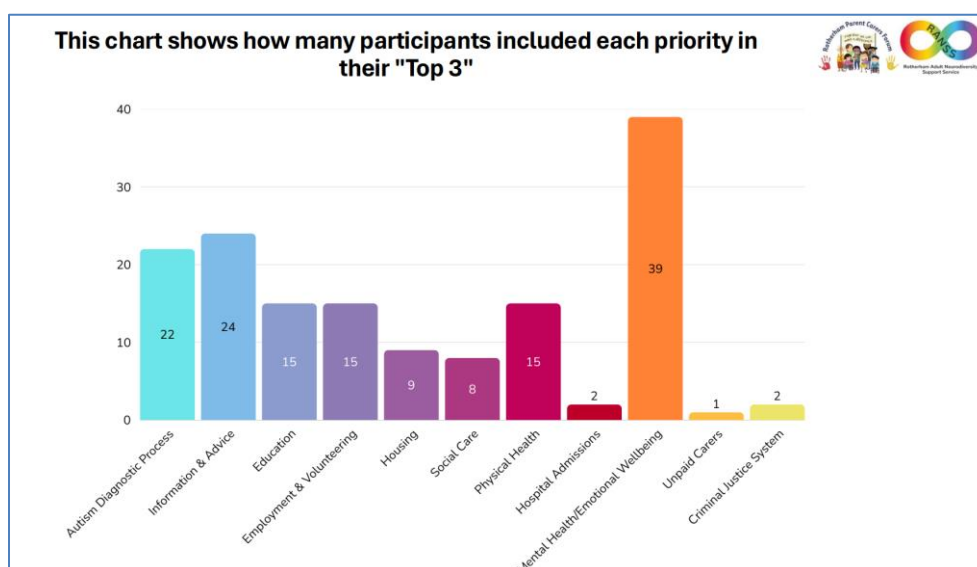
Autistic people have consistently stated the need for services to be accessible and inclusive. Rotherham remains committed to delivering the 2024-2027 vision. The successful delivery of this vision requires all Rotherham Place partners to work together with Rotherham's autistic community to ensure success, with oversight of the Strategy sitting under the leadership of the Rotherham Health and Wellbeing Board.

2.10 Co-produced priorities for the Strategy - Action Plan:

Cabinet agreed that the All Age Autism Strategy action plan be co-produced with autistic people, families and stakeholders. In response, Rotherham Parent Carers Forum led a series of engagement activities, including voice sessions and surveys, to ensure that the priorities reflect lived experience and local need.

2.11 These co-production activities have helped shape the development of the action plan, ensuring it is grounded in what matters most to autistic individuals and their families. The outcomes of this engagement are detailed in **Appendix 2**, which summarises the key priorities identified through this process.

2.12 The following key priorities were identified:



1. Mental Health and Wellbeing
2. Information and Advice
3. The autism diagnostic process.

2.13 Work is underway in partnership with Public Health, the Voluntary and Community Sector, and South Yorkshire ICB Rotherham Place to develop an early intervention and prevention offer aimed at promoting better mental health for autistic people. This collaborative approach recognises the importance of addressing mental health needs early and ensuring that

support is accessible, timely and tailored to the experiences of autistic individuals across all ages.

- 2.14 RDaSH is actively working as part of the South Yorkshire Provider Collaborative to reduce waiting times for autism assessments. This work forms part of the Collaborative's *28 Promises* programme, which includes a commitment to reduce assessment waits to a maximum of four weeks. This initiative reflects a shared regional ambition to improve access to timely diagnosis and support for autistic individuals and their families.
- 2.15 Autistic people in Rotherham have consistently highlighted the importance of having their voices heard and meaningfully included in shaping how the Borough supports and includes autistic individuals.
- 2.16 In response, work is currently underway to review and transform Rotherham's Autism Partnership Board. This transformation aims to strengthen co-production and ensure that autistic people are central to decision-making, strategy development, and service improvement across the Borough.

2.17 **Voice and co-production – Transformation of Rotherham's All Age Autism Partnership Board:**

The Statutory Guidance on autism (2015) outlines that Local Authorities should:

'Ensure that there is a meaningful local autism partnership arrangement that brings together different organisations, services and stakeholders locally, including the CCG (now ICB), and people with autism, and sets a clear direction for improved services.'

- 2.18 In response to this requirement, Rotherham established its Autism Partnership Board in 2017. The primary purpose of the Board is to improve the provision of services and support for autistic children, young people, adults, and their families in Rotherham. It does so by overseeing and monitoring the implementation of Rotherham's All Age Autism Strategy and associated Action Plan.
- 2.19 The Partnership Board includes representation from:
- Rotherham Council
 - South Yorkshire ICB
 - Community and voluntary sector organisations
 - Service users with lived experience
 - Parents, carers; and
 - Other organisations involved in supporting autistic people (e.g. South Yorkshire Police, leisure and libraries).
- 2.20 To further strengthen voice and co-production, Rotherham Parent Carers Forum is leading work to re-design the structure of the Autism Partnership

Board. This transformation will ensure greater accessibility and inclusion, with particular attention paid to:

- The suitability and accessibility of venues.
- Improved and inclusive communication methods.
- Supportive formats that encourage meaningful participation from autistic individuals and families.

2.21 From September 2025, the Partnership Board will meet three times a year, and the ambition is that these meetings will be held at the new SEND Hub (Eric Manns Building), which is scheduled to open in September 2025. This venue will support a more inclusive environment for engagement and collaboration.

2.22 Voice is being further strengthened through the development of a dedicated Voice Panel for children and young people aged 14–25, as part of Rotherham's *Preparing for Adulthood* cohort. The Panel will be supported by Genuine Partnerships and the Rotherham Parent Carers Forum, ensuring that young people have a meaningful role in shaping services and support as they move into adulthood.

3. Recommended proposal

3.1 This report is an update on the Cabinet report presented in February 2024.

3.2 Cabinet is asked to:

1. Note the progress being made by Place partners to improve the lives of autistic people living and working in Rotherham.
2. Support the recommended proposal of the transformation of Rotherham's Autism Partnership Board, led by Rotherham Parent Carers Forum.
3. Approve the commencement of co-producing the next Rotherham All Age Autism Strategy.

4. Consultation on the proposal

4.1 This report is an update on work which has been ongoing since the launch of Rotherham's second All-Age Autism Strategy in February 2024.

4.2 Rotherham Parents Carers Forum have held voice panels which have and continue to inform Rotherham's All Age Autism Strategy, and this is set out in sections 2.8 -2.14 and is detailed in Appendix 2.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 Rotherham's All Age Autism Strategy covers the period 2024 - 2027. An action plan has been co-produced to ensure the priorities are delivered and the outcomes and impact can be demonstrated. The focus is on improving access to:

- Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Information and Advice
- The autism diagnostic process.

5.2 From September 2025, the Rotherham All-Age Partnership Board will meet three times a year, and meetings will be held at the new SEND Hub (Eric Manns Building), which is scheduled to open in September 2025.

5.3 The successful delivery of these priorities (including attending and supporting Rotherham's autism partnership board) is for all Rotherham Place partners, with oversight for the Strategy sitting under the leadership of the Rotherham Health and Wellbeing Board.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

6.1 Most of the work is being undertaken within existing budgets. Funding will need to be identified to continue the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training after August 2025. This is being assessed at an organisational and place level and external funding opportunities are being explored. Initial estimates suggest a cost of up to £25,000 per annum for the Council.

6.2 As an update report, there are no direct procurement implications associated with the recommendations detailed in this report. However, it should be noted that the engagement of third-party suppliers by the Council to support the delivery of the Strategy must be undertaken in compliance with the Procurement Act 2023 or the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (dependent on the route to market selected) and the Council's own Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules.

7. Legal Advice and Implications:

7.1 The Autism Act 2009 mandates the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to produce a document to be known as 'The Autism Strategy'. The National strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026 is statutory guidance requiring local authorities and NHS bodies to comply with its terms.

7.2 Local authorities and NHS bodies are responsible for the delivery of a wide range of statutory services, including health, education, housing and social care, all of which should be tailored to ensure that the needs of individuals with autism are appropriately met. The National Strategy places an emphasis on the need to work with individuals and their families, to understand their needs and to jointly develop services which are flexible and person-centred. Such strategies should also aim to reduce blocks which can stand in the way of moving towards a society which ensures equality of opportunity for autistic people.

7.3 In addition to the National Strategy, the Health and Care Act 2022 introduced a statutory requirement that CQC-registered providers must ensure their staff receive learning disability and autism training appropriate to their role. This has been introduced as the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 None identified beyond the training requirements of the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism as required by the Health and Care Act 2022. The implementation of the Statutory Training programme (as set out in the Health and Care Act 2022) - Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism. This aims to ensure the health and social care workforce have the right skills and knowledge to provide safe, compassionate and informed care to autistic people and people with a learning disability which will require staff to be released to undertake Level 1 or Level 2 training.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 The All-Age Autism Strategy 2024 – 2027 takes a life course approach for Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults as set out in the report and will positively address the needs of autistic people throughout all stages of their life.
- 9.2 As this is an All Age Autism Strategy Children and Young People Service leads are aware of the plans to refresh the structure of the Rotherham Autism Partnership Board to support the delivery of the life course approach within the Strategy and plan for the next iteration.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 Part A and part B have been completed. The Equalities Analysis Action Plan (see Part B – Equality Analysis Form in appendix 3) has concluded that the following actions need to be addressed:
- Data: Autism is captured in Council Children and Adult Care systems and is linked to some Protected Characteristics (Age, Gender and BAME status). There remain gaps in relation to sexual orientation and marital status. Further work is also required to ensure that autism is accurately captured. This will be done as part of the refresh of Rotherham's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). There is a need to explore whether all systems in the Rotherham Place (for example: the NHS, leisure and libraries etc.) capture autism as a Protected Characteristic.
 - Embedding co-production with autistic people, their families, unpaid carers and Place partners, primarily through the revised Autism Partnership Board.

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 There are no direct or indirect climate change implications as a result of this report.

12. Implications for Partners

12.1 The Strategy has implications for all Place partners. The principal partners identified are:

- NHS South Yorkshire ICB and Rotherham Place partners – this is set out in the Report and the Strategy will be approved by Rotherham Place SY ICB governance. Noting the current transformation set out in the NHS 10-year Plan and associated NHS re-organisation.
- RDaSH are partners on the Rotherham Autism Partnership Board and have been instrumental in the development of the Strategy. RDaSH have given a strong commitment to meeting the needs of Rotherham's neurodivergent communities (including autistic people) in the Clinical and Organisational Strategy 2023 – 2028 and its 28 promises.
- Voluntary and Community Sector: Voluntary Action Rotherham (VAR), Rotherham Speak Up, Rotherham National Autistic Society and Rotherham Parents Carers Forum have been fully engaged in the development of the Strategy, the key areas of action and the refreshed Autism Partnership Board.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 The following risks have been identified:

- Legal compliance with the Autism Act (2009), Statutory Guidance and meeting the obligations under the Health and Care Act 2022: the adoption of both the Strategy, the Action Plan and changes in the Autism Partnership Board will mitigate this risk, and its alignment with the current national strategy.
- Co-production remains at the heart of the Strategy and has underpinned the development of the Action Plan. This approach is very much welcomed by autistic people, their families and unpaid carers: as the equality impact assessment highlights, there has been an ongoing dialogue with these groups, and this will continue as set out in the report.
- Financial implications: Much of the work is being undertaken within existing budgets. Funding will need to be identified to continue the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training after November 2026. This is being considered at an organisational and place level.

14. Accountable Officers

Ian Spicer, Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	John Edwards	25/08/25
Assistant Director, Financial Services (Deputy S.151 Officer)	Rob Mahon	19/08/25
Assistant Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	18/08/25

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