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**Title of meeting:** Community Wellbeing, Health and Care

**Subject:** Autism Strategic Action Plan 2024 - 2027

**Date of meeting:** 9 December 2024

**Report by:** Kayley Sayers, Transformation Lead - Autism

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Matthew Winnington

**Wards affected:** All

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**1. Requested by:**

Councillor Matthew Winnington - Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing, Health and Care.

**2. Purpose:**

To provide written information on the Autism Strategic Action Plan, and the work that is taking place in Adult Social Care.

**3. Background and Context**

The previous Portsmouth Autism Strategy and Action plan ran until 2022.

The research report "If Not Now, When?" was completed in June 2022, this was presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board in September 2022<sup>1</sup>. Since this time there has been ongoing work to develop the support and inclusion for Autistic and Neurodivergent adults in Portsmouth including the development of Room One<sup>2</sup> (Autism Hub). The priority areas of the national strategy for autistic children, young people and adults<sup>3</sup>: 2021-2026 were considered in the research report and incorporated in the recommendations, ensuring relevance to the local population.

The 2024-2027 Plan<sup>4</sup> is based on the findings and recommendations from this research report and has been developed in collaboration with Portsmouth Autism Community Forum<sup>5</sup>. This is an action plan for autistic and neurodivergent people, aged 18 years+.

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix 1

<sup>2</sup> [Room One - information and support service for autistic people - Portsmouth City Council](#)

<sup>3</sup> [National strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026 - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>4</sup> Appendix 2

<sup>5</sup> [Portsmouth Autism Community Forum](#)



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The SEND strategy includes the strategic plan to meet the needs of autistic and neurodivergent children<sup>6</sup>.

Current estimates<sup>7</sup> indicate that 1 - 3% of the population is autistic, and up to 20% are neurodivergent. Neurodivergence includes conditions such as ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia and Tourette's, amongst others. This is a rapidly evolving field, and with increased learning, more neurodivergent people are being identified. Using the population estimate, 208,400 people living in Portsmouth, this strategic action plan could impact approximately 41,000 people.

### **4. Co-production**

The principles of Co-production<sup>8</sup> have been at the centre of developing this strategic action plan.

The initial research was co-produced with Portsmouth Autism Community Forum as well as being informed by lived experience in the underpinning data. This ensured that the 5 recommendations which have formed the strategic outcomes are priorities for the local autistic and neurodivergent population. Further focus groups were held to develop and refine these priorities.

Representatives from Portsmouth Autism Community Forum and Room One have contributed to development of the action plan, ensuring the language, actions and outcomes are inclusive and will meet Autistic People's needs.

A draft of the strategic plan was shared widely to gain feedback and inform the final version. This was presented at a meeting of the Portsmouth Autism Community Forum and distributed to both forum members and the people who access Room One. To ensure accessibility the draft was presented in full, in a summary document and in a video format<sup>9</sup>. The draft was amended as a result of the feedback, and a 'You said, We did' document was shared to demonstrate the impact of this feedback.

After gaining further feedback from key partners, this strategic action plan has again been shared with members of the Portsmouth Autism Community Forum for their final thoughts and feedback. The draft plan has also been shared with colleagues in Health and Care Portsmouth senior leadership team. It will be formerly signed off prior to being presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board in the New Year.

This will be finalised week commencing 11<sup>th</sup> November. Once finalised, this will be shared via the Portsmouth Autism Community Forum in the form of presentation, workshops and

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<sup>6</sup> [SEND update - Appendix 1 - SEND strategy.pdf](#)

<sup>7</sup> If Not Now, When? Appendix 1

<sup>8</sup> [What is co-production? - TLAP](#)

<sup>9</sup> Appendix 3

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video to ensure autistic people are made aware of the strategic action plan and how they can be involved in the work.

### **5. The Strategic Action Plan**

#### **5.1 The key priorities:**

The five key priorities for the action plan are:

**1) Improving understanding of the lives and needs of autistic and neurodivergent people.**

This priority aims to move past understanding and towards acceptance. Autistic people said, "it would be good if people understood autism was life long, and not a bad thing". This priority will look to ensure a positive message around the skills and strengths that autistic and neurodivergent people will bring. This message will be important for achieving the other four priorities. It is hoped that a greater understanding across the population will result in a more inclusive city.

**2) Improving Health and Wellbeing.**

Many autistic people have poor health outcomes and are likely to experience co - morbidities. This priority focuses on removing the barriers to accessing health care, including mental health care, and to ensure that they can achieve better health outcomes.

**3) Better Care and Support.**

Autistic people will have a wide range of support needs, from living independently to requiring 24/7 supported accommodation in a specialist placement. In order to adequately meet these needs, there will be development opportunities to upskill the workforce, more access to Care Act<sup>10</sup> assessments and looking at creating more supported living provision for autistic adults.

**4) Appropriate Housing Options.**

Autistic people told us that the right housing can transform their lives, and therefore this priority works towards ensuring good quality accommodation for autistic people. Some autistic people will occasionally require the support of temporary accommodation, this work will involve housing colleagues to improve this experience. Alongside this, supported accommodation will need to be developed and making adjustments to the existing accommodation so that it is neurodivergent friendly.

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<sup>10</sup> [Your guide to the Care Act \(England\) | Carers UK](#)

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- 5) **Accessing Education and Securing Employment.** Securing employment can be difficult for autistic people, and if they secure employment ensuring they have the right reasonable adjustments to sustain that employment can be a challenge. The You Trust<sup>11</sup>, from 1<sup>st</sup> November, will provide a service to autistic people to help with all aspects of employment. This priority focuses on growing this offer, and looking at the whole spectrum of employment, including self - employment to ensure that all autistic people in Portsmouth can seek employment in a way that best suits their needs.

### **5.2 Aims and Actions**

This action plan will address these priorities by:

1) **Workforce development**

Ensuring that Adult Social Care, and relevant other services in the city are skilled and confident in working with autistic and neurodivergent people. As such, new training for the next financial year has been commissioned, with a view to develop our own package of training delivered by autistic people in Portsmouth. A training film has already been created by Portsmouth Autism Community Forum, and we will continue to promote this as a free piece of learning ([Portsmouth Autism Community Forum - Autism training video](#)). There will also be a focus on creating champion networks to ensure teams have leads that can share best practice. Another avenue will be developing local research with Portsmouth University and working with the wider community to share learning and understanding of autism.

2) **Adaption to existing resources**

This will include supporting services to make physical adjustments to their buildings, adjustments to interventions such as assessments and service offer to ensure it is neurodivergent friendly. An example of such is Talking Change, who were supported by Room One and the Portsmouth Autism Community Forum Chair to make changes to their offer and waiting room, to ensure they could meet the needs of autistic people. This will also include reviewing already available advice and guidance to ensure it is accessible to autistic and neurodivergent people.

Adapting current resources will also be key in developing the housing options for autistic people. It is likely that the housing stock offer in Portsmouth will remain the same, so by adjusting and considering how this is utilised we may be able to improve autistic people's experience of seeking housing or being in temporary accommodation. One such example of this, is Housing Needs Advice and Support will be hosting a monthly drop in at Room One, so that autistic people can access support and advice around housing in an environment they feel comfortable in.

There are also several tools and resources available that we can utilise to support autistic people, such as vocational profiles, which will help them determine their

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<sup>11</sup> [Into work - The You Trust](#)

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skills and wishes in terms of employment. Another example is hospital passports: these are documents used for people with a learning disability when they need to utilise hospital care, it is a document that informs health professionals of communication needs, sensory needs and other important information. These could be utilised by autistic people and could improve their access to healthcare in the city.

### **3) Creation of new resources**

This involves scoping the requirements for new supported accommodation for autistic adults. This also involves developing a "live" directory of the support available to autistic people in the City, including both formal and informal support such as "autism hours" in shops. There will also be consideration around "micro - commissioning<sup>12</sup>". This will link in with Adult Social Care's work on improving people's access to direct payments and will focus on what support is available for autistic people to purchase, with a direct payment.

### **4) Growing support offer at Room One**

Room One is Portsmouth's autism hub, which has been very well received, and was recently shortlisted for a Great British Care Award in the co-production category. The strategic action plan lays out further development for this service including pre and post diagnostic support, a life skills programme<sup>13</sup> and for other services such as housing and substance misuse to have a regular presence. The NHS England funding also covers the recruitment of a Social Care Associate Practitioner and a Peer Support Worker, both for a year to extend the outreach offer. Finally, the funding has covered the purchase of a hybrid screen to elevate the support offered. This will enable staff to hold, and attend virtual meetings, host hybrid support, increase inclusivity, show resources such as videos and host interactive sessions. In order to further grow Room One, it will host quarterly co-production events, where feedback and ideas will be sought from autistic people, and from this develop task and finish groups to develop those viable ideas.

### **5) Further liaison with the community**

This priority aims to fully understand the needs of the community, particularly around marginalised and oppressed groups (LGBTQ+, ethnic minority communities, older people and women). This work will allow a re-evaluation of the support on offer to ensure it meets the needs of different demographics and helps us really understand the autistic community in Portsmouth to provide the best possible support.

### **6) Supporting the local community**

To achieve real acceptance, we need to involve the local community. One example of this is the plan to liaise with local employers to help them understand autistic

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<sup>12</sup> [The Commissioning Cycle in Social Care - Leaf Complex Care](#)

<sup>13</sup> NHS England funding has been secured for 6 sessions, for 6 people 6 times in a year and includes £5 towards each person's travel, as this was noted as a barrier.



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people, the skills they can bring to the workplace and how to implement creative reasonable adjustments so that autistic people can thrive in employment.

This is not exhaustive, and full details are in the action plan at Appendix 2.

**5.3 Implementation**

Whilst some of these actions can, and should be, implemented by Adult Social Care, there are others that require support and action from colleagues across Portsmouth and the Health and Wellbeing system.

To begin this work a meeting has taken place which included representatives from housing, the NHS and the University to develop commitment to these actions and aims.

**5.4 Oversight**

The strategic action plan includes timescales and measurable outcomes to be able to demonstrate action and impact.

A partnership board will be set up to provide governance of the strategic action plan. This will include autistic people, and representatives of the Portsmouth Autism Community Forum, alongside the key partners.

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Signed by (Director)

**Appendices:**

Appendix 1 - If Not Now When?

Appendix 2 - Strategic Action Plan 2024-2027

Appendix 3 - Video Link explaining Strategic Action Plan:  
<https://youtu.be/Rksp0lci84A>

Appendix 4 – Feedback from Autistic People (8<sup>th</sup> November 2024)

**Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972**

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location