



**Cabinet
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Item

Public



All Age Autism Strategy 2025 - 2030

Responsible Officer:	Laura Tyler		
email:	Laura.tyler@shropshire.gov.uk	Tel:	01743 253178
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Cllr Ruth Houghton		

1. Synopsis

Public consultation reviewed the recommendations and vision of Shropshire's All-Age Autism Strategy 2025–2030. Cabinet is asked to consider the recommendations below, which align to the Shropshire Plan and embed the strategy supporting autistic people of all ages.

2. Executive Summary

2.1 The All-Age Autism Strategy 2025-2030 recognises autism as a life-long condition, updating Shropshire's adult only Autism strategy 2016 – 2020 and aligning with the National All Age Autism Strategy 2021-2026. The strategy sets out a vision for systemic and cultural change to create a county where autistic people of all ages are understood, supported and empowered to thrive.

2.2 The strategy reflects the significant shift in trajectory for autism nationally, and locally, the increased awareness and understanding and importantly the impact autism has on the delivery of our services. Nationally the prevalence of autism has increased from 1:700 to 3-4% of the population. Referrals for autism assessment in Shropshire have seen an

increase of 107% for Children & Young People and a 45% increase in adult referrals between August 2024 & August 2025.

2.3 The Shropshire All Age Autism Strategy 2025–2030 sets out a bold vision for Shropshire to become an inclusive county where autistic people of all ages are welcomed, supported, and valued for their unique strengths. Systemic goals have been identified throughout the strategy which details recommendations across the key domains of Health and Assessment, Education, Employment, Housing and Social Care and the Criminal Justice system. The strategy presents a shift to needs-led support for parent carers, families and adults and a shift to early intervention and prevention to reduce deterioration in well-being that can include social isolation, stigma, lack of independence, poor mental health, not achieving educational potential, low employment, supported living and social care needs and a vulnerability to the criminal justice system. The strategy presents an opportunity to address the systemic challenges, to fully understand the impact of autism across Shropshire’s population and services, to appreciate the financial and workforce capacity burden it places on the delivery of our services and recognise that we need to act now to drive, and enable, positive change for autistic people in our county.

2.4 The updated strategy is fully aligned with The Shropshire Plan, and aligns with the new direction priority outcomes to implement the national children's social care reforms and provision of high quality social care for vulnerable adults, through supporting autistic people of all ages to live healthy and fulfilling lives; the strategy commits to a healthy organisation by focusing on data-driven, and evidence based, service provision and close collaboration across sectors. It emphasises the importance and value of lived experience, co-producing services with the autistic community, and creating clear, accessible information to improve how people navigate available support. The strategy proposes measures that help autistic adults live independently and enable families and carers to participate more actively in the workforce. This includes providing accessible housing, easing service navigation for carers and encouraging voluntary and peer-led employment opportunities within the community.

Embracing the Shropshire Plan priorities reinforce the Council’s broader vision of a healthier, more inclusive Shropshire with positive impact on the local economy and local organisations.

2.5 The strategic objectives set out a broad vision for cultural and systemic change requiring a joined-up systemic approach to drive positive change, enabling autistic people to thrive in their communities, schools and employment, with equal opportunity and ambition, to lead happy, fulfilling and independent lives.

The all-age strategy has focussed on key priority areas identified in stakeholder events that align with the National All Age Autism Strategy covering Health and Assessment, Education and Preparation for Adulthood, Education, Housing and Social Care and finally the Criminal Justice System. Strategic objectives that cut across all domains are summarised below:

- o **Needs-Led, Person-Centred Support:**

The strategy commits to delivering support based on individual needs, not just diagnosis status. It aims to improve access to community-based, needs-led support, promote reasonable adjustments across services, and empower autistic people to understand and advocate for themselves.

- o **Prevention and Early Intervention:**

A proactive approach is prioritised, embedding early intervention and prevention across all age groups to reduce crisis situations and escalation of need. Social prescribing and community-based support are central to this model.

- o **Improved Access and Capacity:**

The strategy addresses long waiting times for autism assessments and support, aiming to increase capacity for both online and face-to-face assessments, and to develop integrated diagnostic and care pathways for all ages.

- o **Empowering Families and Individuals:**

Parent carer and lived experience voices are placed at the heart of referral and support processes. The strategy seeks to reduce stress and anxiety by improving communication, navigation, and access to specialist support.

- o **Workforce Capability and Systemic Change:**

Mandatory autism and neurodiversity training for staff in education, health, social care, and the criminal justice system is a cornerstone, ensuring consistent understanding and delivery of support.

- o **Communication and Information Sharing:**

The strategy calls for clear, consistent, and empowering information, improved digital systems for tracking progress, and regular updates for families and individuals.

- o **Fostering Inclusion and Community Engagement:**

Increasing visibility and support through community hubs, co-production in service design, and reducing stigma are key to building an autism-friendly Shropshire.

- o **Data-Driven Planning and Accountability:**

Improved data collection and sharing across sectors will underpin planning, service delivery, and evaluation, ensuring resources are targeted where they are most needed.

2.6 Domain-Specific Priorities:

- o **Health & Assessment:** Integrated care pathways, reduced waiting times, and accessible community support to reduce escalation and crisis
- o **Education:** Inclusive school environments, consistent support, and improved transitions to adulthood.
- o **Employment:** Doubling employment rates for autistic adults by 2030 is a national ambition. In Shropshire we need to understand our baseline, before embracing national ambition, and provide data confirming the number of autistic people in employment.
- o **Housing & Social Care:** Person-centred housing solutions, independent living skills, and robust planning.
- o **Criminal Justice System:** Systemic change, consistent training, and equitable support for autistic people in contact with the justice system supported through working with neighbouring LA's and community safety boards

2.7 This strategy is the result of extensive co-production and engagement with autistic people, families, carers, and professionals. It sets out a comprehensive framework for action, rooted in listening, empowerment, and collaboration. Success will depend on sustained commitment, transparent accountability, and a willingness to adapt. By embedding these principles, Shropshire aims to lead the way in autism-friendly practice, ensuring that no one is left behind. This strategy will inform the development of a delivery plan by 31st March 2026 adding clear milestones and accountability for delivery.

3 Recommendations

3.1 To approve the Shropshire All-Age Autism Strategy 2025-2030

3.2 To endorse the development of an All-Age Autism Strategy delivery plan to embed the recommendations included and inform policy overseen by the Service Director for Commissioning in consultation with the Portfolio holder for social care.

3.3 To review progress and implementation at People Scrutiny in 12 months, December 2026

3.4 To commit Shropshire Council to be a neuroinclusive employer

Report

4 Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

4.1 On-going risks, which Cabinet are asked to consider include:

a) **Capacity and Resource Constraints**

Risk: increases in autism assessment referrals and long waiting times place pressure on diagnostic services, education, lack of employment, reliance on social care, and housing, causing delayed support and escalation of need.

Mitigation: develop and promote early intervention and prevention accessible to all ages

b) **Inconsistent Data and Recording**

Risk: Poor data capture across sectors limits understanding of prevalence, identification of support needs, local authority service gaps and the impact on well-being.

Mitigation: joined-up systems and shared data protocols support strategic planning

c) **Variable Understanding and Training**

Risk: inconsistent understanding of autism may delay delivery of needs led, person-centred support and signposting to/provision of support, causing escalating needs and deterioration in well-being

Mitigation: mandatory training in all domains and awareness of support services

d) **System Fragmentation**

Risk: Disjointed pathways between children's and adult services, across health, education, and social care, result in gaps in post 16 transitions. Limited coordination between local authority, NHS, and voluntary sector partners may delay integrated service delivery.

Mitigation: embed systemic and collaborative approach to delivering positive outcomes for autistic people

e) **Cultural and Structural Barriers**

Risk: Stigma, lack of awareness, and deficit-based language in workplaces and public services hinder inclusion.

Mitigation: Adopt policy of neuro-affirming language and needs led support to ensure a strength based and inclusive approach

f) **Limited Engagement and Representation**

Risk: under-representation of autistic people of all ages including CYP, those without formal diagnosis, and those in marginalised communities.

Mitigation: ensure lived experience is integral to service review, redesign and implementation

g) **Financial Support limitations**

Risk: Workforce capacity and funding limitations may challenge the scope and impact of delivery

Mitigations: review as part of delivery plans and develop financial forecasts

4.2 Risk table

<i>Risk</i>	<i>Mitigation</i>
Capacity and Resource Constraints	Review and promote early intervention & prevention support for CYP and adults to ensure the provision of needs-led/person centred support to reduce escalation of needs. This will help respond to the rise in local trajectory for assessments and provide improved support whilst waiting.
Inconsistent Data and Recording	Implement a consistent approach to the data capture & recording of autism across all local authority services to ensure clear and robust understanding of Shropshire's autistic population and the impact on support services. Improved data will provide a pipeline of demand to plan future services, to avoid crisis and reduce costs.
Variable Understanding and training	Mandate training for all local authority staff within social care services to ensure consistent understanding of autism presentation and provision of needs-led/person centred support
System Fragmentation	The adoption of an all-age multi-disciplined approach, supported by quality data will ensure a collaborative system approach and integrated service delivery to meet the needs of autistic people.
4.5 Cultural and Structural Barriers	Introducing mandatory training and the use of neuro-affirming, non-deficit-based language together with driving cultural and systemic change in schools will reduce stigma and encourage a society that accepts difference and contributes to ensuring CYP have a positive experience in school reducing social isolation, home education and exclusion.
Limited Engagement and Representation	Introduce the roles of autism champions to lead peer support through schools, employers, housing and the criminal justice system to capture the all-age voice of lived experience. Ensure all support offers and communication are widely accessible and available in a range of accessible formats including translation tools.
Financial Implications	To be reviewed as part of the delivery plans and generation of financial forecasts

5 Financial Implications

5.1 Shropshire Council continues to manage unprecedented financial demands and a financial emergency was declared by Cabinet on 10 September 2025. The overall financial position of the Council is set out in the monitoring position presented to Cabinet on a monthly basis. Significant management action has been instigated at all levels of the Council reducing spend to ensure the Council's financial survival. While all reports to Members provide the financial implications of decisions being taken, this may change as officers and/or Portfolio Holders review the overall financial situation and make decisions aligned to financial survivability. All non-essential spend will be stopped and all essential spend challenged. These actions may involve (this is not exhaustive):

- scaling down initiatives,
- changing the scope,
- delaying implementation, or
- extending delivery timescales.

5.2 A financial evaluation will take place as part of the delivery planning and financial profiling will be completed. There is no budget set aside for the delivery of the autism strategy. There is minimal existing financial contribution to autism support services but significant financial and operational impact on the delivery of local authority services as the prevalence of autism continues to rise at rates that far exceed assessment capacity. The financial impact on the delivery of statutory services is significantly underestimated without a system approach to robust and accurate data recording to ensure we understand the prevalence of our autistic population and impact on our service delivery.

5.3 Below is a summary of current council expenditure on autism support services:

Children and young people

- Neurodiversity Practitioners, £136,500, providing targeted support in schools
- Universal Autism Support offer, £56,208, jointly commissioned with the ICB, to provide information, advice and guidance to parent carers, families and autistic children, under the age of 19 years

Adults

- Shropshire Autism Hub – small contribution made to reduce property rental costs.

There is no financial contribution made to an early intervention and prevention support offer through the adults autism hub however the strategy makes a strong case for this to minimise the impact on Adult Social Care. Given the pressures in this area across children's and adults, and increasing waiting lists, it is imperative that community assets, groups, social prescribers are embedded in neighbourhood planning to increase needs led support.

6 Climate Change Appraisal

6.1 Shropshire All-Age Autism Strategy 2025–2030 and its potential impact on a Climate Change appraisal, specifically regarding energy and fuel, renewable energy generation, carbon offsetting, and climate change adaptation. The strategy does not explicitly reference climate change, energy use, renewable energy generation, carbon offsetting,

or climate adaptation and there are no dedicated sections or strategic goals that directly address these topics however there are indirect impacts and opportunities:

- a. Housing & Social Care: the strategy advocates for supported housing integrated into local neighbourhoods and access to green spaces. While not directly referencing energy or climate, this opens opportunities for
 - Sustainable building design (e.g., energy-efficient homes, use of renewables).
 - Inclusion of green infrastructure (gardens, outdoor spaces) that can support climate adaptation and wellbeing.
 - Collaboration with developers to include inclusion of low-carbon and climate-resilient construction standards.
- b. Community Hubs & Service Delivery: the strategy promotes community-based support and hubs which could support the following:
 - Serve as models for sustainable public buildings in Shropshire.
 - Provide access to support in communities improving local services and reducing the need for transport
- c. Transport & Accessibility: linking to the above & improved community support:
 - Improved service navigation and access could reduce travel needs for autistic people and families, potentially lowering transport emissions if digital and localised support is prioritised.
- d. Employment: the strategy aims to increase employment rates for autistic adults, including remote and flexible working. This could reduce commuting and associated energy use, especially if digital infrastructure is prioritised.

6.2 Gaps & Recommendations for Climate Change Appraisal

- a. Energy & Fuel: whilst there are no direct commitments to energy efficiency and fuel use reduction in this strategy, there are opportunities for indirect benefits arising from the measures above.
- b. Renewable Energy Generation: there is an opportunity to consider renewable energy installations in new or refurbished autism-friendly housing and community hubs.
- c. Carbon Offsetting: there is an opportunity to consider offsetting schemes for unavoidable emissions, especially in new developments or council-run facilities.
- d. Climate Change Adaptation: the strategy contains only indirect links via access to green spaces and community resilience, but no explicit adaptation planning.

6.3 Strategic Alignment & Co-Benefits

- a. Person-centred, inclusive design can align with climate goals: e.g., sensory-friendly environments often benefit from natural light, good insulation, and quiet, which are also energy-efficient.

- b. Community engagement and co-production could include autistic voices in climate planning, ensuring that proposals are accessible and inclusive.

6.4 Summary Table: Potential Impacts & Recommendations

Area	Current Strategy Impact	Current Strategy Impact	Climate Appraisal Recommendation
Housing & Social Care	Green spaces, integration	Green spaces, integration	Add energy efficiency, renewables, adaptation
Community Hubs	Local support	Local support	Retrofit for energy, renewables, climate resilience
Employment	Flexible/remote work	Flexible/remote work	Promote digital infrastructure, reduce travel
Transport	Service navigation	Service navigation	Encourage sustainable transport options
Procurement	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Add low-carbon procurement policies
Carbon Offsetting	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Consider offsetting for new builds/services

6.5 Conclusion

The draft strategy offers several indirect opportunities to support climate change objectives

7 Background

7.1 The All-Age Autism Strategy 2025-2030 recognises autism as a life-long condition, updating Shropshire's adult only Autism strategy 2016 – 2020 and aligning with the National All Age Autism Strategy 2021-2026. The strategy sets out a vision for systemic and cultural change to create a county where autistic people of all ages are understood, supported and empowered to thrive.

The increasing trajectory on autism prevalence has a significant impact on local authority statutory duties to support individuals with disabilities. These duties form part of broader legislative framework that aims to protect and support individuals with autism, ensuring they have access to the services and support they need to lead fulfilling lives.

National Perspective

7.2 The strategy reflects the significant shift in trajectory for autism nationally, and locally, the increased awareness and understanding and importantly the impact autism has on the delivery of our services. Nationally the prevalence of autism has increased from 1:700 to 3-4% of the population. Referrals for autism assessment in Shropshire have seen an

increase of 107% for Children & Young People and a 45% increase in adult referrals between August 2024 & August 2025.

“A rise in diagnoses loops backs to increased awareness, which impacts on how people identify themselves, which leads to a call for more assessment centres, which has led to a greater rise in diagnoses,”

7.3 Autism is a life-long condition where timely and appropriate access to assessment, diagnosis and support services contribute to the well-being, achievement and independence of autistic people. While awareness of autism is widespread—reaching 99% of the population—it is true understanding that paves the way for meaningful change. Implementing real improvements requires this understanding at every level: within families, both before and after diagnosis, in schools, workplaces, housing, and across the wider community. Early intervention, coupled with improved understanding, can foster acceptance, transform environments, reduce harmful labelling, and help society embrace difference so that everyone is valued and included.

7.4 Currently, all age support before and after diagnosis is inconsistent, incomplete, and often difficult to navigate. Addressing these gaps and recognising the links to well-being, educational achievement, independence and social isolation are essential. Poor school experience has a lasting and often damaging effect on mental health and well-being which in turn impacts educational achievement, employment and in some cases the Criminal Justice System. The national autism strategy placed a focus on the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities System (SEND) enabling autistic children and young people to access the right support, within and outside of school supporting children to reach their potential, and to show that fewer autistic children are permanently excluded or suspended from school due to their behaviour. Improvements within schools included the support autistic people get in their transitions into adulthood, so that more autistic people can live well in their own communities, find work or higher education or other opportunities. This was cited in the national strategy as important in preventing more young people from avoidably reaching crisis point or being admitted into inpatient mental health services.

7.5 Post education, the national autism strategy highlighted the need to make progress on closing the employment gap for autistic people, ensuring that more people who are able and want to work can do so and that those who have found a job are less likely to fall out of work. Current national employment levels for autistic people in 2025 is reported at 30%. Local engagement in Shropshire reported difficulties in sustaining work, lack of provision for reasonable adjustments, stigma in the workplace and a lack of understanding at employer level. The engagement report highlights the necessity for improved understanding within the workplace and the need to create more opportunity for autistic people to work and live independently, increasing well-being and reducing reliance on social care. The suitability and availability of housing support and social care provision is also cited as a priority area, linked to escalation of need, lack of community support and inappropriate housing placements.

7.6 Finally, but by no means least, is improving support within the criminal and youth justice systems. Autistic people are more likely to be victims and witnesses of crime than offenders however the widespread misunderstanding of behaviours can lead to inappropriate support and sentencing for some autistic people. The aim of the strategy priority is to improve the police and wider criminal and youth justice system understanding of autism, to ensure autistic people are more able to receive the right support, adjusted to their needs, as well as ensuring that different parts of the justice system – from prisons to courts – become more autism-inclusive.

7.7 The national strategic priorities, when taken together, represent a holistic approach to supporting the needs of autistic people throughout their life journey and recognise the significant impact that lack of support and understanding deliver at each phase. To provide equity, a system-wide approach is needed to prevent often unnecessary escalation of need and above all, positive outcomes for autistic people.

Shropshire perspective:

Autism Prevalence

7.8 In June 2025 Shropshire autism assessment referral data confirms 1381 CYP 5-17 years are on the waiting list for assessment; 1365 adults and 114 0-5 years– a total of 2,860 representing all age waits, with wide impact on the individuals, their parent carers and families. Of these the holistic approach offered by the 0-5 years pathway is the only data showing a downward trajectory but, overall, the all-age data shows a 66% increase in referrals for assessment between August 2024 and June 2025 which should not be ignored. Assessment referral data shows comparable increases with national rates – a 767% increase for children and young people (CYP) with the longest wait over 2 years. Increases of 31% are reported for adult assessments referrals, with an average wait time of 4 years, system partners are working to address this.

7.9 Shropshire population data is expected to increase by 15.1%, June 2025 Office of National Statistics figures, showing growth areas in adults aged 25 years and over with marked growth in 65 years and over. Using current national prevalence data we are able to forecast the impact of autism and neurodivergence for our population in Shropshire; the data has been used to indicate the prevalence of autism at 4% and neurodivergence at 15% by age group; the numbers are significant increases from previous prevalence rates of 1:700 and represent significant capacity challenges for health and local authority services, including education, employment, housing and social care and the Criminal Justice System.

Age	2023	2047	Change	% Change	Autism Prevalence 2027 - 4% Population	Autism Prevalence 2047 - 4% Population	ND Prevalence 2023 - 15% Population	ND Prevalence 2047 - 15% Population
0-4	14521	13805	-716	-4.9%	581	552	2178	2071
5-14	35324	30747	-4577	-13.0%	1413	1230	5299	4612
15	3979	3318	-661	-16.6%	159	133	597	498
16-24	26973	25460	-1513	-5.6%	1079	1018	4046	3819
25-44	71,954	81338	9384	13.0%	2878	3254	10793	12201
45-64	95821	104357	8536	8.9%	3833	4174	14373	15654
65-84	75647	100987	25340	33.5%	3026	4039	11347	15148
85+	11653	26644	14991	128.6%	466	1066	1748	3997
Total	335,872	386655	50783	15.1%	13435	15466	62500	68998

7.10 There is often unrecognised impact on parent carers/families navigating the autism assessment process for their children, the current referral process can be overwhelming and frustrating to parents with a wider impact on employment, income and well-being.

7.11 In Shropshire we are improving our understanding of our autistic population by mapping autism referrals in conjunction with community and school support; this is now

being used to inform the location and demand for support needs in our communities. We have piloted all age autism events in county hot spots raising awareness of available services and connecting with Community and Family hubs to meet people where they live. In addition, we have held focus groups with parent carers and autistic adults, listening to their experience of the assessment pathways, identifying issues and gaps in provision which would improve their experience and the outcomes for the child/young person or adult in their family. Neurodivergent CYP are 3-6 times more likely to have other mental health difficulties such as anti-social behaviour, depression and anxiety and research confirms links to school exclusion and links to the Criminal Justice System.

Education

7.12 With national and local increases in the prevalence of autism comes deeper impact on local services. Locally commissioned support services need to keep up with demand, parent carers and families need help to understand autism and strategies of support for themselves and their children; our schools need sufficient understanding and resources to support autistic children to have a positive experience in education recognising the impact on social isolation, anxiety, mental health, friendships, academic achievement and ultimately being able to live happy, healthy and fulfilling lives. Autistic children and young people should be supported through transition stages into further or higher education – a key life stage for all young people but a significant risk for some autistic young people anxious about next steps. Data on autism in Shropshire schools must be improved, we are unable to see the impact on elective home education, SEND hubs, exclusion, Post 16 risk of Neet (not in Education, Employment or Training) school avoidance and mental health support in schools. All anecdotal and pilot evidence indicates a high proportion of autistic and neurodivergent children are affected whose needs are not being met in mainstream schools.

7.13 In Shropshire, the Office for Standards of Education (Ofsted) / Care Quality Commission (CQC) Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) Local Area inspection in January 2020 identified priority areas for Shropshire to address, one of which was the significant waiting times for children and young people (CYP, 0-25 years) on Neurodevelopmental Assessment pathways. In 2021, a Neurodiversity (ND) Workstream was created to enable a partnership response to meet the needs of neurodiverse CYP and was instrumental in the coproduction of Neurodiversity Practitioner (NDP) posts. Three NDPs were appointed and started in January 2024 supporting 50 primary and secondary schools, free of charge, in the pilot year (33% of Shropshire's mainstream schools) focussing on systemic and cultural change in schools. NDP roles support the children, teaching staff and parents to understand, and meet, the needs of autistic children. NDP support contributes to a positive school experience where the voice of the child is heard, these often simple environmental and organisational changes in schools consider the sensory adaptations, classroom support and reasonable adjustments needed to support autistic children. Whilst the NDP roles have been made permanent, Year 2 operates under an Education Psychologist managed traded model where funding and school priorities determine whether NDP support is in place, not the needs of the autistic children in their schools.

Employment

7.14 At national level the Annual Population Survey 2020 reported that 21.7% of autistic adults are employed and are more likely to be in roles below their skill level or in unstable employment. Being unemployed excludes people from society. It limits their ability to support themselves and impacts their mental health. Lack of diagnosis, education, awareness and stigma associated with disclosing autism are all reasons attributed to the low percentage. By November 2024 the Annual Population survey shows an improved employment rate of 30% reflecting improved identification of autistic people and greater prominence and topical coverage of autism however data recording of autism is limited with no coverage of wider neurodivergent needs. The cost of low employment nationally is estimated at over £10 billion annually. In Shropshire we are unable to report on the number of autistic people who are employed, we need a broader shift to recognising the value of autism to employers, where businesses and society benefit from the diverse abilities of autistic individuals, highlighting strengths helps challenge stereotypes and unlock potential in the workplace. We have taken part in a national accreditation scheme called the Neurodiversity Employer Index, this reviews workplace practices supporting neurodivergent people and awards a bronze, silver or gold award to participating organisations who employ five staff or more. Enable achieved a Silver award and such achievement should be used to roll out a Shropshire wide programme and lead by example using a scheme that provides visibility of employers who positively support neurodiversity.

7.15 The wider economic cost of low employment is the impact on Universal Credit/ Personal Independence Payments (PIP) and the links to independent living, housing costs, supported living and wider support costs associated with not being able to work. The recent launch of the 5 year Connect to Work programme, managed by Enable, creates an opportunity to report accurately on the support provided for autistic people in Shropshire and successful work placements – this cannot be successful on its own however and employer awareness and support of neurodivergence plays a critical part.

7.16 Valuable insight has been gathered locally through the Employment survey which was completed by 195 people endorsing the employment struggles for autistic people and the need to ensure equitable access to sustainable employment in all sectors. There is a clear lack of understanding of autism and workplace reasonable adjustments, as specified in the Equality Act 2010, for both employee and employer and a need for education rather than awareness in driving staff understanding of autism and neurodivergence, a cultural shift that accepts “difference”. In conjunction with broader employer awareness consideration should also be made to the need for improved preparation for adulthood for young people and the transition from education to employment. In strategy discussions the consideration of how an EHCP (Education Health and Care Plan) could be developed beyond mandatory education to support further education or employment. This was identified as a gap in support provision recognising the daunting leap to employment that, for some, is impossible.

Housing & Social Care

7.17 Current data shows an increasing trajectory of autistic adults being supported by adult social care and current average annual costs of £64,476 per person. Through the strategy work and engagement with lived experience interventions have been discussed that are designed to work together to create a more responsive, inclusive, and forward-planning system of housing and social care for autistic adults. These include:

- a. Mandatory autism training for professionals in commissioning and social care.
- b. Person-centred, needs-led support with improved communication.
- c. Development of housing specifications tailored to autistic needs.
- d. Independent Living Skills programme to assess and support practical independence.
- e. Internal resources for timely Housing Needs Assessments.
- f. Clear communication of prevention offers using visual and written formats.
- g. Collaboration with national studies to understand the burden of waiting and inform future services.

7.18 Working collaboratively with health, a focus is needed to identify ageing adults living with ageing parents. Support needs are frequently unknown but there is a significant risk presented by this cohort of people that could be supported by early intervention and prevention, assessing independent living skills, community resources, financial independence to reduce pressures on social care. Working collaboratively with the autism hub is an opportunity to utilise local expertise and data to support forward planning and identify gaps in support needs.

Criminal Justice System

7.19 National research suggests that systemic change is required across the Criminal Justice System. There needs to be a shift to a consistently person-centred approach that meets the needs of autistic individuals, helping them to understand themselves and the consequence of their behaviour/actions. Systemic failure to diagnose and provide needs led support attribute to the vulnerabilities and risks of autistic people to be victims of crime and autistic people who are often misunderstood within the Criminal Justice System can be more at risk of inappropriate sentences due to a lack of understanding. Autistic people report fundamentally different experiences and needs in the Criminal Justice System that are frequently associated with challenges and difficulties in interpersonal interactions/communication, environments, and processes not being very neuroinclusive. Within the strategy sub-group, autism support has been reviewed as a “system” – a joined-up approach essential in ensuring a shared ambition to support autistic people through their Criminal Justice System journey, to provide a consistent level of understanding, provision of reasonable adjustments and recognition that many autistic individuals are vulnerable adults who are the victims of crime.

7.20 We have shared a Criminal Justice System survey with all contributors to the strategy sub-group including West Mercia Police, Criminal Courts, Probation, Youth Justice, and HMP Stoke Heath. The survey aimed to understand current practices, identify gaps, and explore opportunities for improvement in supporting neurodiverse individuals within the system. The results confirmed sub-group findings that inconsistent systems, data capture and training and education, contribute to a lack of accuracy and prevalence across the Criminal Justice System. The wider cost and impact of autism to the Criminal Justice System is not available but locally it is estimated that 50% of prisoners in HMP Stoke Heath are undiagnosed autistic/neurodivergent, with an annual cost of £39 million. Collaborative working and shared ambition cited in the strategy provides an opportunity for a system approach, one that puts the needs of the individual first and recognises the wider impact on our social care services of not doing so.

The strategic priorities set out a broad vision for cultural and systemic change requiring a joined-up system approach to drive positive change, enabling autistic people to thrive in their communities, schools and employment, with equal opportunity and ambition, to lead happy, fulfilling and independent lives underpinned by cross-cutting themes:

- a. Needs-led rather than diagnosis-led support.
- b. Mandatory autism and neurodiversity training for professionals.
- c. Early intervention and preventative models.
- d. Co-production and involvement of families and carers.
- e. Improved data capture and joined-up systems.
- f. Continuity of support through transitions.
- g. Reducing stigma and promoting acceptance

8 Additional Information

8.1 The increasing trajectory on autism prevalence has a significant impact on local authority statutory duties to support individuals with autism. These duties form part of broader legislative framework that aims to protect and support individuals with autism, ensuring they have access to the services and support they need to lead fulfilling lives most prominent of which is The Equality Act 2010.

8.2 **The Children & Families Act 2014** – includes Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCP's) requires councils to help young people move into adulthood in a way that supports their independence and social inclusion & Section 8 of the SEND Code of Practice "Preparing for Adulthood from the Earliest Years"

8.3 Under the **Care Act 2014**, councils have a duty to provide information and advice on available local services and support arrangements. The Care Act 2014 also places a legal duty on councils to promote individual wellbeing for adults in need of care and support, inclusive of ways to delay and prevent care needs escalating.

8.4 Under the **Housing Act 1996** Councils have a generic duty to assess and accommodate the housing needs of their residents, including young people with a learning disability and autistic young people.

8.5 The **Equality Act 2010** legally requires councils to prevent discrimination and ensure equal access to public services and community life. Councils are also obligated to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that autistic people, can access services without facing discrimination

8.6 The **Mental Capacity Act 2005** protects the rights of people over the age of sixteen to make their own decisions unless there is clear evidence they cannot do so.

8.7 **Autism Act 2009** and Subsequent Guidance: **Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities and NHS Organisations (2015)**: This guidance mandates that local authorities should include the employment support needs of autistic adults in local planning and service provision.

8.8 Mandatory training about learning disability and autism for health and social care provider staff | Local Government Association Councils should ensure that health and social care staff receive suitable and appropriate training designed to better equip them

with the skills and knowledge to care for individuals with learning disabilities and autism, such as the Oliver McGowan training

8.9 Local Authorities must provide the following services:

- a) **Assessment and Provision:** Local authorities must assess individuals with autism and provide necessary services to support their needs and ensure that any person carrying out a needs assessment under the Care Act 2014 has the skills, knowledge and competence to carry out the assessment in question and is appropriately trained. Local authorities should ensure that people with autism are aware of the right to access a Care Act assessment (for the adult) and a carer's assessment (for the carer).
- b) **Support and Advocacy:** Local authorities are required to provide advocacy services for individuals with autism, ensuring they have a voice in their care and support plans.
- c) **Equality and Accessibility:** Local authorities must ensure that services are accessible to all individuals with autism, including reasonable adjustments to remove barriers
- d) **Support for Families:** Local authorities should support families of individuals with autism, providing information, resources, and assistance to help them navigate the services available.

9 Conclusions

9.1 The All-Age Autism Strategy 2025-2030 recognises autism as a life-long condition, updating Shropshire's adult only Autism strategy 2016 – 2020 and aligning with the National All Age Autism Strategy 2021-2026. The strategy sets out a vision for systemic and cultural change to create a county where autistic people of all ages are understood, supported and empowered to thrive.

9.2 Across health, education, employment, housing, social care, and the Criminal Justice System, the strategy identifies clear priorities and actionable goals. It recognises that autism is a lifelong condition requiring lifelong support, and that meaningful progress depends on collaboration, data-informed planning, and the voices of autistic individuals and their families.

Autism, and increasing prevalence, is a thread that transcends all service provision and Shropshire Council as a local employer.

9.3 As a local authority we have a statutory duty to support people with autism, both as an employer and a public service provider, stemming primarily from the Equality Act 2010 and the Care Act 2014, supported by the Autism Act 2009 guidance.

In conclusion we are looking for endorsement of the following recommendations set out in **3:1** of this report.

- To approve the Shropshire All-Age Autism Strategy 2025-2030
- To endorse the development of an All-Age Autism Strategy delivery plan by 31st March 2026 to progress, from April 2026 onwards, the recommendations included and inform policy
- To review progress and implementation at People Scrutiny in 12 months, December 2026

- To commit Shropshire Council to be a neuroinclusive employer

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Local Member: **ALL**

Consultation with Local Member – Please consider the Local Member Protocol (see page E60 onwards of part 5 of the Constitution) and determine whether it is necessary to consult with the local member over the proposal set out in this report. This may not always be applicable (eg where the proposal affects all of Shropshire) but it should always be a consideration and in some cases a necessity so as to comply with the spirit of the Protocol.

Appendices [Please list the titles of Appendices]

1. Draft All Age Autism Strategy 2025-2030
2. Neurodiversity Employment Survey May 2025 – public
3. Criminal Justice System Survey June 2025 – strategy group organisation representatives only
4. Public Engagement Survey – to follow (closes 6th November)