



## Mayor and Cabinet

### Lewisham All-Age Autism Strategy Update Report 2023-2028

**Date:** 8 May 2024

**Key decision:** Yes.

**Class:** Part 1

**Ward(s) affected:** All

**Contributors:** Integrated Commissioning Officer, Assistant Director Adult Integrated Commissioning Mental Health and Wellbeing

#### Outline and recommendations

The Lewisham All Age Autism Strategy 2023-2028 (“the Strategy”) presents our collective vision for the borough and describes the priority areas we will work on over the next five years. The Strategy has established action plans which, together, outline the route map to make Lewisham a more autism-inclusive borough to live and work. Implementation of the Strategy has proceeded on a whole-system partnership approach.

#### **Mayor and Cabinet is recommended to:**

- Note the update of the implementation of the Strategy.
- Note the action plans and priorities alignments to groups.

#### Timeline of Engagement and decision making

Quarterly Jan 23- Mar 25	LAPB meetings
6-weekly May 23- Mar 25	Priorities Groups 1, 2 & 3 meetings
Quarterly Apr 23- Mar 25	Autism Young Advisors Panel (Drumbeat)
October 2024	Autism Strategy 23-28 Launch Event
Nov 23- Apr 24	JNSA Lewisham All-Age Needs Assessment Survey
Dec 23- Jan 24	SLaM Autism Strategy
December 2024	Lewisham Autism & Learning Disabilities Big Health Day

## 1. Summary

- 1.1. The Strategy was developed in collaboration with autistic residents, carers/guardians and local professionals. The Strategy outlines our vision to make Lewisham an autism

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inclusive borough and the objectives we need to meet to achieve this.

- 1.2. The Lewisham Autism Partnership Board (“LAPB”) is responsible for overseeing the Strategy’s action plans and projects, particularly the all-age autism support service and steering groups. The LAPB will continue to drive forward progress against the Strategy to improve the quality of life of our autistic population.
- 1.3. The Strategy is the first of its kind in the borough and ensures the Council is meeting its statutory requirements as per the Autism Act 2009 and acting in accordance with the government’s policy paper “*Autism Strategy for autistic children, young people and adults 2021 to 2026*”.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Mayor and Cabinet are recommended to:
  - Note the update of the implementation of the strategy.
  - Note the action plans and priorities alignments to groups.

## 3. Policy Context

- 3.1 The Councils Corporate Strategy 2022-2026 priorities most relevant to Autism strategy are as follows;
  - **Young People**
    - We will ensure the most vulnerable children are protected from harm, driving improvement in children’s social care and aiming to reduce the number of children coming into care through earlier targeted support for families in crisis.
  - **Open Lewisham**
    - We will celebrate Lewisham’s diversity, ensuring we are a representative and inclusive council and workforce.
    - We will maintain and strengthen the Lewisham Way of working in collaboration with our voluntary and community sectors and seek new areas where we can partner together. We will actively listen to our residents, being responsive to their concerns and communicative in our approach.
    - We will co-design services with those affected by them and ensure strong consultation processes that reach out to people whose voices are seldom heard
  - **Health and Wellbeing**
    - We will learn from our Birmingham and Lewisham African and Caribbean Health Inequalities Review, aiming to mitigate and ultimately end, structural racism and discrimination as a driver of health inequalities
    - We will work with the local NHS to deliver the services Lewisham residents need and create the Lewisham Health Care and Wellbeing Charter.
    - We will collaborate with other organisations to deliver the places, activities and programmes our autistic residents need to feel empowered to live a physically active lifestyle.

## 4. Background

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- 4.1 Autism is a spectrum condition that impacts the way autistic people interpret the world, communicate and regulate their emotions.
- 4.2 Autistic people often experience discrimination and isolation as a result of their condition and consistently report a lower quality of life than the general population.
- 4.3 There are currently just over 4,000 people diagnosed with autism in the borough, however, the actual number of those with autism is likely to be much higher. Autistic people face significant inequalities and because of that often have worse outcomes in life than their neuro-typical peers.
- 4.4 Whilst the Strategy aligns with the government's national priorities as set out in the policy paper referred to above, several consultation processes have been undertaken during the various stages of development to ensure that the Strategy is oriented around what is important to our local communities.
- 4.5 In order to ensure that the Strategy remains a living, working set of priorities and deliverables the LAPB includes the Council's strategic partners, providers and community members and people with lived experience. The role of the LAPB will be to oversee the development, mobilisation and delivery of the Strategy.

## **5. Strategy Summary**

- 5.1 Our vision is that Lewisham be an inclusive borough in which autistic people can lead fulfilling lives. We aim to become an autism-inclusive borough, improving conditions for autistic people to ensure they are welcome, safe and able to thrive.
- 5.2 Only when a large proportion of our autistic community consider that these vision statements are a true reflection of their lives, can we say we are autism-inclusive:
  - I feel safe and welcomed in the community, including public services, schools and in my workplace.
  - I have access to reliable information about autism; and have access to diagnostic services.
  - I can ask for help whilst I am waiting for an assessment for a diagnosis of autism.
  - My family, carers, and I are supported to understand autism and what it means for me.
  - I can learn in ways that work for me and my teachers understand how to support me.
  - I am supported to make my own decisions about my future. My views are taken seriously regardless of my sex, gender, ethnicity, sexuality or any disability I may have.
  - I have access to services and therapies based on my needs. The NHS and service providers understand how to make reasonable adjustments so that I can access these services.
  - My family and carer(s) receive the help they need to care for me and for themselves.
- 5.4 The vision statements set out at 5.2 have been incorporated into the action plans to ensure the proposed outcomes take effect.
- 5.5 Our priority areas that we will focus on over the next five years are:
  - Priority 1: Improving understanding and acceptance of autism within society

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- Priority 2: Improving autistic children's and young people's access to education
- Priority 3: Improving diagnostic pathways and autism support services
- Priority 4: Tackling health and care inequalities for autistic people
- Priority 5 Supporting more autistic people into employment
- Priority 6: Reducing mental health admissions & supporting quality inpatient care
- Priority 7: Improving support within the criminal and youth justice system
- Priority 8: Improving experiences of caring

5.6 The full Strategy can be found in Appendix A.

5.7 The Steering Group action plans can be found in Appendix B.

5.7 The Equalities Analysis Assessment can be found in Appendix C.

## 6. How the Strategy was Developed

6.1 In order to develop a strong understanding of the current evidence base, we reviewed over 100 sources of data and evidence, including health records data, local practitioner evidence, research from expert organisations, and academic literature.

6.2 In order to better understand the local context and need, we hosted a series of workshops bringing together groups of local experts by experience. Those groups included autistic residents, carers and professionals. We engaged with 16 professionals and 18 autistic residents/carers and generated the first iteration of our vision statements and priority areas.

6.3 Subsequent to the workshops, we reviewed how other councils have implemented autism-inclusive strategies by spending time with professionals and reviewing online materials. We also consulted with over forty professionals within the council to ensure the content of the Strategy was well aligned and our priorities well defined.

6.4 In spring/summer 2022, we shared our vision statements and priority areas with the general public and received feedback on both how suitable the statements were and also advice as to how we might achieve them. We received a total of 149 responses to our public consultation survey. The respondents included 28 autistic people, 38 professionals who work with autistic people and 81 carers. In October/November 2022 we undertook further targeted engagement where we received 70 responses from young people with autism.

6.5 As part of the consultation activity, we also undertook the first autism 'Temperature Check.' That part of the consultation sought to determine to what extent our autistic residents agreed that our vision statements aligned with their wants. We will continue to undertake temperature checks throughout the life of the Strategy.

6.6 We established a small working group of professionals across children and adult health and social care, education, SEND and other divisions in the council who each took a lead on developing their respective priorities. The Strategy was then sent to key stakeholders, including parent and carer forums to provide further comments and input into the Strategy.

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## 7. Implementation of the Strategy

### LAPB

7.1 The LAPB was formally established in January 2023 with the final membership agreed in April 2023. The LAPB is made up of representatives from across adult and children health and social care commissioners, education commissioners and providers, SEND, people with lived experience, parents and carers and providers of key borough based services who will work together to deliver the Strategy.

The LAPB board meet quarterly and was originally chaired by the Clinical and Professional Lead for Learning Disabilities and Autism of the Southeast London Integrated Care Board. The LAPB is now co-chaired by the Assistant Director Adult Integrated Commissioning Mental Health and Wellbeing, of the Southeast London Integrated Care Board, and Independent Expert by Experience Co-Chair.

7.2 The role of the LAPB Co-Chair was advertised on the Lewisham Council Recruitment website and the Co-Chair was appointed in November 2023. The purpose of the Co-Chair is to bring an independent voice with lived experience to advocate the views of the autistic community and ensure any decisions made are the best for the people with autism in Lewisham. The responsibilities of the role include providing additional oversight of governance and monitoring and reporting on the effectiveness of the implementation of the Strategy across the borough. Further, the Co-Chair will establish and manage an 'Expert Adults Group.' The Expert Adults Group will be made up of Lewisham autistic residents and will provide insight and suggestions for events and workstreams to both the LAPB and Steering Groups.

7.3 The LAPB board has the following membership:

- Children and Young People's Commissioning Division
- Lewisham Primary Care
- Expert Co-Chair
- Integrated Adults Commissioning Division
- Special Education (Drumbeat)
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust CYP & Adults
- Lewisham and Greenwich Trust
- Public Health
- Children's Social Care (Children with Complex Needs)
- Adult Social Care
- Parent Forum Group
- Dynamic Support Register and Care Education and Treatment Review
- Resources for Autism
- Learning from lives and deaths – People with a learning disability and autistic people (LeDeR)

7.4 The Autism Partnership mailing address is operational and currently has 112 stakeholders who have agreed to receive information from this account. The mailbox is monitored with an aim to respond to emails every two weeks. It sends out relevant communications and informative materials to the subscribers and provides a resource for wider input into relevant consultations and questionnaires

FYI. [autismpartnership@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:autismpartnership@lewisham.gov.uk)

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- 7.5 The Autism webpage went live in December 2023 and provides information linked to the Strategy along with the Strategy documents and the LAPB Terms of Reference. It is planned that the website will provide information about training, events and a direct link to the Autism Wellbeing Support Hub once launched. We will work with partners to link this webpage to their website. *FYI. [Lewisham Council - Making Lewisham an autism inclusive borough](#)*
- 7.6 The LAPB has produced an overarching action plan that will sit underneath the Strategy. The LAPB will monitor actions to ensure that the Strategy objectives are being met and implemented.
- 7.7 The Partnership Board has established three steering groups which have each taken on different Strategy priorities and will ensure delivery of the plans and actions required to implement the Strategy. The LAPB will oversee the work of these groups.

### **AUTISM STEERING GROUPS**

- 7.8 The steering groups are responsible for creating detailed work plans for their respective priorities and managing the implementation of workstreams. The steering groups will also monitor the impact of each workstream on the implementation of their respective strategic priorities.
- 7.9 **EDUCATION AUTISM STEERING GROUP** - consists of the following priorities and membership:

1. Improve understanding of autism within society
2. Improving autistic children and young people's access to education

#### **Representation**

##### **Drumbeat (GROUP LEAD)**

SEND

Lewisham, Lead for Learning Disabilities and Autism

Young Advisor Group

Parent and Carer Forum Group

- 7.10 **COMMUNITIES AUTISM STEERING GROUP** - consists of the following priorities and membership:
- 3b Improving access to autism support services
  5. Supporting autistic people into employment
  7. Improving support within the criminal and youth justice systems
  8. Improving experiences of caring

#### **Representation**

##### **Adults Integrated Commissioning Team, ICS (GROUP LEAD)**

Parent and Carer Forum Group

Family Thrive, Prevention and Early Help Service

Social Care, Children with Complex Needs

Children and Young People Joint Commissioning Team

National Autistic Society

Lewisham Young Offending Service

Family Hubs

Lewisham, Jobs and Skills Programme

- 7.11 **HEALTH AUTISM STEERING GROUP** - consists of the following priorities and membership:

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- 3a Improving diagnostic pathways
- 4. Tackling health and care inequalities for autistic people
- 6 Reducing mental health admissions & supporting quality inpatient care

### **Representation**

#### **Lewisham Clinical Lead for Learning Disability & Autism (GROUP LEAD)**

Lewisham Public Health

Lewisham and Greenwich Trust, Childrens Community Services

Dynamic Support Register and Care (Education) and Treatment Review

Autism Spectrum Disorder Primary Care

Childrens and Young Adults Commissioning Team

Adults Integrated Commissioning Team

### **KEY DELIVERABLES THIS YEAR (23-24):**

- 7.12 **The Lewisham All-Age Autism Strategy 23-28** was officially launched on Thursday 12th October 2023 by holding an event at St. Laurence Community Centre. Local professionals and organisations, autistic residents, community residents and businesses were invited.

The event provided workshops to enhance awareness and skills relating to autism. Also, information was shared of autism support services available in Lewisham. The Mayor and other cabinet members conveyed their vision of Lewisham being an `all-inclusive autism borough' to the audience.

There were in excess of 150 people in attendance of the launch event. Anecdotal feedback was positive and there was a desire for future similar events. However, due to a technical glitch, the data from the online feedback form was not retrievable. The launch provided insight into what provisions are missing in Lewisham and highlighted there was a lack of support and services for adults 25 +.

All outcomes of the launch event will be integral to developing future planning of the strategy workstreams within the LAPB and the Steering Groups functions.

- 7.13 **The All-Age Autism Wellbeing Support Service (“the Service”)**, went live on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 for an initial period of two years.
- 7.14 The Service will provide an integral part of supporting the implementation of the Strategy and an autistic inclusive borough. The Service is founded on a `proof of concept' approach.
- 7.15 The service specification was produced in partnership between Children and Young People and Integrated Commissioning directorate with key stakeholders contributing to it. The Service will be delivered within the I-Thrive Framework and is needs led. The children's funding contribution to this service is on a recurrent basis and statutory functions from the National Autistic Society contract are now within this service. The adult elements of this service is funded on a non-recurrent basis from Southeast London Integrated Care Board. This will be the first time Lewisham has had a local offer for adults.
- 7.16 The contract value for the two years is £460K. Additional money sourced through Southeast London Integrated Care Board has been set aside to evaluate the Service while recurrent funding from adults can be sourced.
- 7.17 The Service will be delivered by Resources for Autism and will be co-located

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with Lewisham Music (SE6 3BT). The Service will provide:

- Information and advice for Lewisham residents and provide support to children and young people, families, adults and carers.
- Support for those identifying or diagnosed as autistic and require 1:1 support, peer support, advocacy, workshops, psycho-education.
- Support for those with a diagnosis or on diagnostic pathway for intensive behaviour support and family support.

## TRAINING

- 7.18 Schools 'Autism Champion' relaunch is in process with Drumbeat providing a full day's 'Autism Champion' conference in March 2024.
- 7.19 'Making Sense of Autism' training in schools, delivered by Drumbeat is now being offered on a virtual platform for schools once a term. This will ensure new mid-term staff members can have access to the training and with limited training capacity, allow Drumbeat to provide the training to more schools.
- 7.20 The 'Good Autism Practice' standard audit has been simplified for schools to complete. Drumbeat will monitor audits received and review yearly.
- 7.21 The NAS Certification of Good Autism Practice programme for schools has been offered to 80 hubs across London. Drumbeat Outreach are currently working with two Lewisham schools, one primary and one secondary, to go through the certification process. This will be completed next year.
- 7.22 Training for Autism has increased to organisational groups with Drumbeat providing training to Lewisham Adult Social Care and being commissioned for Children's safeguarding services.
- 7.23 **Resources for Autism** is a member of the LAPB. It is a registered charity which provides practical services for individuals with a diagnosis of autism and also to those who care for them. Its work covers a range of social groups virtually and in person and includes workshops and coffee mornings to parents and young people, support with transitional milestones, 1:1 support and advice for 16- to 25-year-olds. Resources for Autism also provides training programs to enhance professionals understanding of autism and neurodiversity. It also provides skills training necessary to support autistic individuals within the community, ensuring the delivery of high-quality services.

They have secured funding for the next five years to work with 16-25 year old independent/semi-independent autistic young people and their families. They will support the implementation of the Strategy by delivering fully funded training programs that cover various groups, such as parents, professionals, educators, the public, and employers.

## SOCIAL GROUPS

- 7.25 An autistic adult social group has been running since September 2023. The group is held once a month at the Ignition Brewery in Sydenham. On average, we have 15 attendees, predominately from the 18-30 age group. The aim of the group is to provide a safe space for autistic adults to make friends, share experiences and support each other. The group is run by autistic people, for autistic people, and has been well received. Regular attendees have also created a WhatsApp group to organise social gatherings outside of the planned events.

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- 7.26 An autistic girls' social group (10-18 years) is held fortnightly at Lochaber Hall in Hither Green. Local volunteers such as sports coaches, artists, and cafe owners are invited to teach a skill or run an activity. We have had drama workshops, hoola hooping, circus skills, skateboarding, cooking as well as the pleasure of introducing the girls to new crafts. Parents are required to stay for the duration of the group and they use the opportunity for peer support and advice. Most weeks, a drumbeat teacher and a GP is in attendance to offer advice to families in need. On average there are 20 girls in attendance plus parents.

## **ENGAGEMENT**

- 7.27 The LAPB is meeting its aim in working in collaboration with partners to deliver the best outcomes for the Strategy. The Young Advisors Group (Drumbeat) regularly attend and/ or provide feedback to LAPB and priority groups.
- 7.28 The LAPB has taken an active part in consulting with programmes such as the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust Autism Strategy review to be launched in 2024
- 7.29 The LAPB is taking an active part in the development of Lewisham's Autism Joint Strategic Needs Assessment that is being led by Public Health.

## **NEXT STEPS**

- The LAPB are committed to improving the collection and quality of data and has ensured that this is considered within each of the steering groups. Each Steering groups are mapping the strategy outcomes to their action plans and capturing the qualitative and quantitative data available to support this. This will also outline where the gaps are in data recording and will work to improve and establish this. The outcome will result in an assurance dashboard that will be presented to the LAPB.
- The All-Age Autism service has gone live and a key component to this is ensuring we independently evaluate the service during year 2 of the contract. Officers will work with the provider to establish the evaluation brief for the service to ensure the provider is collecting this information in advance of evaluation taking place during 2025.
- The LAPB will be establishing a lived experience forum in 2024. We want to ensure that we continue to seek input from our autistic adult residents to feed into the work we do and also bring transparency and accountability. The forum will be chaired by the co-hair of the LAPB who will feedback at the LAPB.
- Following to success of the launch of the strategy, the LAPB have committed to run engagement events throughout the year. This will enable us to continue to do a temperature check and update Lewisham borough on the progress of the action plan.

## **8. Financial implications**

- 8.1 This report lays out the Council's Autism strategy over a 5-year period. There are no financial implications for Lewisham council at this stage over and beyond existing funding arrangements.

## **9. Legal implications**

- 9.1 There are no significant legal implications arising from the implementation of the

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recommendations in this report.

## **10. Equalities implications**

- 10.1 Equality Act 2010 brought together all previous equality legislation in England, Scotland and Wales. The Act included a new public sector equality duty, replacing the separate duties relating to race, disability and gender equality. The duty came into force on 6 April 2011. It covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 10.2 The Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
  - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
  - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 10.3 The strategy recognises that improvements in provision for autistic people has not benefitted everyone and the strategy outlines plans to explore how to reduce inequalities moving forward.
- 10.4 A copy of the Equalities Analysis Assessment can be found in Appendix B.
- 10.5 One of the key quality criteria measured during any commissioning process is “Processes for addressing equality and diversity”. All the services contained in this report will be subject to robust contract monitoring processes which include evaluating fair access to services for all.

## **11.0 Climate change and environmental implications**

- 11.1 There are no direct climate change or environmental implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations in this report.

## **12.0 Crime and disorder implications**

- 12.1 Improving support within the criminal and youth justice system is one of the strategies priorities.
- 12.2 We know that people with autism are over-represented as people that come into contact with the Criminal Justice System, yet studies indicate a rate of offending lower or equivalent to the population. Autism prevalence is 1%, however 16-19% of adults in prisons have a diagnosis of autism. The nature of difficulties (thinking styles, emotional regulation, communication) may make some individuals vulnerable to offending in some circumstances.

## **13.0 Health and wellbeing implications**

- 13.1 The health and wellbeing implications are outlined throughout the strategy.
- 13.2 Implementing the proposals will have a significant impact on the wellbeing of our autistic residents, both directly and indirectly.
- 13.3 With a focus on practical support, the delivery of our strategic objectives should have a direct impact on the of health and support residents can access in order to thrive.

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- 13.4 In addition to interventions designed to promote emotional wellbeing, the service will also promote social wellbeing and the reduction of social isolation and loneliness. This is particularly important considering autistic people are reported as some of the most isolated and lonely people in society.

## 14.0 Social Value implications

- 14.1 The importance of social value is embedded throughout the strategy and proposed delivery plans.

## 15.0 Glossary

- 15.1 Description of terms below.

Term	Definition
NHS SEL ICB	NHS South East London Integrated Care Board
NHS	National Health Service
SEND	Special Education Needs and Disabilities
LAPB	Lewisham Autism Partnership Board

## 16.0 Report author (s) and contact

- 16.1 Natalie Sutherland, Assistant Director – Adult Integrated Commissioning  
[Natalie.sutherland@selondonics.nhs.uk](mailto:Natalie.sutherland@selondonics.nhs.uk)
- 16.2 Deborah Harry, Commissioning Officer, Adult Integrated Commissioning  
[Deborah.Harry@selondonics.nhs.uk](mailto:Deborah.Harry@selondonics.nhs.uk)

## 17.0 Comments for and on behalf of the Director of Law and Corporate Governance

- 17.1 There are no significant legal implications for London borough of Lewisham Council regarding the adoption of the proposals.
- 17.2 Berkeley Montandon, Adult Social Care Solicitors  
[berkeley.montandon@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:berkeley.montandon@lewisham.gov.uk)

## 18.0 Comments for and on behalf of Finance

- 18.1 There are no financial implications for Lewisham council at this stage over and beyond existing funding arrangements.
- 18.2 Yusuf Shaibu, Strategic Finance Business Partner  
[Yusuf.Shaibu3@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:Yusuf.Shaibu3@lewisham.gov.uk)

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