



## **Councillor Jane MacBean**

Chairman

Health & Adult Social Care Select Committee

## **Councillor Julie Ward**

Chairman

Children's and Education Select Committee

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Cllr Angela Macpherson

Cabinet Member, Health & Wellbeing

Cllr Anita Cranmer

Cabinet Member, Education and Children's Services

21 September 2023

### **SENT BY EMAIL**

Dear Angela and Anita,

### **Draft Autism Strategy – joint response to consultation**

As Chairmen of the Children's and Education Select Committee and Health & Adult Social Care Select Committee, we agreed to form a small working group of Members to review the council's draft autism strategy, as part of the public consultation process. We felt that this important piece of work falls within the remit of both Select Committees. The working group met on 30<sup>th</sup> August to discuss the draft strategy in detail and below is our joint response.

For ease, comments have been grouped together under the 5 key improvement areas outlined in the draft strategy (page 7), as well as some general comments about the draft strategy.

### **General comments**

- Whilst the draft strategy refers to partnership working and collaborative working, the title page of the strategy states "Buckinghamshire Autism Strategy 2023-2027" and has the Buckinghamshire Council logo underneath. Could consideration be given to having the logos of all the key organisations on the title page to reinforce that this strategy has been developed in partnership with others and will be delivered in partnership.
- For the sake of clarity and consistency, we feel that the headings throughout the strategy should reflect the exact wording used on page 7 to describe the key areas and the key area should be numbered appropriately throughout the strategy. For example, page 11, the heading should be **Key Area 2 – Reducing health and care inequalities** (rather than "tackling....."). On page 14, the heading should be **Key Area 3 – Meeting the needs of autistic children and young people**.

- Throughout the draft strategy there is reference to percentages but there is no raw data included and the source of the information is missing. We would recommend adding the source of the data, provide the survey response rates and include the raw data against the percentages.
- Page 8 provides details of the outcomes which are all commendable, however a key question is how the outcomes will be measured – what does success look like? The strategy mentions the Autism Steering Group and that progress will be reported to and monitored by the Adults and Health Board, Adults Integrated Care Board and the SEND Integrated Care Board. We feel that there should be an opportunity for progress to be monitored in a public forum rather than through Boards which do not publish papers or provide an opportunity for the public to submit questions. We would recommend that a progress report should be reviewed by the Health & Wellbeing Board.
- We understand that the Autism Steering Group will be chaired by a Head of Service from Integrated Commissioning. We would like to recommend that there is Member involvement on the steering group, possibly a Member from the Children’s and Education Select Committee and a Member from the Health & Adult Social Care Select Committee.
- Communications – this is a key component in delivering a successful strategy but there was little mention of this. We hope there will be a detailed communications plan to support the delivery which will be published alongside the final strategy.
- Funding – we would like to understand how the ambitions within the strategy will be funded as clearly some additional resource will be necessary in order to achieve them. Whilst this is a Buckinghamshire strategy it would be helpful to consider if joint working across the wider BOB ICS could help to drive improvement.
- Interaction with other strategies – it is vital that this new Autism Strategy aligns with other existing or emerging strategies and plans for SEND children and young people and indeed Adults, as it is concerned with supporting autistic people throughout their lives.
- As you are aware the Children’s and Education Select Committee have recently undertaken a review of Pathways into SEND with some recommendations specifically about resources relating to neurodiversity and training for school and nursery staff. We hope that this will also be taken into account in the final version of this Autism Strategy.

### **Key Area 1 – Awareness and Understanding of Autism**

- There is no specific mention of primary and secondary healthcare in the training section. We feel that training should be part of the Hospital Trust’s training programme and undertaken by all those working within Primary Care Networks (PCNs), with tailor-made training for those carrying out the social prescriber role and mental health practitioner role within PCNs.
- Page 10 provides feedback from parents, carers and autistic adults. It would be helpful to have more clarity around the settings. For example, “only 9% of parents and carers think people understand and accept autistic people” – is this specifically related to within schools or is that a more general statement?

### **Key Area 2 – Reducing health and care inequalities**

- There is no specific mention of the council’s mental health provider (Oxford Health). Page 12 refers to investing in assessment and diagnostic services, leading to reduced waiting times. We are concerned about the additional resourcing needed to deliver this as we are aware of the workforce pressures across the health and social care system. Could the role of the mental health practitioner within the PCN cover autism assessments, for example?
- There is a very broad statement under the areas of focus – “Hospitals collect information to better deliver services”. What does this mean and can this “information” then be shared across the system? Data sharing and combatable IT systems is an issue.

- Page 11 states that many people found the assessment process was confusing. We would like to see simplification of the assessment process added as an area of focus.
- Members also consider that there could be a role for Public Health in developing targeted awareness campaigns to assist autistic people in accessing health and care services more easily.

### **Key Area 3 – Meeting the needs of autistic children and young people**

- Page 14 refers to transitional pathways from children to adults' services which are currently not understood and autistic people and their carers do not feel properly prepared for their adult lives. We would like to see an explanation of the age definition included in this section as this can be a source of confusion.
- The Preparation for Adulthood Pathway is mentioned as requiring improvement. We would like to see this work to be undertaken as a matter of urgency. We feel that the enhancements to the pathway and toolkit should be co-designed with parents, carers, autistic children and young people and adults and this should be stated in the strategy. The draft strategy currently says that "we will work in partnership with council colleagues.....".

### **Key Area 4 – Supporting employment and meaningful activities**

- This key area requires significant investment in officer time as it relies on building relationships with a range of external organisations. We hope that there will be appropriate resources allocated to delivering this key area.
- We felt that local colleges, Bucks New University and the University of Buckingham should also be included under the area of focus on page 17 to encourage them to attend autism related events, alongside local businesses.
- We were pleased to hear about the work being undertaken with employers to ensure that they can put in place 'reasonable adjustments' to support autistic people into meaningful work.
- There also needs to be more discussion in schools to ensure that the right support is in place for autistic young people when they are considering their future career path. Some autistic young people can be 'academic high-flyers' but will still need support to transition into a working environment and we would like to see their needs reflected in the strategy.
- As Select Committees we are particularly interested to see how success will be measured e.g. what performance indicators will be used for this key area?

### **Key Area 5 – Increasing independence and community provision**

- Page 19 states that autistic people find it harder to gain and maintain their own housing offers, including independent tenancies and landlord relationships. We would like to see training for landlords included as an area of focus. We also feel more work needs to be undertaken to fully understand the issues surrounding this so these can be addressed.
- This key area relies on good working relationships with housing officers. We would like to see housing officers be part of the Autism Steering Group.
- We are aware of a number of voluntary and community organisations which support autistic people and it is vital that they are engaged in the delivery of the strategy.

We hope this feedback will help to shape the final version of the Autism Strategy and we will be inviting you both to attend a future Select Committee meeting, either Children's and Education or Health & Adult Social Care, to discuss the key themes from the public consultation and to hear about how the feedback will be used to shape the final strategy.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. MacBean', written in a cursive style.

**Cllr Jane MacBean**

Chairman, Health & Adult Social Care Select Committee

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julie Ward', written in a cursive style.

**Cllr Julie Ward**

Chairman, Children's and Education Select Committee