

# **AUTISM STRATEGY**

## **2023–2028**

### **Delivery Plan 2023–2025**

**DECEMBER 2023**



## **Delivery Plan 2023–2025**

The Delivery Plan for 2023–2025 will commence implementation of the Autism Strategy 2023–2028 and will remain a ‘live’ document throughout its timeframe to enable response to emerging priorities.

At the time of development, Northern Ireland Government Departments are experiencing unprecedented budgetary challenges. In consideration of these constraints, an initial two year Delivery Plan for 2023–2025 has been developed to set out how actions of the strategy will be taken forward throughout this period. The Delivery Plan sets out the actions to be achieved against commitments, associated outcomes and the delivery partners involved.

The Delivery Plan will be reviewed on an annual basis and a monitoring and funding report will be produced and published on the Department of Health website. The report will set out the progress on implementation of the strategy, the outcomes that have or will be achieved, or their current position and how this will be measured. The report will also capture the funding which has been allocated to support and deliver the commitments of the strategy.

A sample Monitoring and Reporting template is provided at **Appendix 1**.

Whilst the monitoring and reporting role will be fulfilled by the Independent Autism Reviewer, in adherence to legislative requirement, until this appointment is made the Department of Health will commit to this role.

**Commitment 1**

**Through improved regional pathways of care, individuals and families will have access to early intervention and support which can meet emotional health and wellbeing needs.**

Action	Key Partners	Outcome	Timeframe
<p>1.</p> <p>We understand that the provision of support and intervention, based upon presenting need, at an early stage is vital for individuals both pre and post assessment.</p> <p>Through partnership working we will implement a new framework of care to support and provide early intervention to children and young people with emotional health and wellbeing needs, which will include autism.</p> <p>1.1</p> <p>We will consult on and finalise a Children and Young People’s Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework which will guide future development of services. The Framework will embrace a move towards understanding Autism within a broader neurodevelopmental approach and incorporate a regionally consistent single point of entry and diagnostic pathway. In addition to providing post-diagnostic services and supports, the Framework will promote the provision of early support that is based upon presenting need.</p>	<p>Department of Health Health and Social Care Trusts Department of Education Community and Voluntary Sector</p>	<p>We will have a framework that will support health and social care services to collaborate broadly to develop and integrate high quality, evidence-based support, intervention and diagnostic pathways that will best meet the presenting needs of our children and young people, both pre and post diagnosis.</p>	<p>Consultation on the Framework to inform the Implementation plan will be completed by 31 March 2024</p>

Action	Key Partners	Outcome	Timeframe	
1.2	As part of the consultation a Framework implementation plan will be developed in line with the requirements of the Children’s Co-operation Act (NI) 2015. The implementation plan will be informed through a regional engagement process that will be facilitated through the National i-Thrive Programme and will be inclusive of all key stakeholders.		Through the Framework implementation plan we will enable key stakeholders to develop shared language, thinking and enhance collaboration across health, education and third sector.	Engagement and planning will take place from Sept 2023 to March 2024
2.	<p>We acknowledge that many autistic people will have complex needs or will have autism as a co-existing condition.</p> <p>We will work with key partners to develop a Learning Disability Strategic Plan which will include finalising an Adult Learning Disability Service Model and Children with Disabilities Framework, developing Learning Disability governance structure options.</p> <p>This will be informed through stakeholder engagement and through learning disability evidence and data.</p>	<p>Department of Health Department of Education Department for Communities Department for the Economy Department for Infrastructure Health and Social Care Sector Independent providers Service Users and families</p>	<p>The Learning Disability Strategic Plan will seek to address the growing pressures across learning disability services for children and adults and to provide a focus for future strategic planning and regional commissioning.</p> <p>The development of the Strategic Plan will also address the need for better transitions planning between children and adult services.</p>	Will be completed to issue for consultation by 31 March 2024
3.	Recognising that referral for an autism assessment process may create anxiety and be lengthy, we will provide and publish improved communication and relevant information which will set out step-by-step guidance on each step of the autism assessment process.	<p>Department of Health Health and Social Care Trusts Autistic people</p>	The provision of accessible step-by-step guidelines will enable individuals and families feel informed and prepared throughout the referral and assessment process.	By 31 March 2025

Action		Key Partners	Outcome	Timeframe
4.	To increase understanding of the social, communicative and sensory challenges that autistic people experience in accessing and receiving care and support within our healthcare system, we will develop regional training videos for GPs and the Health and Social Care (HSC) workforce which will be co-produced by people who have lived experience of autism.	Department of Health Health and Social Care Trusts Autistic people	The provision of training will enable GPs and HSC staff to have access to e-learning training which will assist them in providing practical support by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding the challenges experienced by autistic people.</li> <li>• Identifying preferred communication styles for autistic patients.</li> <li>• Understanding the sensory challenges in the health and social care environment.</li> </ul> Implementing reasonable adjustments which can support them as they receive health and social care.	First phase of development will be completed by 31 March 2024
5.	Following a review which was undertaken of adult autism services across Northern Ireland, we recognise we must secure and sustain high quality, cost effective, person-centred social care services for autistic adults in Northern Ireland.	Department of Health Health and Social Care Sector Autistic people		
5.1	We will ensure that effective commissioning processes are in place and that accurate data for adult autism is collated to inform service planning.		Effective commissioning processes and accurate data for autistic adults will help inform and plan for service development.	By 31 March 2025
5.2	We will identify the investment required to provide intervention ensuring that effective commissioning processes are in place and that accurate data for adult autism is collated.		A costed implementation plan will be developed.	By 31 March 2025

Action		Key Partners	Outcome	Timeframe
5.3	We will identify the investment required to provide intervention and address waiting lists for adult autism services.		This will be included in Action 5.2.	By 31 March 2025
5.4	We will carry out a review of the current adult autism service model.		<p>The review will inform the establishment of a consistent adult autism service model across Northern Ireland which will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide clear pathways of care.</li> <li>• Age appropriate assessment.</li> <li>• Intervention to support presenting need.</li> <li>• Establish targets for assessment.</li> </ul>	By 31 March 2025
6.	Many siblings of an autistic family member may experience anxiety, and at times peer pressure, due to the challenges this can place on family life or in fulfilling the role of a carer.	Northern Ireland Civil Service Health and Social Care Sector Community and Voluntary Sector Private Sector People with lived experience	We will provide sources of support for families, including siblings, to enable them to have time and space for their voices to be heard and needs considered.	By 31 March 2024
6.1	We will work with key partners to identify sources of support and recreation to enable families, including siblings, to have opportunity to be supported.			

Action		Key Partners	Outcome	Timeframe
6.2	Following a Reform of Adult Social Care consultation, we will establish a Social Care Collaborative Forum, an action of which will be a 'Supporting Carers' workstream to take forward proposed reforms to improve support for carers.		We will work to strengthen the provision of information and advice for carers; evaluate the implementation of the current carer strategy; establish a cross departmental group to build recognition and strengthen cross government approaches to carers issues and we will review the current Health and Social Care Carers Register to explore potential enhancements, including data, to better support carers.	Establish Supporting Carers Workstream by 31 December 2023
7.	Transitions can present challenges and anxiety for autistic people and their families. Through partnership working and stakeholder engagement we will undertake a review of current processes and procedures of children with special educational needs transitioning from education into adulthood, including the examination of available pathways for young people who are autistic.	Department of Health Department of Education Department for the Economy Department for Communities Health and Social Care sector	We will provide more efficient and effective transition arrangements with better clarification of agency roles and responsibilities for transitioning young people. We will maximise opportunities for enhanced inter-agency working ensuring statutory duties are met.	By 31 March 2025
8.	As a requirement of the Autism (Amendment) Act (NI) 2022 the Department of Health will appoint an Independent Autism Reviewer for Northern Ireland.	Department of Health	The Autism Reviewer will provide an independent monitoring role in relation to the implementation of the Autism (Amendment) Act (NI) 2022 and the implementation of the Autism Strategy.	By 31 March 2024

## **Commitment 2**

**We will work in partnership to enable autistic people to feel understood and supported throughout their education, to experience environments which are inclusive to their needs and to have a workforce who are equipped with understanding to recognise and respond to the specific needs of autistic pupils and students.**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
9.	Department of Education Education Authority Autism Advisory and Intervention Service		
9.1		We will provide an enhanced model of support at the appropriate level to meet a child/young person's individualised presenting needs at the right time, whether they have been referred for an autism assessment or a diagnosis has been received.	By 31 March 2025
9.2		We will provide accessible learning environments to support children and young people's individualised needs.	By 31 March 2025



Action		Key Partners	Outcome	Timeframe
10.	We acknowledge that educational staff would benefit from autism specific training so that characteristics of autism and appropriate interventions could be provided.	Department of Education Education Authority Middletown Centre for Autism		
10.1	We will continue to work with Middletown Centre for Autism regarding provision of the resources and training being offered.		We will improve access to resources and training for parents and educational staff.	By 31 March 2025
10.2	We will commence an end-to-end review of Special Educational Needs including examining initial teacher education and continual professional development.		Staff within the educational workforce will be better equipped to deploy reasonable adjustments within the educational environment to enable children and young people to feel understood and supported and improve outcomes for pupils with Special Educational Needs including those with a diagnosis of autism.	By 30 September 2024
11.	Access to Educational Psychologists remains a challenge for many children, families and schools. We will review Educational Psychology Services as part of a Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transformation Programme.	Department of Education Education Authority	Through exploring new models of delivery we will improve access to educational psychologists for both pupils and schools.	By 31 March 2024

Action		Key Partners	Outcome	Timeframe
12.	We understand that working in partnership across Health and Education sectors is essential in ensuring children and young people's needs are supported.	Department of Health Department of Education		
12.1	We will establish a joint Oversight Group to enhance strategic planning of services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability and develop integrated models of support.		We will improve identification and assessment pathways by enhanced strategic planning of children and young people's services.	By 31 March 2025
12.2	We will progress the appointment of a joint partnership worker who will deliver a special school pilot project.		We will increase opportunities for community engagement.	By 31 March 2025
12.3	We will progress the appointment of a joint data analyst to scope the healthcare needs of children and young people and work with colleagues across both health and education to develop integrated models of support.		We will improve the use of data to inform and shape development of services.	By 31 March 2025
13.	We acknowledge that an autism advocate or nominated 'link person' would be beneficial to enable autistic students to navigate and adapt through college and university life, particularly in the early stages of their academic experience.	Department for the Economy Regional Colleges Universities	We will work with key partners to train academic workforce to increase understanding of autism, identify key points of contact and quiet spaces in further and higher education campuses and support autistic students throughout the transition process from post-primary education to further and higher education.	By 31 March 2025

### **Commitment 3**

**We will seek opportunity for increased understanding of autism in the workplace to enable individuals to feel supported within employment and enhance career opportunity.**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
14.	<p>We understand that careers advice needs to be adapted to support individualised needs of autistic people and provided by staff, who have an understanding of the communicative and sensory needs of autistic people, to support them in recognising skills and making career and employment choices.</p> <p>We will develop and promote guidance and training to increase understanding of an autistic person's individualised needs within employment and the services we deliver.</p>	<p>Northern Ireland Civil Service Equality Commission for Northern Ireland Community and Voluntary Sector Autistic People</p>	<p>Through the provision of guidance and training to increase understanding of an autistic person's individualised needs, employers and staff will have a better understanding and approach in how they engage with and advise autistic people, working with them to identify strengths, skills and challenges and how these can be managed in pursuing career opportunity and employment.</p> <p>By 31 March 2024</p>
15.	<p>Many autistic people can feel anxious and misunderstood within the work environment, through partnership working, we will provide guidance which will be accessible to employers to raise understanding of autism and reasonable adjustments and support to underpin and enhance life skills to support autistic individuals as they manage transition and adapt into careers and employment.</p>	<p>Department of Health Equality Commission for Northern Ireland Northern Ireland Councils Community and Voluntary Sector</p>	<p>Employers will have access to guidance which will set out steps that can be taken to provide reasonable adjustments in relation to communication, workstyle and sensory challenges, within the recruitment and work environment to support the needs of autistic people.</p> <p>By 31 March 2024</p>

Action	Key Partners	Outcome	Timeframe	
<p>16.</p> <p>16.1</p> <p>16.2</p>	<p>The Northern Ireland Civil Service, as an employer, will deliver a range of interventions to support and promote neurodiversity in the workplace.</p> <p>We will develop a new Neurodiversity Toolkit for managers in partnership with key stakeholders including people with lived experience of Autism.</p> <p>We will deliver a NICS neurodiversity awareness event and learning webinars; and continue to promote and encourage staff to complete the Supporting Autistic People e-learning module which was co-produced by people with lived experience of autism and available to all civil servants.</p>	<p>Department of Finance NICS Diversity Champions Network NICS Disability Working Group NICS Disability Staff Network NICS Autism Working Group The Executive Office Department for Communities Equality Commission for Northern Ireland Employers for Disability NI</p>	<p>The new toolkit will educate managers on neurodiversity and the practical steps they can take in the workplace to support neurodivergent colleagues.</p> <p>The NICS neurodiversity event, webinar and e-learning modules will raise awareness of, and help educate colleagues on, neurodiversity and the value and importance of diversity in the Civil Service workforce.</p>	<p>By 31 March 2024</p> <p>By 31 March 2024</p>
<p>17.</p>	<p>To improve awareness and understanding of reasonable adjustments, the Civil Service as an employer will review and implement a new reasonable adjustment policy and processes and will launch a range of supporting resources for managers including new guidance, e-learning modules, and FAQs.</p>	<p>Department of Finance NICS Diversity Champions Network NICS Disability Working Group NICS Disability Staff Network NICS Autism Working Group Equality Commission for Northern Ireland Employers for Disability NI</p>	<p>The policy and underpinning guidance and learning resources will outline practical steps which can be taken to provide reasonable adjustments throughout the employee lifecycle, which will include supporting the needs of autistic and neurodivergent people.</p>	<p>By 31 March 2024</p>

Action		Key Partners	Outcome	Timeframe
18.	We will work with key partners to monitor the conclusion of European Social Fund and the introduction of UK Share Prosperity Fund closing to assess the potential impact on those with a Learning Disability including those who are autistic.	Department of Health Health and Social Care Trusts Community and Voluntary Sector	By identifying the potential challenges on people who have a Learning Disability and/or are autistic, measures can be put in place to mitigate any impact.	By 31 March 2024

**Commitment 4**

**Through increased understanding of autism, our housing providers will be more equipped to provide supportive engagement and adequately support the needs of autistic people.**

<b>Action</b>		<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
19.	We will work with key partners to support transitional arrangements for autistic people seeking housing and obtaining housing information, for example, details of housing options and financial support which may often prove difficult for autistic people.	Department of Health Health and Social Care Trusts Northern Ireland Housing Executive	We will ensure applicants will be supported throughout the process of seeking housing accommodation.	Ongoing
20.	We acknowledge the need for housing providers to be provided with opportunity to gain a greater understanding of autism as a condition and the specific needs of autistic people, for example in relation to communication and sensory needs.	Department of Health Northern Ireland Housing Executive Community and Voluntary Sector		
20.1	We will work with key partners to provide training to Northern Ireland Housing Executive staff to increase their understanding of autism and autistic people's needs including customer facing environments.		Staff will have a broader knowledge of the communicative and sensory challenges that autistic people experience and make reasonable adjustments to address this in the provision of information and delivery of services.	By 30 September 2024
20.2	We will review our Communication Support Services in relation to autism.		Staff will have a better understanding of ways to communicate with autistic people to support them and meet their individualised needs.	By 31 March 2024

Action		Key Partners	Outcome	Timeframe
20.3	We will develop a housing advice leaflet for autistic people in relation to housing application pathways.	Northern Ireland Housing Executive	The leaflet will give autistic people a clear understanding of the planning and preparation process for housing applications.	By 31 March 2024
21.	We will work with key partners in seeking appropriate housing solutions for autistic people reducing any barriers to their ability to develop and maintain independence.	Department of Health Health and Social Care Trusts Northern Ireland Housing Executive	We will accommodate the needs of autistic people by joint working between health and housing to seek appropriate housing solutions in a timely fashion.	By 31 March 2024
22.	We understand everyone's journey is different as are their needs.	Northern Ireland Housing Executive	For more complex cases Housing Support Officers will provide specialist services for those who require a housing solution outside the general housing solutions remit.	By 31 March 2025
22.1	The Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Options service will seek to provide advice and assistance to everyone with a case management approach to enable the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to understand the customer's individual needs and explore their housing and support options including understanding current and future housing aspirations.			
22.2	We will set up a Regional Escalation Panel to manage the needs of individuals who have complex needs including those who are autistic.			

Action		Key Partners	Outcome	Timeframe
23.	We will work with key partners to develop an Inclusive Design Guide taking into consideration the needs of people living with cognitive and sensory impairments including autism.	Department of Health Northern Ireland Housing Executive	The Inclusive Design Guide will complement adaptive toolkits to design and improve homes for autistic people.	By 31 March 2024
24.	We will commit to continued engagement with Disability Forums, including Autism Forums to enhance collaborative working between Housing and Health.	Northern Ireland Civil Service Northern Ireland Housing Executive Community and Voluntary Sector	Engagement with key partners will provide opportunity for collaboration and feedback and to inform policy, guidance and service delivery.	By 31 March 2024



**Commitment 5**

**We will work within our community to increase understanding and acceptance of autism and create inclusive environments to support the needs of autistic people and their families and carers.**

<b>Action</b>		<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
25.	<p>We understand autistic people often feel anxious and isolated within community life.</p> <p>We will work with key partners to identify and promote proactive methods of increasing understanding and acceptance of autism within our communities.</p>	Department of Health Northern Ireland Councils	By encouraging and promoting autism friendly facilities and activities, autistic people and their families can feel accepted, supported and understood.	By 31 March 2025
26.	<p>We acknowledge autistic people and their families can often feel overwhelmed by the need to access information and services and require greater signposting and ease of access to navigating sources of support, points of contact and community life.</p> <p>Through partnership working, we will commence development of a Regional Autism Information Service to provide signposting to support and services for autistic people and their families.</p>	Northern Ireland Civil Service Health and Social Care Sector Community and Voluntary Sector Autistic People	Phase 1 of the development of the Regional Autism Information Service will include extensive stakeholder engagement to establish what sort of information autistic people, their families and carers would like to be able to access.	Phase 1 to be completed by March 2024

Action	Key Partners	Outcome	Timeframe
<p>27. We are aware autistic people, and those with neurodivergent conditions, can have sensory challenges and anxiety in public areas and buildings requiring support.</p> <p>We will work with key partners, ensuring people with lived experience are involved and included, to revise and refresh the Accessible Business Checklist which will be published by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.</p>	<p>Department of Health            Equality Commission for Northern Ireland            Northern Ireland Councils            Community and Voluntary Sector            Autistic People</p>	<p>The revised Accessible Business Checklist will increase awareness and promote and enable the needs of autistic people to be reflected and accommodated within our business community.</p>	<p>By 31 March 2024</p>

Commitment \_\_\_\_\_

What did we do?	When did we do it?	What difference has it made?	How did we measure this?	Funding allocation	Key partners	Progress at 31 March (Year)