

AUTISM STRATEGY

2023-2028

Delivery Plan 2025-2028

APRIL 2026



INTRODUCTION

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

Background

At the time of development of the Autism Strategy, Northern Ireland Government Departments were and still are experiencing unprecedented budgetary challenges. In consideration of those constraints, an initial two year Delivery Plan for 2023-2025 was developed to set out how actions of the strategy would be taken forward throughout that period.

Current Position

This Delivery Plan sets out the actions to be achieved against commitments, key milestones, quality assurance and impact indicators and the delivery partners involved. The Delivery Plan will be reviewed on an annual basis and a funding report will be produced and published on the Department of Health website. The report will capture the funding which has been allocated to support and deliver the commitments of the strategy. This is in keeping with the section 3B(1) of the Autism Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 [2011 c. 27] (*as amended by the Autism (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 [2022 c.13]*).

Monitoring Report

Under section 2(6) of the Autism Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 [2011 c. 27] (*as amended by the Autism (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 [2022 c.13]*), the Department must monitor the implementation of the Strategy by the Northern Ireland departments and under sections 2(9)-(10) of the Autism Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 [2011 c. 27] (*as amended by the Autism (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 [2022 c.13]*), report on that implementation at least every three years. In keeping with these legislative requirements, the Department will in 2028 publish a monitoring report at the end of the three years.

IMPROVED REGIONAL PATHWAYS

1. 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.

Commitment 1					
<i>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.</i>					
Actions		Who is involved?	Key Milestone	Quality assurance and impact indicators	Date to be completed
1.1	Develop and begin to implement a children and young people's Emotional Health and Wellbeing framework for the Health and Social Care sector. This will support HSC services to	Owner: Department of Health – Strategic Planning and Performance Management Group (SPPG) Partners: PHA, HSC Trusts; lived experience partners	Framework published.	Incorporates feedback from public consultation.	30 April 2026
			High level Implementation plan published.	Plan: a) co-produced with key stakeholders; b) defines regionally consistent diagnostic pathway standards (including referral, assessment, early-support, and maximum waiting-time expectations); c) includes a standardised early-support model deliverable pre-diagnosis, with required components, staffing assumptions, and delivery standards; d) includes alignment with the Local Impact Teams model where relevant and feasible, ensuring consistent referral and early-support pathways across health and education.	30 June 2026

	collaborate in delivering high-quality, evidence-based pathways for children and young people, pre- and post-diagnosis.	through participation and engagement (P&E) processes; autistic children and young people, their families and carers.	Costing schedule completed.	Identifies what is needed to meet current gaps in service provision.	30 June 2026
			Transformational investment recommendations published.	a) Signed-off by key stakeholders b) Aligned to the implementation plan.	31 October 2026
			Future investment is in line with the Emotional Health and Wellbeing framework.	a) Future investment is in line with the Emotional Health and Wellbeing framework.	31 October 2026 onwards
			Services delivered to provide an initial assessment and early support before diagnosis.	Quantitative and qualitative evidence from each of five HSC Trusts that early-support activity has started, e.g. data from Local Impact Teams to show: a) Number/ types of services that plan to make changes to existing services next year; b) Number/ types of services who have provided initial assessment/ early support before diagnosis; reach/ uptake, impact on autistic people's experience/ outcomes.	30 June 2027

1.2	<p>Develop and publish a Learning Disability Strategic Plan. This will seek to address growing pressures in learning disability services and inform future strategic planning, regional commissioning, and improved transitions between children's and adult services.</p>	<p>Owner: Department of Health</p> <p>Partners: PHA; HSC Trusts; lived experience partners through P&E processes; autistic children and young people, their families and carers; VCSE sector organisations contributing to learning disability and autism support pathways.</p>	<p>Learning Disability Service Model published following a formal public consultation.</p>	<p>Plan includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) autism specific priorities; b) costed actions and a delivery roadmap; c) a monitoring framework developed to track implementation and outcomes; d) themes such as regional consistency, needs-based support, planning with an autistic lens, meaningful participation and engagement, and aligned transitions; e) use of existing commissioning and transitions data, and pressure points identified by Trusts, families and professionals to inform regionally consistent commissioning intentions. 	30 June 2026
			<p>Framework for Children with Disabilities integrated into the Regional Strategic Reform Programme.</p>	<p>Recommendations incorporated into the delivery plans for the new Regional Children's Services Strategic Reform Programme implementation groups.</p>	31 March 2026
			<p>The Department will pilot a Transitions Protocol for children and young people with a learning disability, including those with co-occurring autism prior to full rollout.</p>	<p>Implementation includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) coproduction with autistic people, parents and carers to develop accessible resources in different formats (e.g. Easy Reads); b) new data template for tracking young people with complex needs developed and implemented across the 5 Trusts; c) costed implementation plan progressed in terms of recommended Transitions posts required to start implementation of the protocol; 	31 December 2026

				<p>d) bids to secure funding, e.g. Transformation Funding in partnership with Department for the Economy for pilot in one Trust area.</p> <p>Evaluation of pilot includes:</p> <p>a) feedback shows 95% of parents/ guardians are satisfied with template;</p> <p>b) evidence that Transition protocol supports early planning;</p> <p>c) recommendations for any changes required and what is needed to support roll-out to other Trusts,</p>	
			Evaluation	<p>At least 70% of autistic people, families and carers participating in the P&E process report improved clarity about available learning disability services and future transitions, as measured through a DoH-approved survey tool.</p>	31 March 2027

1.3	Accessible step-by-step guidelines throughout the referral and assessment process will be in place to enable individuals and families feel informed and prepared.	Lead: Department of Health – SPPG and PHA.	Step-by-step guidelines developed and published.	Guidelines: a) are coproduced; b) are regionally agreed; c) are rights compliant; d) clarify early support, needs-based access, and expectations before/after diagnosis; e) embed navigation principles to ensure a single, regionally consistent entry point (“one front door”) and clear, predictable steps through the referral and assessment pathway; f) available in multiple accessible formats (e.g. Plain English, Easy Read, digital, printable and visual tools) to support diverse communication needs.	30 September 2026
		Partners: HSC Trusts; PHA; Local Impact Teams; VCSE organisations; Lived experience partners through Public and Personal Involvement (PPI) processes; autistic children and young people, their families and carers.	Regionally agreed NICE compliance reporting schedule developed.	Monitoring framework: a) developed to track implementation and outcomes b) regionally agreed c) NICE compliant.	31 December 2026
			Evaluation of the Guidelines completed.	Evaluation demonstrates: a) Autistic people, families & carers report greater preparedness, clearer expectations, and reduced uncertainty when navigating the referral & assessment process; b) consistent and effective use of the guidelines by staff across all HSC Trusts; c) measurable improvements in system functioning, including specified percentage reductions or increases in key indicators, and evidence of improved flow, reduced delays, and cost efficiencies where achievable.	30 June 2027

1.4	Effectiveness of the autism training videos for GPs, and GP practices will be evaluated.	<p>Owner: Department of Health – SPPG</p> <p>Partners: HSC staff, GPs, Autism coordinators</p>	<p>Evaluation framework agreed with each Trust for the following videos:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is autism? (regional video) - What services and support are available in your area? (local to each Trust) - Lived experience perspective on supporting autistic people (regional). 	<p>Evaluation framework for training uptake and impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Feasibility explored and recommendations made for evaluation across all Trusts; b) Data development and reporting plan agreed with each Trust. 	30 September 2026
			Quarterly reporting of uptake	Quarterly reporting demonstrates increased training uptake across GPs in all Trusts from March 2027.	31 March 2027
			Evaluation of impact.	<p>Evaluation demonstrates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) improved knowledge, confidence and attitudes among GP staff; c) lived-experience feedback evidencing improvements in communication, understanding and practice confidence among trained staff; d) evidence that training supports increased use of neuro-affirmative language and practice. 	31 March 2027

				Evaluation findings inform recommendations for future-focused training development, ensuring alignment with regional priorities and identified gaps.	
1.5	Review and update of the Autism Adult Care Pathway developed by the HSC Regional Autism Strategy Development Network (RASDN). This will ensure that it will be relevant, evidence-informed and needs-led.	Owner: Department of Health – SPPG and HSC Trusts.	A regionally agreed Autism Adult Care Pathway is finalised and published.	Pathway is: a) regionally agreed; b) neuro-affirmative; c) evidence-informed; d) supported by stakeholder feedback that the pathway produced will support collaborative, high-quality care across health and social care, pre- and post-diagnosis.	31 March 2027
		Partners: HSC Trusts; PHA; VCSE organisations; Lived experience partners including autistic adults, their families and carers.	A consultation report summarising stakeholder and lived-experience feedback on the pathway is published.	Stakeholder feedback demonstrates that the revised pathway: a) supports collaborative delivery of high-quality, evidence-based assessment, intervention and support for autistic adults; b) meets presenting needs both before and after diagnosis; c) improves clarity, predictability and regional consistency in adult autism pathways; d) strengthens alignment with regional transitions expectations, particularly for young people moving from children’s to adult services.	30 June 2027
			All HSC Trusts confirm readiness to begin implementation and alignment of local adult autism pathways with the	a) implementation plan agreed b) implementation begins.	31 December 2027

			updated regional model.		
1.6	A clear plan in place to support more timely access to assessment, support and intervention before, during and after diagnosis.	Department of Health – SPPG and HSC Trusts.	A regionally agreed action plan developed and endorsed by all HSC Trusts.	The action plan: a) details clear evidence-informed actions to support more timely access to assessment, support and intervention before, during and after diagnosis; b) is endorsed by all HSC Trusts.	31 March 2027
			Data plan developed and agreed.	Data collection plan and standardised reporting developed and agreed with all Trusts to track implementation and outcomes.	31 March 2027
			Ongoing evaluation of implementation and effectiveness.	Trusts demonstrate progress against the regionally agreed actions through standardised reporting: a) Quarterly reporting demonstrates: i) evidence of improved pathway flow and reduced impact of avoidable process barriers on delay; ii) greater consistency in communication with families across Trusts; iii) increased access to early-support options prior to diagnosis. b) Lived-experience feedback evidences greater clarity, predictability and support during the assessment process.	31 December 2027

1.7	Implementation of a regional protocol to standardise the approach to transitions for children with learning disability and co-occurring autism , aligned to NICE guidelines.	Owner: Department of Health	Gap analysis of Transitions planning completed to inform new service provision across HSC, Education and Housing	Gap analysis: a) is regionally coordinated; b) uses data from Transitions databases in each Trust, professional insights and lived-experience feedback.	31 March 2027
		Partners: HSC, Education and Housing	Regional transitions protocol for children with learning disability and co-occurring autism agreed.	Protocol is: a) aligned to NICE guidelines; b) agreed by Health, Education and Housing Partners.	31 March 2027
			Protocol implemented across all HSC Trusts	a) implementation across all Trusts; b) Cross-agency expectations are clearly communicated.	31 March 2027
			Data plan developed	Data plan developed to track implementation and outcomes.	31 March 2027

			Ongoing evaluation of implementation and impact	<p>Evaluation:</p> <p>a) Trust and cross-agency reporting shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) more timely and consistent transition planning processes; ii) clearer roles and responsibilities across Health, Education and Housing; iii) improved predictability and clarity for children, young people and families. <p>b) Lived-experience feedback shows improved understanding, coordination and support during the transition from children's to adult services.</p>	30 September 2027
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ENHANCED MODEL OF SUPPORT

2. 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.

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.

Actions		Who is involved	Key Milestone	Quality assurance and impact indicators	Date to be completed
2.1	Implementation and effectiveness of a new Special Education Needs (SEN) Framework will be monitored to improve participation and	Owner: Department of Education, Education Authority, Local IMPACT Teams.	Regionally consistent set of autism-specific universal adjustments is developed.	Adjustments are: a) autism-specific; b) regionally consistent; c) aligned with the Inclusive System Development Programme, the Graduated Response and SEN workforce development workstreams.	31 March 2027

	empowerment through the assessment process.	Partners: Dept of Health	Monitoring framework developed and implemented.	Data collected and reviewed on: a) what is being implemented in various settings; b) consistency in approach across all settings; c) schools and the EA use the new statutory Personal Learning Plans (PLP) to review and improve their programme of special educational provision for all children and young people with special educational needs; e) PLPs are used as the primary information source for schools when referring a child for Stage 2 services.	31 March 2028
			Evaluation.	Evidence (including lived experience) shows: a) reduction in the bureaucracy around referrals/ requests for involvement; b) improved and reduced timescales for the SEN statutory assessment and statementing process; c) faster access to the special educational provision children need.	31 March 2028
2.2	Develop and publish guidance within our School Building Handbook on the design of inclusive learning environments and suitable accommodation	Owner: Department of Education Partners: Education Authority, Local IMPACT Teams.	Section on Autism-Inclusive Learning Environments Guidance developed and published within Dept of Education Inclusive Design Guidance.	Guidance: a) is coproduced with autistic pupils, families and educators. b) applies across all settings; c) is based on evidence of best practice; d) sets out autism-specific expectations for sensory-aware classrooms, quiet/ regulation spaces, predictable transitions, signage and accessible communication.	Delivery of this action is subject to Executive support and a confirmed funding commitment.

	for children and young people with a wide range of needs including autism.		Data plan developed and implemented.	Monitoring data shows: a) effective awareness raising of the new guidance; b) reach of new guidance.	Delivery of this action is subject to Executive support and a confirmed funding commitment.
			Ongoing evaluation of effectiveness and impact.	Evaluation using quantitative and qualitative data (e.g. estate-wide audits), and drawing on lived experience) shows: a) improvements in school design; b) improvements in everyday practice; c) more accessible learning environments are provided that support children and young people's individualised needs; d) children and young people have better learning experiences.	Delivery of this action is subject to Executive support and a confirmed funding commitment.

2.3	Work will continue with Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA) in conjunction with DEY (Department of Education and Youth Ireland) to improve access to resources and training for parents and educational staff.	Owner: Department of Education Partners: Education Authority, Local Impact Teams.	Expand access to autism information, resources and training for parents through accessible online and in-person training programmes.	Evaluation data will indicate that at least 80% of parents report increased confidence in supporting their autistic child.	31 March 2028.
			Ongoing monitoring and evaluation.	Evidence shows: a) improved access to resources and training for parents and educational staff; b) improved partnership across Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland in relation to the understanding and development of autism practice.	31 March 2028

2.4	Enhancement of pathways and supports for school leavers and other learners who want to access the Department for the Economy's education, skills and training provision (subject to funding).	Owner: Department for Economy Partners DoH DE DfC DfI FE Colleges	New routes into apprenticeships for learners with SEN are scoped, developed and piloted.	Pilot model to be scoped. Engage with Sector/Employers and other stakeholders on design and processes. Subject to resources, aim to roll out test / pilot in 2027/28 and 2028/29. Ongoing monitoring during pilot and evaluation on completion.	31 March 2028
			Improved methods of data capture to enable monitoring of progress for FE learners with additional learning/support needs, including autism, to inform policy making.	Ongoing monitoring and evaluation data shows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Retention rates across FE provision for those with autism. b) Trends in progression pathways chosen by FE learners with autism. 	31 December 2028
			A new statutory assessment and support model for FE learners is developed.	Legislative and policy requirements to underpin model will be scoped in 2026/27. Co-design work to take place in 2027/28 to inform consultation (likely in 2028).	31 March 2028

			<p>Introduction of a dedicated Transition Support Service for learners with additional needs progressing from school to Economy pathways.</p>	<p>Scoping and design of pilot transition support service during 2026/27. Roll out of pilot service from April 2027 (subject to funding). Monitoring and evaluation.</p>	<p>31 March 2028</p>
			<p>A strategic three-year, joint Careers Action Plan for the Department for the Economy (DfE) supported by the Department of Education (DE) is implemented. This includes launch of the Careers Portal and dedicated software to support Autistic clients with the career guidance process’.</p>	<p>The Joint Careers Action Plan: a) is codesigned, with lived experience partners; b) is a partnership between the Department for the Economy and the Department of Education; c) embeds neuro-affirming practice, communication approaches, sensory understanding and practical adjustments; d) a monitoring framework is developed and used to review ongoing implementation.</p>	<p>31 March 2028</p> <p>31 December 2026 (Software).</p>

			Explore the potential for additional data sharing arrangements with other Departments to improve cross government support for Children & Young People with Special Educational Needs.	The scoping: a) involves key departments DoH, DE, DfE. b) The scoping exercise will provide clear options for next steps, including recommendations on where formal data-sharing agreements may be required. c) a Working Group involving key Departments has been established.	31 December 2026
			Consultation completed on proposals to improve access, support, and outcomes into and through higher education for Widening Participation (WP) students.	Consultation makes clear recommendations on actions relating to: a) how to improve access, support, and outcomes into and through higher education by removing barriers for learners; and b) tailored supports for those who need them.	31 December 2026

SUPPORT INDIVIDUALISED NEEDS OF AUTISTIC PEOPLE

3. We will promote training and the need for understanding of the individualised needs of autistic people and consideration of communicative approaches to staff.

<i>Commitment 3</i>					
<i>We will seek opportunity for increased understanding of autism in the workplace to enable individuals to feel supported within employment and enhance career opportunity.</i>					
Actions		Who is involved?	Key Milestone	Quality assurance and impact indicators	Date to be completed
3.1	Promote and support the use of regional Autism Employment Guidance. This aims to raise understanding of autism and reasonable adjustments and support to	Lead: Department of Health Partners: Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and DoH Regional Autism Forum.	Light-touch summary evaluation report produced.	Ongoing monitoring and evaluation shows: a) stable or increasing engagement (e.g. website analytics, downloads, participation in ECNI-led awareness sessions); b) improved staff understanding of autistic needs and reasonable adjustments (e.g. voluntary employer feedback); c) guidance supports more predictable and accessible employment processes (e.g. lived experience feedback); d) disaggregation where possible by characteristics such as location, organisation size and sector; e) training events are high-quality and shown to improve understanding of autism and reasonable adjustments (data provided by ECNI).	31 March 2026 31 March 2027 31 March 2028.

	underpin and enhance life skills to support autistic individuals as they manage transition and adapt into careers and employment.			<p>Light-touch summary evaluation report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) outlines engagement levels; b) employer perspectives; c) recommended next steps for future promotion and iterative improvement of the guidance. <p>Longer-term evaluation shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) more autistic people find it easier to manage transition and adapt into careers and employment; b) increase in number of autistic people who are employed. 	
3.2	Actions taken for all staff working in the NICS and ALBs to complete autism training.	<p>Lead: Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS)</p> <p>Partners: ALBs</p>	Formal monitoring and evaluation implemented	<p>Quarterly Monitoring data reported to NICS Diversity Champions shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) increased completion rates of the Supporting Autistic People e-learning module across all NICS departments from March 2024; b) increased completion rates of Supporting Autistic People e-learning module across ALBs shown from March 2024; c) JAM Card completion rates total a minimum of 60% of all NICS staff. <p>Evaluation shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) changes to policies and practice; b) lived experience feedback reflects more predictable, respectful and supportive interactions with autistic people. 	Ongoing - quarterly monitoring each year of e-learning completion rates.
3.3	The NICS as an employer, will continue to deliver a range	Lead: Department of Finance.	Deliver a range of interventions.	<p>Interventions will include an annual internal communications plan featuring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) features visible leadership contributions; and b) promotes learning interventions. 	Ongoing.

	of interventions as required to support and promote neurodiversity in the workplace.	Partners: NICS Diversity Champions Network NICS Disability Working Group NICS Disability Staff Network NICS Autism Working Group Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.	Monitoring and evaluation framework developed and implemented.	Monitoring shows: a) increase in completion rates of e-learning courses (Disability Awareness for front-line staff; Supporting Autistic People; Supporting Vulnerable People); b) increase in attendance at events / webinars. Evaluation shows: a) increased knowledge about how to support neurodiversity in the workplace; and b) autistic staff feel better supported in the workplace.	31 March 2026 31 March 2027 31 March 2028
3.4	The Civil Service as an employer will implement a range of interventions to increase the representation of Disabled people including	Lead: Department of Finance Partners: NICS Diversity Champions Network	New Ring-Fencing Scheme (RFS) policy implemented as a positive action measure.	Evidence shows: a) increases in the proportion of the NICS workforce with a declared disability; b) increase in number of work experience placements / work placements for Disabled people.	31 December 2027
			Review and promotion of the NICS Work Experience Scheme.	Evidence shows: a) an increase in the number of placements; and b) the scheme provides meaningful placements for Disabled people.	Ongoing

	people with Autism in its workforce.	NICS Disability Working Group NICS Disability Staff Network NICS Autism Working Group Equality Commission for Northern Ireland	Design and delivery of new NICS Employability Programmes to those furthest removed from the labour market with an initial focus on disabled people and care experienced.	Evidence shows a) a new NICS employability pathway for Disabled people; and b) an increase in the number of people with a declared disability in the NICS workforce.	31 December 2027
3.5	The NI Civil Service as an employer will undertake a comprehensive review of the reasonable adjustment process and deliver improvements through a co-design approach with key stakeholders	Lead: Department of Finance Partners: NICS Diversity Champions Network NICS Disability Working Group NICS Disability Staff Network NICS Autism Working Group ECNI	Review and recommendations completed.	Review of reasonable adjustment process via a formal working group of key stakeholders including Disabled NICS staff which will a) equip line managers with the relevant knowledge and skills; b) provide an effective and efficient reasonable adjustment process for users; c) complies with legal obligations; d) reflects best practice; and e) supports service delivery/business needs.	31 March 2026
			Implementation of recommended actions.	Implementation will include: a) launch of a new policy and procedure; b) supporting resources including line managers training; and c) a comprehensive communications campaign.	30 September 2026
			Develop and implement a monitoring and	Evidence shows: a) increase in the number of recorded requested and agreed reasonable adjustments;	31 March 2027 31 March 2028

	including colleagues with lived experience.		evaluation framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b) increased confidence from staff in the adjustments process; and c) managers report improved confidence and clarity in implementing adjustments. 	
3.6	Evaluation of the HSC Autism and Neurodiversity training packages launched in August 2025 for all HSC Staff.	Department of Health Strategic Planning and Performance Group.	Evaluation completed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) analysis of uptake across professional groups, sector and locality. b) Feedback from end of course survey shows increase in knowledge. 	30 September 2026

3.7	The continued provision of training to educate those with disabilities and neurodiverse conditions. through PSNI college.	Police Service of Northern Ireland	Evaluation of impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Input from Independent Reviewer of Autism on Neurodiversity training (2) Review of training in relation to disabilities and neurodivergence. (3) Better informed and responsive policing through increased understanding and awareness of neurodiversity. 	30 November 2027
3.8	Working with external bodies and our Autism Support Network to understand and improve communication more broadly to support both our officers in engaging with the public and colleagues within the service.	Police Service of Northern Ireland	Evaluation of impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Police College to engage with external bodies during the review of their neurodiversity and communication training. (2) Review of workforce processes in supporting those who are neurodivergent. (3) Continued engagement with the Disability Support Network. 	30 November 2027

3.9	Rollout of Neuro Diversity training to Youth Justice Agency Staff operational staff as scoped from the profile of YJA referrals.	Youth Justice Agency	Evaluation of impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Promoting positive attitudes towards people with autism. (2) Assistance to staff on best practice on working with young people with autism. 	Ongoing-Continuous Improvement, assessed yearly.
3.10	<p>Delivery of training in autism awareness and neuro diversity training to NIPS</p> <p>Operational Grade staff.</p>	Northern Ireland Prison Service	Forms part of the ongoing Prison Service College training package delivered to all recruit classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Review of the effectiveness of training in relation to disabilities and neurodivergence. (2) The training will provide staff with strategies for the management of autism displayed by those in their care. (3) Monitoring via the equality and Diversity meetings at all prisons. 	In-place/On-going.

GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF AUTISM TO PROVIDE APPROPRIATE SUPPORT.

4. In collaboration with Health and Social Care Trusts, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive will continue to support transitional arrangements for applicants who may be seeking housing.

<i>Commitment 4</i>					
<i>Through increased understanding of autism, our housing providers will be more equipped to provide supportive engagement and adequately support the needs of autistic people.</i>					
Actions		Who is involved?	Key Milestone	Quality assurance and impact indicators	Date to be completed
4.1	Continued work with key partners to support transitional arrangements for autistic people seeking housing and obtaining housing information , for	Lead: Northern Ireland Housing Executive,	Pathways to Accessible Housing Project completed and published	Pathways to Accessible Housing Project: a) involves collaboration with health colleagues and others; b) makes recommendations for a regionally consistent transitional pathway	31 March 2027
		Partners: HSC Trusts	Regionally consistent transitional pathway is published/	Pathway: a) uses findings from the Pathways to Accessible Housing Project; b) introduces predictable communication standards (clear timelines, written follow-ups, and sensory-aware options); c) ensures access to transitional support is based on functional need, not diagnosis;	31 March 2027

example, details of housing options and financial support which may often prove difficult for autistic people.			d) includes clear actions to ensure access to housing support with clear pathways is open to all persons living with disabilities.	
	An accessible autism-inclusive 'Housing Journey' guide published		Guide is: a) concise; b) autism inclusive; c) coproduced with autistic individuals; d) accessible in different formats.	31 May 2026
	Monitoring and Evaluation		Post-project review shows: a) at least 70% of Housing Executive staff involved in housing delivery, tenancy management and accessible housing, report improved confidence supporting autistic applicants by 31 March 2028; b) Lived-experience feedback evidences improved clarity and support – there is no definitive date as this is a continuous process and is current practice; c) Light-touch annual assurance confirms guidance is being used in practice from 31 March 2028.	31 March 2028

4.2	Continued 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.	Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Department of Health and Community and Voluntary sector.	Delivery begins of updated and consolidated Training programme on autism	Training is: a) delivered on an ongoing basis to customer facing and assessment staff; b) content is updated regularly, informed by autistic people to prevent outdated or static material; c) feedback loops are established to show how lived-experience informs change; d) embedded within induction, refresher cycles and workforce development structures.	Has already commenced and is continuous process in onboarding new staff.
			Monitoring and evaluation	Evidence shows that the training: a) at least 65% of customer-facing staff complete training by March 2028; b) customer service feedback (including existing customer satisfaction tools are appropriate) indicates improved communication accessibility and environmental awareness is underway and is a continuous process; c) annual evaluation shows measurable increases in staff confidence and reduced procedural barriers where possible legal framework within housing legislation has to be applied to all at all times.	31 March 2028

4.3	Continued work with key partners in seeking appropriate housing solutions for autistic people reducing any barriers to their ability to develop and maintain independence.	Northern Ireland Housing Executive.	Pathways Project underway completion date of March 2027	The project has particular focus on people living with ASD/Neurodivergence and also learning difficulties.	31 March 2027
4.4	An Inclusive Design Guide published that takes into consideration the needs of people living with cognitive and sensory impairments including autism. During first year after launch we will evaluate	Lead: Northern Ireland Housing Executive Partner: Department of Health	Inclusive Design Guide published.	Guidance: a) includes clear, practical and needs-led autism-inclusive principles; b) focuses on embedding consistent practice ensuring low- or no-cost adjustment, predictable environments and communication accessibility; c) provides multi-format tools (visuals, checklists, illustrated examples) to support implementation; d) disseminated to NIHE teams, adaptations teams and housing associations.	31 May 2026
			Monitoring and evaluation.	Evaluation: a) feedback from staff and end users on impact, to establish if it is easy to use and how effective is it in increasing knowledge about how to adapt houses and other environments to be more neurodivergent friendly;	31 March 2028.

	the usage of the guidance.			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b) improvement plan issued reflecting staff and lived-experience feedback; c) use findings to inform future design work refurbishment decisions and customer-facing environment improvements. 	
4.5	Continued engagement with Disability Forums, including Autism Forums to enhance collaborative working between Housing and Health.	Lead: Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Partners: HSC Trusts and Department of Health.	Ongoing engagement with Autism and Disability Forums.	Engagement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) is structured; b) is maintained and strengthened; c) includes at least two feedback loops each year showing how autistic input shaped improvements (“you said, we did”). 	Ongoing
			Cross-agency communication framework published.	Communication framework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) establishes predictable cross-agency, communication pathways; b) develops simple communication expectations for referrals, updates and named contact points; c) standardises Trust-to-Housing referral template for autism-related housing needs. 	This is already in place with the Interdivisional forums attended by Housing staff and Health Trusts. Referral process under review with Pathways Project
			Monitoring and evaluation.	Annual reporting demonstrates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) improved coordination and clarity for autistic applicants. 	31 March 2028.

INCREASED UNDERSTANDING AND ACCEPTANCE OF AUTISM

5. Encourage and promote increasing understanding of autism.

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.

Actions		Who is involved	Key Milestone	Quality assurance and impact indicators	Date to be completed
5.1	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.	Lead: Northern Ireland Civil Service Departments. Partners: Equality Commission NI Health and Social Care	Accessible Business checklist published.	Checklist: a) coproduced with key partners and people with lived experience.	31 March 2027
			Monitoring and evaluation.	a) reach/ uptake of checklist is monitored; b) more businesses understand what best practice is in neuro-affirmative and inclusive practices and use these.	31 March 2028

		Sector; Community and Voluntary Sector; Autistic People.			
5.2	Continued work with key partners to identify and promote proactive methods of increasing understanding and acceptance of autism within our communities.	Lead: Northern Ireland Civil Service Departments. Partners: Health and Social Care Sector. Equality Commission NI; Health and Social Care Sector; Community and Voluntary Sector; Autistic People.	Autism-Inclusive Community Environments resource pack, incorporating the refreshed Accessible Business Checklist, is published.	Autism-Inclusive Community environments resource pack: a) is co designed; b) incorporates existing good practice initiatives; c) identifies gaps; d) includes a refreshed and relaunched Accessible Business checklist with autistic co design and ECNI input; e) is short and practical with resources for adoption across public-facing setting (e.g. checklists, examples, signage templates, low/ no-cost adjustments).	31 March 2028
			Implementation.	Uptake is promoted across councils, libraries, leisure services, museums, community hubs and business forums, using existing engagement structure and sector networks.	31 December 2028
			Evaluation report published.	Qualitative feedback from autistic people and families evidence: a) improved predictability, communication clarity or sensory comfort in at least two everyday community settings; b) Light-touch feedback loops (“you said, we did”) established with autistic people and families to test	Annually from 2029.

				whether changes are visible and meaningful in everyday environments.	
5.3	Digital Regional Autism Information Service developed through partnership working to provide signposting to support and services for autistic people and their families.	Lead: Northern Ireland Civil Service Departments. Partners: Health and Social Care Sector; Community and Voluntary Sector; Autistic People.	Digital Regional Autism Information Service developed and publicly accessible.	Digital First Regional Autism service: a) builds on the Phase 1 scoping work to define core user needs, priority topics and preferred formats where possible; b) provides clear, plain-language, up-to-date information and signposting for autistic people of all ages, their families and carers, and professionals; c) information is needs-led rather than diagnosis-led; d) content, structure and navigation co-designed with autistic people: - clear navigation by life-stage and theme - strong signposting to existing authoritative sources, avoiding duplication; e) content governance process established (including autistic and family representatives) to keep Information Hub up to date, high quality and accurate.	30 June 2026
			Monitoring.	Quarterly monitoring of user analytics e.g. page views and user feedback tool used to: a) inform whether complementary in-person access options may be required; b) feedback received by NI Direct via their online feedback form to be shared with NICS Departments.	Ongoing on a quarterly basis
			Evaluation report published.	Evaluation report shows: a) at least 70% of respondents to the user-feedback tool report that the information is clear, helpful and improves understanding of available support;	30 June 2027

				b) summarises usage, gaps and recommendations, including options and risks to any future in-person access model.	
5.4	An In-person Regional Autism Information Service developed through partnership working, to provide signposting to support and services for autistic people and their families.	Lead: Northern Ireland Civil Service Departments. Partners: Health and Social Care Sector. Community and Voluntary Sector. Autistic People	In Person Regional Autism Information Service implementation plan published.	In Person regional autism information service: a) informed by mapping of existing access points and current strengths/ barriers; b) informed by monitoring reports from digital information service; b) uses codesigned quality criteria for ‘autism-inclusive information points’ (e.g. predictable access, sensory-aware spaces, availability of written communication options, links to the digital Regional Autism Information Service).	31 March 2027
			Pilot completed and evaluation published.	Development is informed by a small number of pilot sites that: - integrate autism-inclusive information access into existing services; - provide staff with simple scripts, basic staff awareness resources, and direct links to the digital autism information service; - collect proportionate data on user experience; - inform an options paper on whether, and in what form, local in-person access should be integrated into the statutory Autism Information Service. - inform a decision on whether and how local in-person access should complement the digital service within the Autism Act information duty.	31 March 2028

5.5	Strengthen staff capacity and physical environments to be more neurodiverse friendly.	Lead: Department of Health	Explore potential to enhance existing guidance to enable providers of HSC care for autistic people to make adaptations to their physical environments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Identification of relevant guidance b) Identification of relevant stakeholders (e.g. health estates, primary care, people with lived experience, etc) c) Scope out existing good practice d) Recommendations made so guidance aligns with best practice and training e) Action plan developed. 	31 December 2026
		Partners: HSC Trusts, Autism Fora, Autism coordinators			
		Department of Health Strategic Planning and Performance Group and Middletown Centre for Autism.	Support the uptake of Neurodiversity Awareness Training on Learn HSCNI.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Targeted ongoing promotional plan informed by quarterly monitoring of uptake. b) Quarterly monitoring of uptake across HSCNI staff, sector and locality shows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) increasing number of staff complete awareness training each year; ii) completion, targeted uptake; iii) improvements in knowledge, skills and behaviour which lead to more neuroinclusive environments. 	Quarterly
		Develop Specialist Neurodiversity Training for Mental Health staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) will build on foundation training already developed; b) coproduced with people with lived experience; c) specialised for the needs of mental health staff; d) based on best available evidence; e) evaluated for effectiveness in changing target knowledge, skills and behaviours. 	30 September 2026	

			Scoping completed of making the Neurodiversity Awareness training accessible to a wider group of stakeholders.	a) make clear recommendations.	
5.6	Learning and awareness of the role of carers through targeted engagement and awareness raising.	Police Service of Northern Ireland.	Monitoring and evaluation.	Better informed and responsive policing through increased understanding and awareness of autism. Success associated with this will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Increased rates of trust in policing; (2) Reduction in complaints related to interactions with police; (3) Lowered reports of hate crimes through increased awareness. 	30 November 2027

5.7	We will ensure that the Youth Justice Agency buildings and services are accessible for children who are neurodivergent.	Youth Justice Agency.	Monitoring and evaluation.	Dependent on the availability of funding.	Dependent on the availability of funding.
5.8	Mental health and neuro-disability assessments are completed for young people in the Juvenile Justice Centre.	Youth Justice Agency.	Monitoring and evaluation.	Improving quality of life for young people in our care with autism.	In place and ongoing.
5.9	During initial assessment by YJA staff the needs of young people with mental health issues are considered. Where clinical needs are recognised YJA will refer to the CAMHS service.	Youth Justice Agency	Monitoring and evaluation.	(1) Improving quality of life for children with autism. (2) Improving mental health.	In place and ongoing.

<p>5.10</p>	<p>Continue to work to ensure adjustments are made and awareness of any neurodiverse condition is highlighted on the prison estate.</p>	<p>Northern Ireland Prison Service and key partners.</p>	<p>This includes: Staff Training to ensure all staff are Autism Aware and are able to provide support to autistic people, if needed; providing adjustments to the environment to help autistic people use the premises; ensuring appropriate and individualised customer service & communication that assists autistic people; creating an environment where people feel comfortable disclosing their diagnosis of autism should they wish to. (Includes</p>	<p>Monitoring of the effectiveness of adjustments through feedback from prisoners, staff and key partners in the South Eastern Trust and Belfast Metropolitan College. Monitoring through the Equality and Diversity meetings to identify improved communication, enhanced inclusivity and diversity across the prisons. 'Help Kids Talk' is an excellent example facilitated by Barnardo's and a Speech and Language Therapist to increase fathers' confidence in supporting their child's communication. The Speech and Language Therapist and NIACRO help fathers connect with their children through play. The addition of a registered nurse for learning disability has positively impacted patients with learning disabilities and other neurodiverse conditions, including acquired brain injury and autism.</p>	<p>In-place and ongoing.</p>
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			customers and employees).		
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5.11	There is a clearly defined forensic referral and care pathway.	Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) Partners: Trust Autism Forums, YJA, Forensic Managed Care Network (FMCN), and Probation Board for Northern Ireland) PBNI	Evaluation of impact.	The pathway takes into consideration Forensic service user autism specific priorities.	In place and ongoing.
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5.12	The Department of Justice will continue to provide Registered Intermediaries (RIs) to assist vulnerable victims, witnesses, or defendants with significant communication needs, including autism, to understand and participate in police interviews and court proceedings.	Lead: Department of Justice (DoJ) Partners: PSNI PPS Law Society	Monitoring and evaluation.	DOJ to publish an annual evaluation report relating to the RI Scheme to include: a) Uptake of RI service b) Service users broken down by age, status (victims, witnesses, or defendants) and communication need.	31 March 2027
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