

Forward Plan reference number: FP/574/11/22

Report title: Adoption of 'Meaningful Lives Matter - Our plan for a more inclusive Essex'	
Report to: Cabinet	
Report author: Cllr John Spence, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health	
Date: 18 April 2023	For: Decision
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County Divisions affected: All Essex	

1. Everyone's Essex

- 1.1 Supporting residents to live independently by assisting them to access suitable accommodation, supporting access to employment and meaningful activities, and enabling independence at home are fundamental ambitions for Essex County Council.
- 1.2 These ambitions are reflected strongly in a new document, '*Meaningful Lives Matter - Our plan for a more inclusive Essex*.' Its aim is to enable people with disabilities to live the best lives they can.
- 1.3 The document sets a clear ambition and commitment to help improve the lives of people with disabilities. It is for the next 4 years and covers adults in Essex who have a learning disability, a physical disability, or a sensory impairment, and adults who have autism or neurodivergence that affects them in a way that they experience to be disabling.
- 1.4 The document describes the four most important things people with disabilities have told us they want from their lives; good relationships, a place to call home, to be safe and well, and meaningful activity. The document sets out where we need to address barriers to these things and will guide our future work with adults with disabilities to help do this.
- 1.5 The document aligns closely with the Everyone's Essex 4-year plan for levelling up, particularly its focus on promoting health, care, and wellbeing for everyone who need support. It also aligns with the strategic framework set out within the Adult Social Care business plan and links to related strategies such as the carers strategy and all-age autism strategy. It is in accordance with ECC's objectives around climate change.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Adopt Meaningful Lives Matter, our Plan for a more inclusive Essex in the form appended to this report.
- 2.2 Note that officers are working on a plan for implementation and a funding request which they intend to present to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health and the Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Corporate Affairs for formal approval.

3 Background and Proposal

- 3.1 People with disabilities have the right to a full life, but they are often marginalised within our society. Whilst the current social care offer enables many good outcomes, we know that these are not always consistent. Demographics and demand for services are challenging and require us to use resources efficiently and ensure sustainability within the system.
- 3.2 There is opportunity to address barriers in society and to better provide what people with disabilities want from their lives. A clear strategic ambition and commitment to people in Essex will help focus efforts on delivering a more holistic, person-centred and lifetime approach for people with disabilities.
- 3.3 Over the last few years, engagement with people with disabilities and the carers, providers and partners who have a role in providing support to them has indicated what people want in their lives and what their main strengths and challenges are. Over the past year we have undertaken more focused engagement such as surveys, 1:1 interviews and group discussion sessions. Our learning from these has uncovered four key aspirations that people with disabilities have told us are most important to them in their lives and that have formed the core of the document. These are:
 - 3.3.1 Meaningful relationships within a community, including with families, partners, friends, groups of people with similar interests and paid or unpaid carers
 - 3.3.2 A suitable place to live and call home, whether that is a person’s own home or other accommodation that best allows their needs to be met
 - 3.3.3 Ability to maintain as good health and wellbeing as possible, including financial wellbeing, and personal safety
 - 3.3.4 Access to meaningful activity during the day, such as education, employment and volunteering, or other fulfilling day activities, which may include opportunities to contribute to society and the economy.
- 3.4 The document aligns closely with ‘Everyone’s Essex’. It links to the strategic framework set out within the Adult Social Care (ASC) business plan, contributing towards the ASC vision of ‘enabling people to live their lives to the fullest.’ It also connects with related strategies such as the Carers Strategy.

- 3.5 The document is in accordance with the Care Act and its principles around community-based support and prevention, and the Health and Care Act and integration.
- 3.6 ECC consulted with the public over a twelve-week period between 1 December and 23 February. We invited feedback on the content of the strategy from all residents of Essex and, in particular, people with disabilities, their carers and families and people who support people with disabilities as part of their work. The consultation was made as accessible to a wide range of needs as possible and has included in-person and online focus groups and drop-in sessions with people with disabilities. In total 213 people were engaged in the consultation.
- 3.7 Feedback received in the consultation showed us that the vast majority of people agreed with the priorities and areas of focus of the strategy document. However, it highlighted that a few aspects were missing, the most frequently mentioned of which was the need for information and help to access financial support. We have amended the document to include this aspect, incorporating information and support with finances within the theme of staying safe and well to recognise that financial wellbeing is an important component of overall wellbeing.
- 3.8 Other aspects that people felt were missing included transitions from children to adult services, and better awareness and understanding around disability in communities. We have addressed this by adding in specific reference to including young people coming into adulthood and adding in that we will work to help communities to learn more about disabilities as an area of focus. Timely access to support was also raised, particularly in relation to finding the right place to live with the right support, and we have acknowledged this challenge as something we wish to achieve within the strategy.
- 3.9 A number of respondents made the point that it was important for services to be accessible and to take a person-centred approach. We have reviewed the document and believe that this is already well embedded within it but made sure this was the case.
- 3.10 Some respondents raised issues relating to the education system and informal carers but these were intended to be outside of the scope of the strategy and we are not proposing to bring them in as they are for other policies and strategies.
- 3.11 Some people asked for a commitment to always ensuring a consistent relationship with the same care professional but we feel that this is not realistically always achievable and felt that other areas of focus within the strategy will help contribute to a coherent level of support.
- 3.12 Autism is not included in the draft document. This was considered but not included because a person with autism may not be disabled. If they are disabled they would be included within the document. A significant number of people felt strongly that autism on its own should be included within the document. To recognise this, we have extended the document's scope to include people with

autism where they experience it to be disabling, regardless of whether they have disability.

3.13 It is proposed that the document will be launched online and at an in-person event in May 2023.

3.14 We are working on implementation of the document and will bring a further report forward as a key decision in the summer which agrees the action plan and how its delivery will be funded. An indicative list of activities which will be considered for inclusion in the plan is the Meaningful Lives Matter programme ‘plan on a page,’ which is at appendix 4, but this is an emerging document and Cabinet is not asked to adopt it at this stage clearly all such activities are subject to funding,

4 Links to our Strategic Ambitions

4.1 This report links to the following aims in the Essex Vision:

- Enjoy life into old age
- Strengthen communities through participation
- Connect us to each other and the world
- Share prosperity with everyone

4.2 Approving the recommendations in this report will have the following impact on the Council’s ambition to be net carbon neutral by 2050:

- Consideration of how future work to support adults with disabilities help protect the environment by reducing carbon emissions and environmental damage.

4.3 This report links to the following strategic priorities in the emerging Organisational Strategy ‘Everyone’s Essex’:

- Health wellbeing and independence for all ages

5 Options

5.1 **Option 1:** Do not endorse the document and continue to work towards delivering the Adult Social Care business plan without a specific document in place. This option is not recommended because there will be a lack of strategic direction to unite the different work underway to support people with disabilities. This therefore makes it more difficult to plan and prioritise which may adversely affect the delivery or effectiveness of future initiatives. It also misses an opportunity to make visible to the public, partners, and our workforce what we have learned is needed and to commit to doing this for people with disabilities.

5.2 **Option 2 (Recommended):** Adopt the document. This option is recommended because it provides a clear strategic direction for future work and communicates this clearly to our workforce, partners, and the public. It supports us to prioritise our work and deliver better outcomes for people with disabilities

and allows us to review and measure what we achieve going forwards against our stated aims and aspirations.

6 Issues for Consideration

6.1 Financial implications

- 6.1.1 The Council currently spends £277m per annum on people with disabilities. Whilst there are no direct additional financial implications associated with this decision, there is a risk costs increase due to demographic pressures and our ambition to support people proactively, but the aim is to mitigate this with a focus on early intervention and prevention of costs in the long term.
- 6.1.2 The document will require some investment in training that cannot yet be quantified. There is a project budget that will be able to fund small investments in delivering this document. It is understood that officers are developing an action plan to set out what the Council is intending to do to implement the aims of Meaningful Lives Matter. It is further understood that a further report for key decision is planned to agree the action plan and request additional funding from reserves.
- 6.1.3 Any further investment required to support the document will be subject to separate governance as and when required.

6.2 Legal implications

- 6.2.1 It is lawful to adopt the proposed document. Whilst it is slightly unusual to adopt a high level plan without the resources and plan for implementation, this is not unlawful and it is intended to remedy this omission in the next few months.

7 Equality and Diversity Considerations

- 7.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:
- (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 7.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. The Act states that ‘marriage and civil partnership’

is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).

- 7.3 The Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessment indicates that the proposals in this report will not have a disproportionately adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic. Instead, they will have a positive impact for people with disabilities and also older people.

8 List of Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1: Meaningful Lives Matter – Our plan for a more inclusive Essex
- 8.2 Appendix 2: Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessment
- 8.3 Appendix 3: Engagement and consultation findings pack
- 8.4 Appendix 4: Meaningful Lives Matter – emerging plan on a page (not adopted)

9 List of Background Papers

- 9.1 QA Research report findings