

Disability Strategy Engagement and Consultation findings

March 2023



Essex County Council

What is this engagement report?

During the process of creating Essex County Council's new Disability Strategy, we have conducted various forms of engagement and consultation with adults, partners, staff, and providers. This has included one-to-one interviews conducted by QA Research, an independent research organisation, as well as forums, formal & informal meetings, and various surveys.

This was with the aim of capturing key themes regarding what is important to include within the strategy and the workings behind it. An important part of the creation of a strategy to ensure it meets the requirements and needs of those who it will impact the most.

This pack documents the findings and also helps to show how the key themes of our engagement have gone on to help shape the strategy.



Engagement Feedback

Engagement Priorities

Early Help

Housing

Inclusive Communities

Accessibility

Engagement Feedback

Early Help

I am not getting help early enough – Work for Change

Adults with lived experience were sent a questionnaire and took part in a two-day workshop to establish what needed prioritising to shape the future of our sensory service..

One key theme that came out was that adults felt they were not receiving support early enough. Also, that they were in need of extra and on-going support.

Housing

People want to feel safe in their home – Collaborate Essex

Our work with Collaborate Essex helped to show the importance of housing for residents and how it ties in to other key topics such as choice & control, being a part of a community, and accessibility.

Similarly, the QA research revealed that respondents were concerned that housing was a real concern for people and made them anxious about the future.

Engagement Feedback

Inclusive Communities

[Adults] want inclusion within communities and social networks – Provider Survey

Being a part of a community helps adults to feel accepted and allows them to more easily find meaningful activity.

A well developed community can also offer additional support to adults. The QA research showed that some adults were already providing informal support to other people with disabilities in their community.

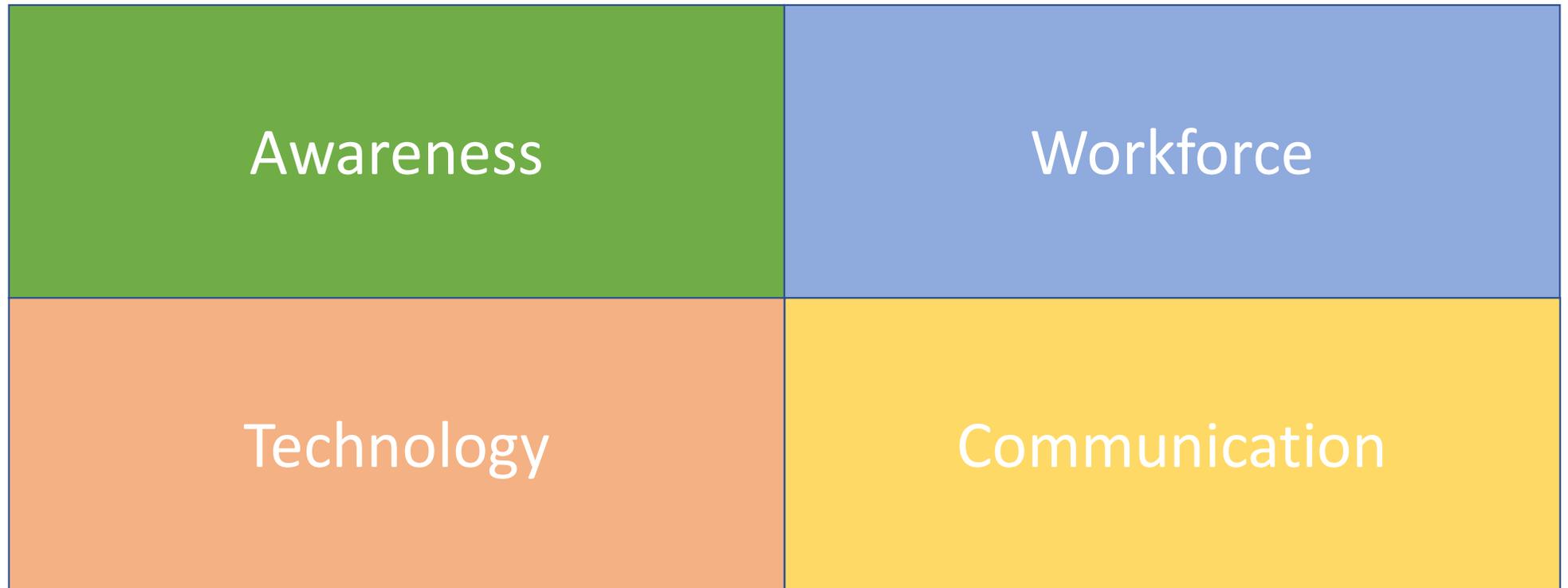
Accessibility

A significant challenge to people living with disabilities are inaccessible services – Provider Survey

Within the provider survey multiple respondents flagged the challenges faced by people living with disabilities due to issues around the accessibility of services.

There was also a desire to maintain a balance across services. Whilst some new innovations, such as online services, may be a positive for others they are not appropriate.

Engagement Priorities pt.2



Engagement Feedback

Awareness

*There is a gap in knowledge of bus drivers around disabilities and reasonable adjustments – ECC
Staff 121*

Whilst bus drivers were provided as a specific example within the feedback from staff, the idea that the awareness of symptoms and how to make reasonable adjustments are key factors that could be more widely applied. For example, from the QA research:

“I will walk in places, and sometimes people don't know what to do with me, They either go over the top or just don't just don't want to come talk to me.”

It was also brought up in the provider survey that the lack of awareness can be a challenge to people living with disabilities.

Workforce

*How would this affect specialist social worker roles which have declined over the years? - ECC
Staff*

Those who engaged in our processes have been keen to understand how the changes will impact staff roles.

There was also a desire to “focus on joint working”. Providers in particular saw collaborative working as a way of achieving better outcomes.

Engagement Feedback

Technology

What is the role of technology in supporting the strategy?

Some of the participants in our engagement have been digitally confident, others less so.

Whilst we need to ensure we have a good digital offer, there needs to be multiple routes of communication that people can use to contact us.

Participants of the QA research spoke about how difficult they found it to fill in complicated forms in general, and sometimes this was more difficult if the form was online.

Communication

Inaccessible communications delay or prevent people getting support – Provider Survey

The importance of communication was repeatedly highlighted throughout engagement. It not only helps with awareness and helping adults feel accepted, but it makes it more likely that they have good outcomes and their support isn't delayed.

Good communication early on can also help to alleviate concerns the adult may have about the future.

Initial Feedback

Below are just some of the ways that our initial engagement has helped to form the first draft of the Disability Strategy:

We have included people with autism in the strategy	<p>During initial engagement it has become clear that adults with autism feel they should be included in the strategy in some way, complimenting the already existing Autism Strategy.</p> <p>As such people who have autism as well as another disability are included in this work.</p>
We are focusing on the housing market	<p>You told us that where you live is important. You want to live in a safe place that feels like home. You need your home to work for you. Therefore, we have committed to make improvements to the housing market for adults with disabilities to help people have their own home if they want it.</p>
We want people to find the help they need to keep or make new relationships	<p>You told us that you want to grow and keep good relationships in your life. We will support all staff to think about the good relationships we need and how we help other people connect. We will also work with communities to welcome and include people with disabilities.</p>

Further Engagement

QA Research: Priorities

Independence

Healthy Living

Strategy Name & Format

Financial Support

QA Research: Feedback

Independence

The need for independence was paramount for participants – QA Research

A key response across various engagement routes was the need for independence.

This branches across many topics as areas such as good housing, inclusive communities, communication, and meaningful activity can all help to provide a person with independence.

Healthy Living

Participants noted that they are not able to access as many health services as they used to- QA Research

Respondents of the QA research highlighted that due to financial cutbacks they have been unable to access certain health services, such as podiatry services and hydrotherapy.

For adults to lead healthy lives they require accessible services that are able to match the needs of the adult.

QA Research: Feedback

Strategy Name & Format

Maybe more on the positive side of what can we do for you rather than disability strategy? – QA Research

Whilst some respondents to the QA research were fine with the use of “Disability Strategy” there were others who flagged concerns.

One adult stated that “strategy” makes it sound like a “game” and felt that “plan” might be simpler.

Some participants did not necessarily identify with the term ‘disabled’ and thought others might have similar views, or felt that hidden disabilities might not be covered by this term.

Financial Support

It feels like begging... absolute hell, I feel like Oliver with his begging bowl... It's a really awful service – QA Research

The topic of income and financial support caused respondents to the research the most stress.

Participants found the benefits system very stressful. Processes are complicated and people do not feel they are treated as an individual or with much dignity. Assessment processes were perceived as being designed to see people at a snapshot in time, without a holistic picture of their needs.

This will be exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis.

Consultation

We sought to make our consultation as accessible as possible with various alternative formats and ways to participate. These included easy-read, large print, and audio versions of strategy, as well as options to participate by telephone or face-to-face at a drop-in. The main topic that has been fed back to us that is missing is advice and information around accessing **financial support**.



We held **8** events at 4 different locations in Essex, including Colchester, Basildon and Harlow, and online.



95% of respondents either “strongly agree” or “mostly agree” that our areas of focus in the strategy are correct.



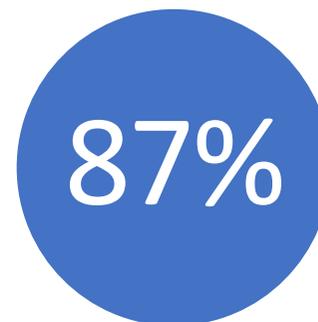
Roughly **39%** of respondents to the consultation either have, or support someone with, a learning disability and autism.



80% of respondents strongly agreed that to have good relationships social care staff need to understand that every single person is different



We have received **169** online responses to the consultation & **44** people have joined focus group meetings



Roughly **87%** of respondents were white-British and roughly **75%** were female.

Consultation Feedback

Below are just some of the ways that our engagement throughout the consultation period has helped to form the newest draft of the Disability Strategy:

We have included young people & transitions

During our engagement with focus groups you told us that work on transition planning should be an area of focus.

This is something we have taken on board and have included in within the Strategy.

We have included financial support and financial wellbeing

It has become clear that one of the key requests for support has been on the matter of information and help with accessing financial support and financial wellbeing.

We are including financial support and financial wellbeing within the “Keeping Well” section of the strategy

Autism

Involving Autism

It was clear from our engagement with autistic adults and other stakeholders that there was a desire for adults with autism to be included in the strategy in some way.

Have autistic people steering the strategy. – PACT & Adult support groups

One individual at an autism networking event felt “incredibly strongly” that autism should be included – Autistic adult employed by a local charity

Autism should be included in the strategy – Sister of a service user with autism

“I don’t [recognise myself as having a disability], but I do recognise that I have struggles that other people don’t. So although I initially don’t, maybe I do”. – Quote from an autistic female

The world makes it a disability. – PACT & Adult support groups

The reality for many autistic people is that some aspects can be incredibly disabling. – Connecting Without Limits

Communicating Autism

When it comes to communication, there are two main areas of work that are highlighted, lack of communication and wrong communication or narrow communication.

There is a lack of communication

“Feels that autism is a disability and that if there was more awareness and knowledge he may have received better support at a younger age ...”

A lack of communication and availability of information in early years can lead to people at a later age habituating themselves to behaviours that exasperates struggles incrementally. Lack of communication is not just centred around the unavailability of information, it is centred around inability to communicate the information that is available at the right time and in the right way.

We provide the wrong communication

‘... whilst some people may wish to focus on the gifts of Autism, the reality for many autistic people is that some aspects can be incredibly disabling, such as sensory issues, social anxiety, relationships, mental health etc

Within wrong communication, the main theme that has come about is the overemphasis on the positive aspects of Autism, or as one adult quoted it the ‘gifts of autism’.

Another danger of wrong communication of the positive aspects is not considering high functioning autistic individuals as having disability. The communication needs to be inclusive of all aspects.

Consultation & Autism



72% of online respondents agreed that our initial approach to including autism in the strategy was the correct thing to do. However, **27%** disagreed with this, meaning it is not a unanimous decision.



Of the online respondents who identify as having a disability, **39%** of them stated to have a learning disability & autism.

We initially included autism on the basis that if an individual has autism and another disability, then they would be included within the strategy.

In our engagement throughout the process we have heard conflicting views on the inclusion of autism within the strategy. We have since taken onboard the feedback and, whilst recognising that not everybody feels that autism is a disability, there are those who do feel disabled by their autism. As such, we recognise the need to define it on an individual basis. For some people autism will be disabling and they are included within our strategy.

Annex

Provider Engagement

- Essex care market provider forums
- Survey of Essex care providers
- PI Partnership Group
- Sensory Community Partners
- Autism Wider Network
- Autism networking event
- A family perspective

Residents Engagement

- Working Together For Change – Survey of adults with lived experience
- Family and carers engagement survey
- Healthwatch/Collaborate Essex
- Sensory Strategic Partnership Group
- Physical Impairment Steering Group
- Support4Sight focus groups
- Sport for Confidence focus groups
- Local Linked Support drop-ins
- Essex Carers Network focus group

Staff & Partner Engagement

- Essex County Council staff one-to-ones
- Essex County Council staff forums
- LD&A Ops Meeting
- Countywide Practice Forum
- PSI managers meeting
- Strategic Partnership Group
- Disabilities commissioning meeting
- PSI South – Pre forum
- LD/PSI Forum
- Health Inequalities meeting
- South East alliance meeting
- Southend Council meeting
- Thurrock Council meeting
- B&B alliance meeting
- Adults Leadership Team
- Meetings with quadrants