



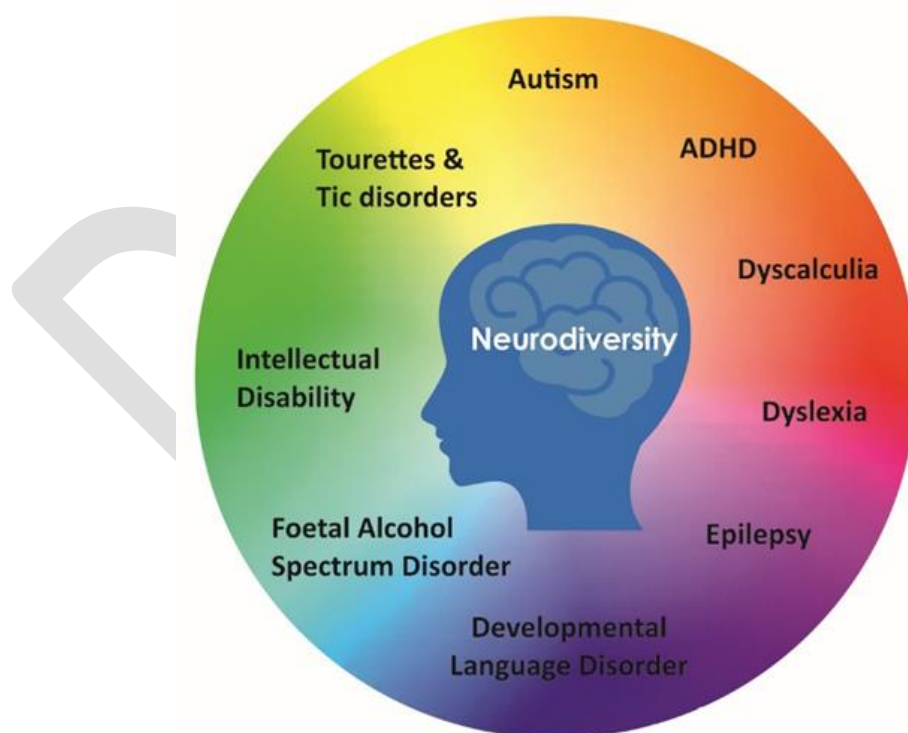
Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

Neurodivergence (Autism & Other Conditions) Social Services Strategic Plan 2024-2027

www.npt.gov.uk

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Awareness, understanding, acceptance, equality and inclusion

Introduction

This strategy has been collaboratively brought together by neurodiverse children, young people, adults and family carers, together with social care professionals from across Neath Port Talbot, to make our ambitions clear.

We want to achieve a neurodivergent inclusive approach across the county and its communities. We will ensure that services have a more joined-up, proactive, timely and accessible provision so that neurodiverse people have equality of access, and the right support within our services.

The strategy will promote a cultural shift so that community and service settings are understanding and welcoming for neurodiverse children, young people and adults.

This document presents our ambition, an overview of the collaborative work we are putting in place to deliver the change that is being undertaken, and our strategic priorities for the coming years.

Our aims

We want to make Neath Port Talbot an inclusive area for all neurodivergent individuals and families. There are a number of ways we will achieve this, including:

Raising awareness and improving understanding across Neath Port Talbot, its communities, stakeholders and services

Supporting neurodiverse families and carers to have their voices heard, their needs understood, and to be supported to lead fulfilling lives and achieve their personal wellbeing outcomes

To work collaboratively with stakeholders in promoting access to diagnostic services and support for individuals and families

Supporting projects within the community, working towards a greater understanding and inclusion of neurodiversity (eg DWP, Workways, NPT Autism Hub)

What is neurodivergence?

Neurodivergence or neurodiversity (ND) refers to the different ways the brain can work and how it interprets information. Neurodivergence highlights that people naturally think about things differently, and can experience an environment differently. Most people are 'neurotypical', meaning that the brain functions and processes information in the way society expects.

Many day to days tasks are designed in a 'neurotypical' way and therefore these may have an impact on someone who is neurodiverse. It is estimated¹ that around 15% of the UK's population (more than 1 in 7 people) are neurodivergent, meaning that the brain functions, learns and processes information differently.

A great deal of work has been carried out in recent years raising awareness around autism in particular, which has indirectly led to the awareness and inclusion of other neurodevelopmental conditions in the public realm.

Neurodivergence includes a range of different neurological conditions, including, but not limited to:

- Autism
- Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia
- Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)
- Speech, Language and Communications Difficulties
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Tourette's Syndrome and Tic disorders

Many of these conditions will be co-occurring (exist alongside one another at the same time). Some will be present throughout childhood, others may not appear until later in adolescence or even in adulthood.

¹ [Neurodiversity \(local.gov.uk\)](https://www.local.gov.uk)

Why do we need a strategy?

Neurodiverse children, young people, adults, and family carers can sometimes experience significant barriers to accessing services and the wider community. Addressing these barriers will require better understanding of neurodiverse conditions, and a culture change across services and our communities.

We want to ensure neurodiverse people can be supported to achieve better outcomes. The work of this strategy will need to be embedded in our services, across organisations and in the wider community so that it is sustained and can be built upon.

We want to help identify neurodiverse people's needs earlier and improve their physical and mental health. This will support better understanding of the inequalities neurodiverse people face, so we can take the right actions to improve people's health outcomes. Enable those struggling in a neurotypical world, to better understand themselves, their environment and their future.

We are committed to bringing the right people together to break down barriers to community access and use our resources effectively to deliver the support people need. The collaboration of our own professionals and those from different sectors, support networks and community services, will be directed at improving the lives of individuals and their families. Our strategy is intended to focus partners across Neath Port Talbot to work together to make the changes we need to see.

National context

Key policy drivers in Wales include the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

In 2023, there was a collective shift across professional sectors to a more inclusive reference of 'Neurodivergence' rather than solely 'autism'. Much of the publicity, awareness raising, research and data has its basis in autism.

In March 2023 The Children's Commissioner for Wales published 'A No Wrong Door Approach to Neurodiversity – A Book of Experiences'. Highlighting the need for collaborative work amongst services to ensure that children, young people and families get the right help, at the right time, and not to fall through gaps in services.

In 2022 Welsh Government published a “Review of the Demand, Capacity and Design of Neurodevelopmental Services”².

The review identified the need for:

- A whole systems approach with a focus on raising awareness and understanding of neurodiversity, strengthening access to early help and support, the active involvement of a range of sectors (including health, education, social care and the third sector), and a lifelong outlook around autism, covering children, young people and adults.
- Investment in, restructuring of, and greater collaboration between services, to address demand-capacity gaps (including gaps in service provision), deliver a national support offer, and ensure a more person-centred approach which is better able to handle complexity, difference and diversity
- A focus upon short to medium term measures to improve experiences and outcomes and to reduce the pressure upon existing ND services; and consideration of the development of new service models in the longer term
- Strengthening monitoring and evaluation, focused upon what is important to service users, to inform decisions about the development of services, and provide transparency and accountability to stakeholders

Additionally, the Autism Code of Practice came into force in Wales in September 2021. The Code has four overarching objectives (arrangements), which are already being met in NPT:

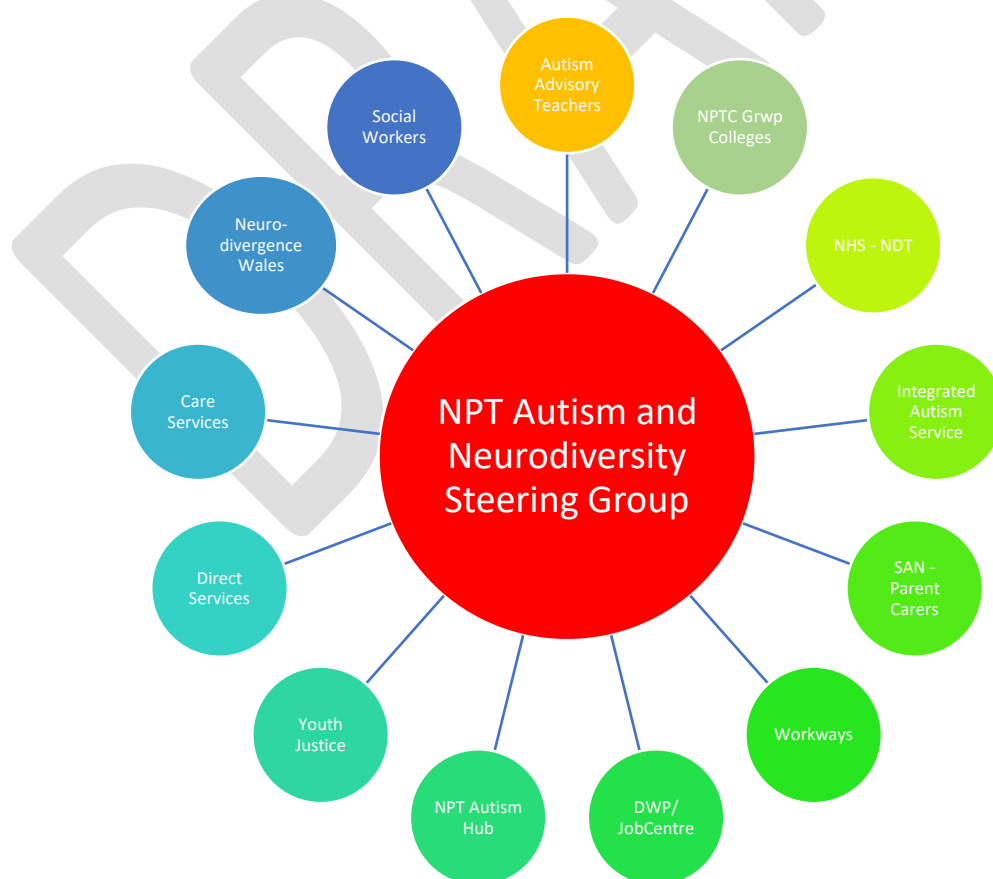
1. Autism assessment and diagnosis
2. Accessing Health and Social Care Services
3. Awareness raising and training on Autism (and wider ND conditions)
4. Planning and monitoring services and stakeholder engagement

² [Review of Neurodevelopmental Services | GOV.WALES](#)

Local context

At Neath Port Talbot we have an Autism and Neurodiversity Lead who provides a consultative role across Adults and Children's Services and acts as a contact for people with neurodivergent conditions and key point of contact between partner services at both a National and local level. Contact details for NPT SPOC (Single Point of Contact) and the Autism & Neurodiversity Lead are advertised through various forums, with individuals or organisations not previously known to statutory services getting in touch, allowing them to be advised, supported and signposted the right person or organisation.

There is a strong working partnership between the Local Authority and Swansea Bay University Health Board. The NPT Autism and Neurodiversity Steering Group (formerly ASD Steering Group) is made up of representatives from Social Services, Education (Schools and Further Education), Local Health Board, Autism Wales, the voluntary and private sectors, and parents and carers of autistic and neurodiverse individuals. The group engages with stakeholders on a monthly basis, sharing information on national, regional and local events and activities relating to autism and wider neurodiversity.

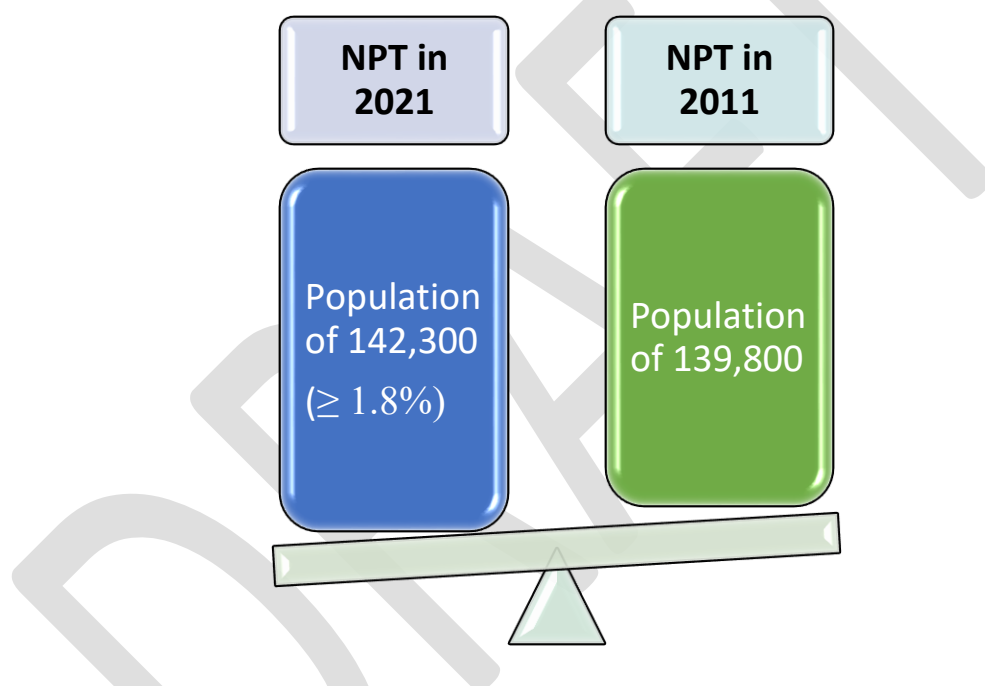


Neurodivergence within our population

Currently available statistics are based on Census data predominantly around autism. It is estimated that **autism has a prevalence of approximately 1% in the population** (although some studies suggest this number is higher especially considering wider neurodivergence).

The population of Wales is recorded as being 3,100,000 (ONS 2021 Census). This means there are approximately **31,000 autistic individuals in Wales**.

The population of Neath Port Talbot is recorded as 142,300 (ONS 2021 Census), **The estimated autistic population of NPT is 1423**.



In considering the estimation that 1 in 7 people are neurodivergent, then **the estimated neurodivergent population of NPT is over 20,000**.

The available regional and local data highlights that whilst we understand there has been an increase of 1.8% in NPT's population over the past ten years or more, the increase in autism referrals in adults (18+) has **increased by 125%** since the Covid pandemic, **from 400 a year in 2020, to 900 a year in 2023 across the Western Bay Area**.

Regional Considerations

Analysis at a West Glamorgan regional level (Neath Port Talbot and Swansea) has highlighted a number of key issues when reviewing the demand and supply of services for autistic people, but the findings are applicable to the wider range of neurodiverse conditions:

- Availability of intervention services that would enable autistic people in their daily lives
- Access to mental health and wellbeing services
- Low rates of employment and vocation
- Impact of Covid-19
- Transition to adulthood is a complex process
- Large numbers of adults with autism in particular, who are still cared for at home by their older carers.
- Cost of living crisis.

The most significant gap identified in the research was the insufficient data across all services for autism and wider neurodiversity. This means we are unable currently to clearly identify the gaps and demand for different services.

The limited data sources included do however evidence that there is a growing number of children and adults who are autistic or seeking diagnosis and data suggest that this will continue to rise.

In February 2021, the West Glamorgan Partnership Board, completed a Population Needs Assessment, which has an Autism Chapter.

To access the full Autism chapter, please click [here](#).

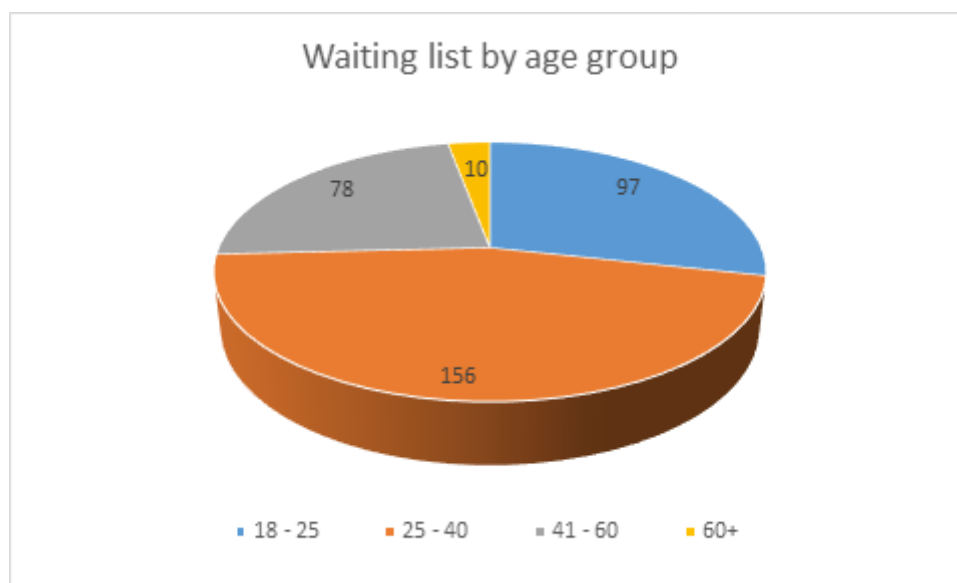
<https://www.westglamorgan.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/West-Glamorgan-PNA-2022-27-Autism.pdf>

The following data is from the Western Bay Integrated Autism Service (IAS).

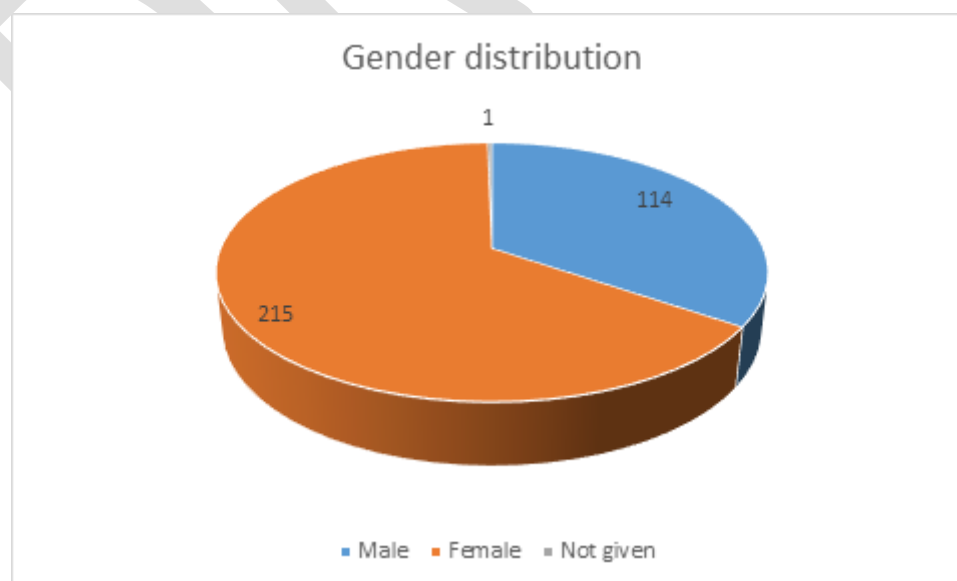
As the graph demonstrates, the number of adults seeking diagnosis has drastically increased, however the capacity to complete assessments has not been able to match the increase since the Covid pandemic.

Distribution of numbers seeking autism diagnosis across the Western Bay area demonstrates the NPT accounts for approximately 25% of referrals = **330**

The this information is specific to NPT and clearly shows that adults aged 25-40 are the demographic accounting for over 45% of referrals.



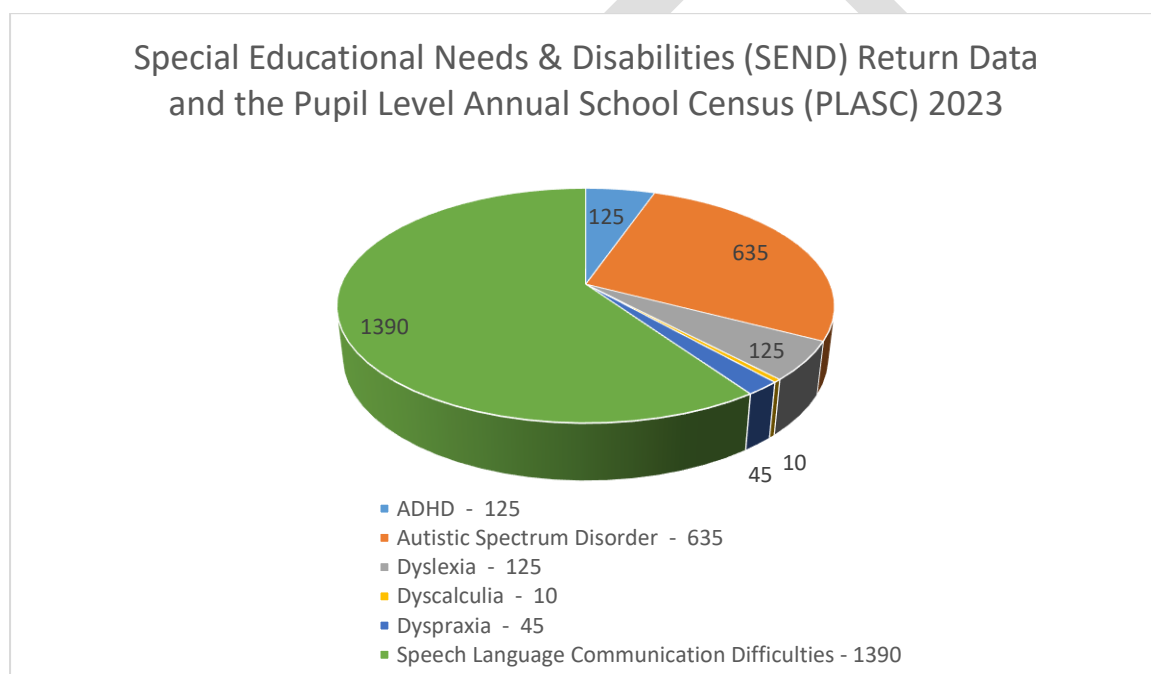
Gender distribution presently indicates a split of 65% female, 35% male.



The following information has been captured from the Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) Return Data 2023, and the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC).

Reports of additional learning or special educational needs by local authority and type of need (ALN/SEN).

The number of times each SEN type was reported e.g. if types 'Dyslexia' and 'Dyspraxia' are reported for a pupil that pupil is counted twice, once under each type. The number of reports will therefore be greater than the number of pupils with ALN or SEN.



This cross section of data relates to the neurodiverse conditions particularly, rather than the wider learning disabilities, physical disabilities and sensory impairments.

Autistic Spectrum Disorders, or more broadly -Autism, scores 2nd highest after Speech Language & Communication Difficulties. These are the most common co-occurring conditions within neurodiversity.

Planning for our neurodivergent population

In terms of planning, the following needs to be considered:

- Ensure a common understanding and consistency across the partners in the way the data is recorded, shared and analysed
- Ongoing analysis to plan for the needs of the population living in the region.
- Engagement with neurodiverse individuals, their families and their carers to inform future developments for neurodivergent services.
- Improved information sharing between partner organisations and people, particularly in terms of the services that are available across the region.
- Empowerment to achieve effective and meaningful collaborative working and the need to develop the ability for people to contribute to the social change of the services they receive.
- Further planning in terms of the requirements from ALNET Act (2018) supporting a fully inclusive education service needs to continue.
- In addition, further planning work and reflective consideration needs to be undertaken in relation to the Welsh Code of Practice on the Delivery of Autism Services.

Awareness Raising, Education and Training.

All Social Services staff will be required to complete the new 'Understanding Autism' training modules created collaboratively with Autism Wales. The principles contained within this training can be applied to the wider neurodivergent conditions mentioned earlier in the strategy.

Mandatory training for all staff to complete on Understanding Autism, Effective Communication and Understanding Assessment. These modules are available freely to the public to enhance their own understanding around neurodivergence and autism in particular.

The community involvement of the Autism & Neurodiversity Steering Group, will continue to work on raising awareness across NPT, and act as a focal point for information, events, developments and research. The Steering Group will operate in linking national developments with community events, and likewise inform current and future planning at local, regional and national levels.

The Autism & Neurodiversity Lead Officer

The Autism and Neurodiversity Lead for NPT provides information and advice across Adult and Children's Services. The Lead also acts as Chairperson of the

Steering Group, managing the Council's network of stakeholders, also linking between national, regional, local and community levels. Autism Champions are a point of contact within Social Services Teams, along with the increased awareness and understanding of staff within 'front door' services in SPOC – Single Point of Contact.

Consultation around neurodiversity is available to professionals within Social Services as well as provision of information and guidance on autism and wider neurodiversity to adults, children and families, and wider public bodies and businesses. Steering Group links with Education and NHS services ensures the accuracy and consistency of information being shared.

The new Understanding Autism training can be accessed here; <https://autismwales.org/en/resources/elearning/>

Additional information on autism, for individuals, families, education and community services can be viewed here – <https://autismwales.org/en/>

Community Safety

Neurodiverse individuals are no more likely to commit a criminal act than any other neurotypical individual. However, they may be more vulnerable to being groomed and recruited into criminal activities or extreme belief systems which are potentially dangerous for them and for others.

Some of these vulnerabilities could include:

- Difficulty understanding another's perspective and therefore not questioning people who appear friendly (with radical points of view)
- Obsessions with particular topics (which could be exploited)
- 'Black and white' thinking
- Potential social isolation and naivety
- Comfortable living in an online world
- Learning difficulties
- Low self-esteem

We will actively support individuals and families who are experiencing or who are at risk of criminalisation or radicalisation. We will work with specialist services, to ensure that vulnerable individuals are understood, protected, educated and supported.

Prevention and Early Intervention:

NPT operates a 'no wrong door' policy where guidance is provided to individuals, families carers and support services. Early Intervention and Prevention supports initial enquiries at the SPOC level, and through to the various community teams. SPOC and EIP will provide information, advice and assistance so that appropriate support and service guidance is provided to both adults and children.

Preparation for Adulthood

We will work with our partners, operational teams and with people with lived experience to commission services that offer better support for young adults including high quality information, advice and guidance at key transition points and educational and vocational support for neurodiverse young people.

Transition Pathway

A transition protocol has been developed between clinical teams for both children's and adult's diagnostic pathways. A child who is currently on the waiting list for autism assessment with the Neurodevelopmental Disorders Team (NDT) and is approaching their 18th birthday, will be transferred to the Integrated Autism Service (IAS) to continue their pathway journey. There will be no requirement to re-refer between services upon reaching the age of 18.

Employment Support

We will commission services that close the employment gap for autistic and neurodiverse people in NPT through support for the journey into employment and to stay in work. We will also support local employers to improve confidence in hiring and supporting autistic and neurodiverse people, and to recognise their skills as an organisational asset.

Health Inequalities

We will work together with our health partners across the health and care system and with people with lived experience to reduce health inequalities and ensure that people with autistic spectrum conditions and neurodiversity have access to good healthcare when needed.

Vision

Awareness, Understanding, Acceptance, Equality and Inclusion.

Our vision is to transform the lives of neurodiverse people in Neath Port Talbot, and to make NPT a neurodiverse inclusive authority. We will do this to enable them to live the lives they choose, achieve their personal goals, feel valued and know that their voices are heard.

What we will do

Aims and objectives

- *Improve our understanding around neurodivergence.*

We will respond to the key recommendations under the Autism Code of Practice and by working together with people with lived experience, listening to the voice of the people to meet their neurodiverse needs.

- *Improve access to the services and support that neurodivergent people need.*

Deliver a 'needs lead' service, where the individual needs of the person will appropriately determine the support they receive. This is in line with the 'no wrong door' approach to those seeking support from Social Services. We will continually review specialist services in response to neurodiverse needs across the county, enabling individuals and families to live and function independently within their communities.

- *Support the development of a training plan for the workforce*

Training for all staff across the service, raising awareness and understanding around neurodiversity. We can universally upskill our workforce to better understand and meet the needs of people with neurodiversity and autistic spectrum conditions. This will be achieved by primarily using the modules developed collaboratively with Neurodivergence Wales (Autism Wales).

- *Support accessing community services and the community as a whole*

Ensure the formation of groups at community levels support social interactions, and provide information and channelling neurodiverse people into work or volunteering. Additional support working with established groups to embrace neurodivergent people and encourage successful transition into the community.

Key areas we have identified as a priority have developed from the NPT Autism and Neurodiversity Steering Group and by engaging with neurodiverse individuals, their families and partner services, these are:

- Community Inclusion & Awareness
- Training and Education
- Parent/Carer Support
- Transition Programmes
- Support around Diagnostic Pathways

This Neurodivergence Strategic Plan can be read in conjunction with the following documents

- Children and Young People Social Care Strategic Plan 2023-26
'Valuing our children's future'
- Adult Social Care Strategy 2023-26
'Living the life you want'
- Population Needs Assessment 2022-2027 – *Autism*
West Glamorgan Regional Partnership
- Housing & Homelessness Strategic Plan 2023-2026
'A place to call home'
Priority Area 4 – *Support those with Social Care Needs to Live Well in Their Communities*

Glossary

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability which affects how people communicate and interact with the world. More than one in 100 people are on the autism spectrum and there are around 700,000 autistic adults and children in the UK.

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) is one of the most common neurodevelopmental disorders of childhood. It is usually first diagnosed in childhood and often lasts into adulthood. Children with ADHD may have trouble paying attention, controlling impulsive behaviours (may act without thinking about what the result will be), or be overly active.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a condition that affects people's behaviour. People with ADHD can seem restless, may have trouble concentrating and may act on impulse.

Dyslexia is a common learning difficulty that mainly causes problems with reading, writing and spelling. It is a specific learning difficulty, which means it causes problems with certain abilities used for learning, such as reading and writing. It is estimated up to 1 in every 10 people in the UK has some degree of dyslexia.

Dyspraxia, also known as Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (DCD), is a condition affecting physical co-ordination. It causes a child to perform less well than expected in daily activities for their age, and appear to move clumsily.

Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) – If you drink during pregnancy you risk causing harm to your baby. Sometimes this can result in mental and physical problems in the baby, called foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD).

Neurodivergence / Neurodiverse / Neurodiversity – refers to the clinical view that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways; there is no one "right" way of thinking, learning, and behaving, and differences are not viewed as deficits

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a mental health condition where a person has obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviours. OCD can affect men, women and children. People can start having symptoms from as early as 6 years old, but it often begins around puberty and early adulthood.

Speech, Language and Communications Difficulties - cover a wide spectrum and include physical problems with producing clear speech, difficulties in

understanding spoken language and difficulties with the social aspects of communication and interaction.

Stakeholders – These are people who have a vested interest or ‘stake’ in a project, organisation or business. A stakeholder can be an individual person, a group or other organisation

Tourette’s Syndrome is a condition that causes a person to make involuntary sounds and movements called tics. It usually starts during childhood, but the tics and other symptoms usually improve after several years and sometimes go away completely. There is no cure for Tourette’s syndrome, but treatment can help manage symptoms.

Tics are fast, repetitive muscle movements that result in sudden and difficult to control body jolts or sounds. They are fairly common in childhood and typically first appear at around 5 years of age. Very occasionally they can start in adulthood. Tics are not usually serious and normally improve over time, but they can be frustrating and interfere with everyday activities.

Further support

The following organisations can also be contacted for further support on Neurodiversity:

Access to Work is a publicly-funded employment support programme that aims to help more disabled people start or stay in work.

Additional Neurodiversity conditions – [The British Dyslexia Association](#) is committed to raising awareness and understanding of Neurodiversity conditions by offering a wide range of information to help families, professionals and Neurodiverse individuals

Autism – [The National Autism Society](#) is a UK charity that provides information, guidance and support to people with Autism.

Autism Wales <https://autismwales.org/en/> - provides advice, information and training on autism and related conditions. Autism Wales is now a subsidiary of Neurodivergence Wales.

[The Dyslexia Association](#) helps to raise awareness and provides support and [Dyscalculia](#) – As well as dyslexia, [Dyslexia Action UK](#) also provides support and information to help remove barriers facing individuals who have dyscalculia.

Dyspraxia – [The Dyspraxia Foundation](#) is a UK wide charity supporting and helping individuals with dyspraxia and providing them with a variety of tools to help themselves.

Dewis Cymru – <https://www.dewis.wales/> - Information and advice hub on individual well being. Their search engine provides information on activities within the local regions and across Wales.

Neath Port Talbot Autism Hub – Community support group for anyone 16+ and identifies as autistic. The Hub is still in consultation around the scope of the support and activities they will provide. Areas of consideration are – independence, socialisation, counselling, special interest groups, education support, community inclusion.

Neurodevelopmental Disorders Team (NDT) – NHS provision of diagnostic services for children and young people aged 4-18yrs, based at Baglan Hospital. Referral is primarily through education, although other professional referrals can be made (Social Services, GP practice). The NDT can be contacted for further advice and guidance on their Friday helpline - (01639) 862459.

Western Bay Integrated Autism Service (IAS) – Provides diagnostic and support services young people and adults across the region. Adults, parents, carers and professionals will be able to refer to the Integrated Autism Service.

The IAS provides direct support for autistic adults, along with consultations for professionals working with autistic adults and children.

Integrated Autism Service, Tonna Hospital, Tonna, Neath, SA11 3LX

Email: SBU.WBIAS@wales.nhs.uk

Telephone: 01639 862 936 An answerphone service is available.



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