

<b>COUNTY COUNCIL LOCAL COMMITTEE FOR CARLISLE</b>
<b>Meeting date: 19 July 2021</b>
<b>From: Christine Bowditch –Champion for Autism</b>

## **AUTISM CHAMPION UPDATE**

It continues to be impossible to visit venues to talk to people about autism, the problems for themselves and their families and how, often with only small adjustments, autistic children and adults can access many of the parts of life, for example leisure, employment, travel etc which we take for granted. What I have been able to undertake as the lockdown eased is to talk to individual families, usually either in their garden or mine about the issues surrounding their lives and the emotional cost of managing an autistic child and looking to the future. This does have an emotional cost to myself and my husband as it usually leaves us drained as we look into the cost it has been for ourselves.

The Autism Act 2011 places a statutory responsibility on the Department of Health to publish an autism strategy every seven years. Whilst the development of a fully co-produced autism strategy for implementation was significantly constrained because of the pandemic an approved publication of an interim autism strategy has been published. The introduction of a duty to provide adequate community services by councils, NHS England and local health decision-makers to provide enough services for autistic people in their area will be very much welcomed by autistic people and their families and carers. It could include enough mental health services, better supported housing and more social groups to stop autistic people becoming lonely and developing mental health problems.

At present, following a survey in 2019 by the National Autism Society they reported that:

- more than 2 in 3 autistic adults in England don't get the support they need;
- only 14% said that there was enough mental health services in their area;
- 50% of parents said that their child had to wait for more than a year for support at school.

These proposals to change the law relating to autistic adults should result in fewer autistic people being wrongly sent to mental health hospitals. At the moment the law allows people to be sectioned because they are autistic even though autism isn't a mental health problem. I look forward to being able to report that improvements have been put in place.

On a lighter note the potential holiday support being put into place or being supported by the County Council is very good and will be of great help to many families with autistic children; thank you for that.

**Christine Bowditch**  
**Autism Champion**

*June 2020*