

This Autism Bucks publication contains the reports of the principle officers of the Autism Bucks Board of Trustees; informing our trustees, volunteers, members and sponsors of the activities, performance and plans of the charity, in line with its aim to support autistic adults and their families, living in Buckinghamshire.

Chair's Report

For many it's been a difficult 12 months of lockdowns, restrictions, anxiety and isolation but after the uncertainties we have a growing sense of optimism and hopefulness. Although this year has not been easy for Autism Bucks, we are delighted to say that it has been a year of growth and progress; not always in expected ways. In 2019, Autism Bucks was focused on the essential fundamentals required of a charity and in determining the foundations on which it would be working.

This last year, with the foundations set, we have been refining our direction and developing some clear plans; building on what we have experienced and achieved to date.

We are grateful for the hard work of our trustees and volunteers and the endorsement and funding of our sponsors, for making this possible. We are indebted to our members and their families for their continued commitment and support.

It is helpful to remind ourselves of the vision and aim of Autism Bucks which underpins both the work in 2020/21 and our future plans and ideas.

Autism Bucks aims to **inspire, inform** and **involve** the community in relation to autism.

Why?

- For autistic people to be fully accepted in their community and be able to thrive and achieve
- To change attitudes and improve understanding of autism
- To improve the lives of autistic people and their families
- To widen access to information, advice, experience and expertise about autism
- To influence the shape of the local community and its universal and statutory services

What will we do?

- Create a valuable resource for the sharing of information, knowledge, experience, stories, ideas and expertise in relation to autism
- Facilitate support groups across Buckinghamshire for autistic adults and their families
- Build a network with a shared purpose
- Provide expertise and knowledge to improve understanding of autism to the wider population

- Offer a conduit for views and voices

How will we do this?

- Develop platforms for user generated content – through the redesign of the website, social media, blogs, forums, podcasts, videos, all created with and by autistic people
- Build networks across Buckinghamshire for and with autistic people and their families – facilitated by volunteers
- Work in partnership to ensure autistic people are core to training and awareness programmes delivered in Buckinghamshire
- Ensure sustainability and efficacy of Autism Bucks through funding, efficient organisation and robust safeguards and risk management

In line with the above intentions we have arranged the work of Autism Bucks into a number of key functions with associated work streams (see diagram below)



One outcome of delivering work and developing plans has been to help us identify the skills, knowledge and expertise we need to take the charity forward. With this in mind we started a recruitment campaign during April and May. Response to the trustee roles was positive and we are pleased to say we have successfully appointed a trustee to lead us on our digital projects.

We intend to continue with recruitment of both trustees and volunteers over the next few months. Building the capacity of the team, in terms of both numbers and skills, will enable us to make further progress and focus our attention on projects yet to be started.

The reports that follow explain how each area of work has progressed this year; the opportunities and challenges, the successes and learning and our next steps.

Operational – Peer Social & Support Groups

Successes

- Although attendance to groups has fluctuated, Paulette and volunteers have continued to facilitate meetings consistently throughout the last 18 months.

- People have reported that opportunities to meet virtually and to stay in touch with others have helped to maintain emotional wellbeing, by supporting one another when feeling anxious, worried and lonely at this time.
- Some people have found accessing the online group meetings easier to navigate and participate in. Interactions with others have been managed at an individual's own pace and people have felt able to connect with other group members more readily. Furthermore, people have been able to better maintain and control the environment they are in

Opportunities

- Although, we haven't been able to establish new groups physically in alternative parts of Buckinghamshire as planned, membership has increased and individuals not previously able to get to existing groups in Aylesbury and High Wycombe, are able to join remotely
- Additionally, our relationships with local facilities (for example the Discovery Museum,) have continued to thrive and we welcome the opportunity to offer alternative outdoor activities and social events in the summer

Challenges

- As a consequence of COVID restrictions and guidance we were unable to access venues and facilitate face to face gatherings, so moved group meetings online, via Zoom

Learning

- We were unable to print and distribute leaflets/flyers; on the other hand, we took better advantage of our social media and website resources.

Next Steps:

- Hear from autistic people and their families about what they want from groups
- Enable face to face meetings and an online option
- Develop plans in September

Autism Bucks are very grateful to Heart of Bucks for their funding and support this year. We are particularly appreciative of the flexibility and support shown in such unprecedented times, which enabled us to adapt plans.

Operational – Awareness Programme

Successes

- The team, led by Paulette, worked with members and volunteers to develop the Autism Bucks Awareness Project; a range of varied and accessible awareness and training resources, created and delivered by autistic people and/or parent/carers of autistic people
- The programme format was simple; short sessions on a given topic or theme, presented by experts by experience, followed by a short Q&A with the presenter.
- The programme has enabled access to knowledge, expertise and a range of

experiences of autistic people.

- Where required support and training was made available to presenters and all have received appropriate remuneration.
- The awareness programme sessions are available to watch again on our [Autism Bucks YouTube Channel](#). Also, visit the Autism Bucks website and read more about the presenters.
- The Awareness Programme delivered 14 sessions from September 2020 to May 2021

Topic	Date	Time	Presenters
What is Autism?	16/09/2020	11am -12noon	Paul Isaacs
Autism as a Fruit Salad	19/10/2020	7 - 8pm	Paul Isaacs
Autism & Sensory Perceptual	19/11/2020	1 - 2pm	Paul Isaacs
Autistic Parents & Parenting	02/12/2020	7 - 8pm	George Watt
Autism & Exposure Anxiety	19/01/2021	7 - 8pm	Paul Isaacs
Awkward Demographic	03/02/2021	7 - 8pm	Kristianne Drake
Mindfulness & Autism	17/02/2021	3 - 4pm	Zaffy Simone
Coping with Death & Loss	01/03/2021	11am -12noon	Paul Isaacs
Autism & Mental Health	17/03/2021	10 -11am	Georgina Watts
Periods & Puberty	31/03/2021	7- 8pm	Robyn Steward
Neuro Developmental Delay & Autism	06/04/2021	7- 8pm	Paul Isaacs
Coping & Managing Lockdown & Learning the Positives	21/04/2021	4 - 5pm	Alex Manner
The Double Empathy Problem	12/05/2021	3 – 4pm	Damian Milton
Finding Out You're Autistic	14/05/2021	1-2pm	Dean Beadle

- Total number of attendees across all sessions was 275; an average of 19-20.

Opportunities

- Autism Bucks set up a Zoom account and a YouTube channel
- With a small under spend in the Awareness Project budget, and following consultation with the members, we created an A4 poster with the aim to support and inform supermarket staff (and managers) as to how they can improve the shopping experience for autistic people. We targeted some 90 supermarkets throughout county and have followed up with stores who have displayed the posters and given us some very positive feedback.
- The use of online sessions via Zoom allowed a greater capacity; average attendance was 20, as opposed to smaller groups of 10 -12 originally planned for venues
- The delivery of an online programme gave us the flexibility to offer sessions at varied times; increasing the numbers participating and better reflecting differing preferences and individual commitments
- Changes made to delivery also meant that the reach was widened to include carers,

family members and health and social care professionals

Challenges

- The programme was due to start in April 2020; unfortunately, this was at the same time as government restrictions and lock down was implemented, which impacted both the development and delivery of the programme
- In line with guidelines we have been unable to deliver the awareness programme face to face as intended
- The administration of bookings and managing the online sessions proved difficult and complex and required at least two facilitators
- A high number of bookings did not translate into attendees to the sessions (particularly for health and social care staff)

Learning

- The intention for the original face to face sessions was to provide accompanying handouts, however, due to restrictions, this proved problematic. Presenters did share their own slides, notes and published guidance where practicable. Future programmes will need to consider the inclusion of appropriate materials for participants
- We made better use of our social media platforms to promote and market the awareness programme (but we have more to do here)
- We will need to consider how we better evaluate the sessions to shape future programmes

Next Steps:

- Develop plans in September
- Hear from autistic people and their families about how they want awareness programmes to look
- Increase the number of local “experts by experience” able to deliver training
- Consider how to adapt sessions to meet the needs of health and social care staff
- Recruit volunteers to support the programme

Autism Bucks are very grateful to Buckinghamshire Council for their Community Prevention funding and support this year. We are particularly appreciative of the flexibility and support shown in such unprecedented times, which enabled us to adapt plans.

Website

Successes

- We have been able to improve the functionality, accessibility and content of the Autism Bucks website
- We have renegotiated the hosting and management arrangements, to ensure local

control and reduce long term running costs

- The content and overall design has been reviewed and we have worked to make some immediate improvements on which to build

Opportunities

- Some requests for support and advice via the website came from unexpected sources which we were unable to respond positively to. This highlighted a gap in the offer from both Autism Bucks and the local system
- Closing the website for a short time, whilst we took out duplicated and out of date information and amended content and links
- We have seen a significant and positive growth in our online presence over the last 12 months, currently:

	Sept 2020	June2021	Increase (%)
Facebook Followers	715	970	255 (+36)
Twitter Followers	374	1,487	1,113 (+298)
YouTube Subscribers	None	42	42 (+100)
YouTube Views	None	946	946 (+100)

Challenges

- Our website supplier was impacted by COVID and forced to pause work, services and communication. This was frustrating and delayed progress of plans

Learning

- We gained a great deal from the sudden reliance on digital technologies; a steep learning curve for us in the effective use of these resources
- This has stimulated a re-evaluation of plans and priorities and identified our need for more expertise

Next Steps:

- Hear from autistic people and their families as to how we can improve and better use our website and social media
- Continue with projects to improve the existing website and add more functionality
- Ensure recruitment to support plans

Autism Bucks are very grateful to Heart of Bucks for their funding and support this year. We are particularly appreciative of the flexibility and support shown in such unprecedented times, which enabled us to adapt plans.

Treasurer's Report

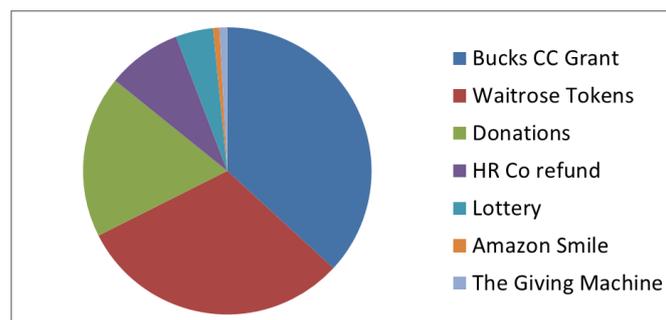
The Accounts have been signed off by our Examiner, Jonathan Bullock and an extract has been circulated prior to meeting and attached.

Successes

- This year has seen the introduction of Restricted Funds as a means of allocating and reporting on Grant money and our own funding for specific projects. It has also led to other improvements in our accounting standard as we are now operating accruals and prepayments as well.
- On the matter of funding for our general operations, we achieved significant savings on the previous year as a result of changes in our website operation and savings on meeting rooms for our member social groups. Overall our net spend was very similar to the year before, with the difference that we directed funds to projects that not only raised our profile in the community but also achieved financial savings for the future.
- Savings made in projects linked to the Heart of Bucks grant enabled us to divert funds (with agreement from Heart of Bucks) to start the planned redevelopment of our website, which we hope to see deployed during July 2021.
- The accounts are reported to the board on a monthly basis and to all trustees, volunteers and members in the quarterly bulletin. This has led to a better understanding of how we account for projects as well as managing funding for our core operation.

Challenges

- Nevertheless our budget for the coming year must include provision for the re-opening of face to face meetings for our members and we must work on fundraising for the future funding for our core operations and planned growth for the charity.
- With most of our projects coming to an end in June / July 2021 our attention can now turn to future projects and general funding. The following chart shows where our funds came from for 2020/21. It should be noted that the major sources of income were 'one-off' in nature and we must seek new sources of income.



Learning

- On a personal note, I would very much like to thank Jonathan Bullock for his help and support in improving the accounting standard for the charity and with its financial reporting activities.
- All present will be asked to vote their approval of the accounts

Auditors

Jonathan Bullock (ACMA) Chartered Institute of Accountants has kindly agreed to audit the charity accounts as required by the Charity Commission.

Appointment of Trustees and Key Offices

The board of trustees for the year to 19th July 2021 are:

Zita Calkin (Chair & Secretary) Martin Hollett (Treasurer), Paulette Hunn, Sue Keating and Paula Strawbridge.

Zita Calkin has notified the board of her decision to stand down as a trustee and the chair, and will not be standing for re-election at the AGM. Zita joined Autism Bucks in October 2018 and has made this decision in response to personal and other work commitments.

Trustees standing for re-election at the AGM are given below, along with their respective roles:

Martin Hollett, Treasurer

Paulette Hunn

Paula Strawbridge

Sue Keating

Neil Cary (Digital Lead)

All present will be asked to vote their agreement of the trustees their roles.