Scottish Borders Autism Strategy is launched

Scottish Borders Council (SBC), NHS Borders and partners launched the Scottish Borders Autism Strategy 2015-2025 at an event in Galashiels on Thursday 30 April.

The Strategy was developed in response to the national agenda for autism to ensure that the needs of individuals with autism of all ages living in the Borders will be acknowledged and addressed. It contains seven priority areas that have been identified for action locally including:

1. Improving public and professional awareness and understanding of autism
2. Good quality early diagnosis and intervention for both children and adults
3. Addressing eligibility criteria and improving access to appropriate support
4. Finding the right opportunities to pursue individual interests and employment
5. Opportunities to develop social skills and access a range of social opportunities
6. Addressing the barriers to finding, securing and maintaining individual housing needs
7. People will have their voices heard and acknowledged by professionals.

These areas reflect the feedback that was received during the extensive period of consultation with people with autism and their carers that was undertaken during the creation of the strategy. A delivery plan has also been developed to ensure that the action points are taken forward over the next ten years in partnership between SBC, NHS Borders and service providers.

Councillor Frances Renton, SBC’s Executive Member for Social Work and Housing said: “I am delighted to be involved in the launch of this strategy. This event marks the beginning of a ten year commitment from NHS Borders, the Council and partners to helping individuals living with autism in the Scottish Borders to feel supported and accepted by providing them with services they need and want.”

Dr Cliff Sharp, NHS Borders Associate Medical Director for Mental Health said: “Autism is known as a spectrum condition, incorporating a wide range of characteristics that some people may or may not share, which can make some aspects of life difficult.

“Awareness, diagnosis and getting the right services at the right time are some of the key priorities for us when looking at how we will improve outcomes for those living with autism in the Scottish Borders.

“It is important to understand that no two people with autism are alike, therefore this makes the support needed unique and personal. This strategy is set up to promote and develop change, in order to improve the quality of life for individuals with autism.”

The Strategy is available to download at: www.scotborders.gov.uk/autismstrategy
Notes to editors

A competition was launched to source suitable artwork for the Strategy and publicity materials. The winning design was created by Martyn Thomson from Newtown St Boswells whose bold use of colour and an eye-catching hand print were regarded as very apt for the ‘Autism and Me’ brief.

Martyn is 22 years old and lives with his mother, Wendy. He receives support two days a week from the Jedburgh Service provided by Council owned care company, SB Cares. Art and colouring in pictures of his favourite characters are just two of the activities Martyn enjoys. He is a huge fan of buying and collecting DVD’s (especially Disney) and loves both watching and acting the stories out, knowing most of them word for word. He also likes baking and decorating cakes and going on the bus to Kelso and Hawick. To keep active he spends time swimming, jumping on the trampoline, going for walks and visiting the gym. The most important thing to Martyn, though, is his whole family whom he is very close to.

Photographs attached include
- Dr Cliff Sharp, NHS Borders Associate Medical Director for Mental Health at the Scottish Borders Autism Strategy launch.
- Martyn Thomson, winner of the artwork competition with Councillor Frances Renton, SBC’s Executive Member for Social Work and Housing.

Please contact Communications on 01896 82 8287/8261 for further information