

SOUTH TYNESIDE  
**All Age Autism Strategy**  
**2022 - 2026**



# Why do we need a Strategy?

Autistic children, young people, adults, and family carers have told us that there are significant barriers to achieving our vision across the service system and the wider community.

Addressing these barriers will require better understanding of autism, and culture change across South Tyneside's services and community.

These are not quick things to deliver, but we know that with focused leadership throughout the system over time, autistic children, young people, and adults in South Tyneside, can be supported to achieve better outcomes. It is envisaged that the strategy, co-developed with people from South Tyneside, will serve as an anchor; enabling residents to hold the system to account in respect to the delivery of agreed priorities.

We want to identify autistic people's needs earlier and improve their physical and mental health. This will help to develop a better understanding of the inequalities autistic people face, so we can take the right actions to improve people's health outcomes.

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 that people need.



We want to achieve an autism friendly approach across the Borough in education, health, social care, work, and communities. We want services to have a more joined-up, proactive, timely and autism-accessible offer so that autistic people have equality of access.

The Strategy will promote a cultural shift so that community settings and services alike, understand the needs of Autistic people and are able to provide an equitable offer for autistic children, young people, and adults.

The Strategy uses the term autistic people to refer to children, young people and adults on the autism spectrum.

We have agreed to use identify-first language (e.g., "autistic person" rather than "person with autism") as this was the preference of most autistic people we spoke to.

This document presents our ambition, an overview of the workstreams we are putting in place, to deliver our strategic priorities.



# Our Shared Vision

Our vision is for South Tyneside to be a place that offers opportunities for people to live healthy and fulfilling lives, where people's contributions to their local communities are welcomed, supported and valued, and no-one is left behind. These opportunities should extend to all autistic children, young people and adults in South Tyneside.

All organisations involved in developing and implementing this strategy are committed to ensuring that the vision and aims will be delivered in full for autistic people.

The development of the strategy has been centered around co-production work and feedback undertaken with our autistic residents and their families. The intention of this strategy is to collate their views, enabling our residents to be agents of change. This strategy captures their priorities which will bring about the necessarily changes within the borough and have a positive impact.

The implementation of the strategy will continue this, with a commitment to ongoing co-production and engagement with South Tyneside's community of autistic people and family carers.

# Our Principles

The development of our principles has been centered around co-production work and feedback undertaken with our autistic residents and their families.



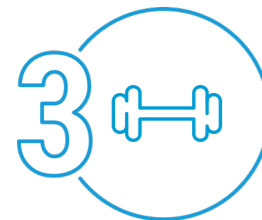
## What Matters to Me

- Work on developing and implementing the strategy will involve autistic people and family carers.
- We make fair and strong decisions together.



## Partnership Working

- Many different agencies and organisations will be involved in delivering this strategy.
- We will work together towards the common goals outlined here.



## Strengths-Based Approach

- We intend to build on strengths of individuals, organisations and communities.



## Closer to Home

- We aim for autistic children, young people and adults to be included and supported in their local communities as far as possible.
- When people require specialist support that cannot be delivered in every locality, we aim for support to be in borough wherever possible



## Efficient use of Resources

- Maximising use of existing resources. Explore opportunities for sourcing additional income (including bidding for any external funding available through national Autism Strategy)

# National strategy 2022-26

The Government published the new National Strategy in 2021 which replaces the previous Think Autism Strategy for adults.

## The strategy focuses on the following aims:

- Improving understanding and acceptance of autism within society
- Improving autistic children and young people's access to education, and supporting positive transitions into adulthood
- Supporting more autistic people into employment
- Tackling health and care inequalities for autistic people
- Building the right support in the community and supporting people in inpatient care
- Improving support within the criminal and youth justice systems

## Alignment between the national strategy and this all-age Autism Strategy

Our all-age Autism priorities in South Tyneside are well aligned with the Government's vision. The national strategy will help to raise awareness of the needs of children, young people and adults with autism and support the aims of delivering this strategy.

The all-age Autism strategy is grouped into the following workstreams based on the key areas identified in our public consultation:

- Information, Awareness and Understanding of Autism
- Education and Preparation for Adulthood
- Health and Support
- Employment
- Housing and Independent Living

The members of these workstreams will continue to adapt and deliver change within the 4-year length of the strategy.

## The National Disability Strategy

The government released a National Disability Strategy that aims to improve the everyday experiences of disabled children, young people, adults and family carers in these areas: while at home, while commuting, at work or in education, when shopping or getting about, when accessing public services online and in feeling connected to others.

*South Tyneside feels passionate about raising awareness of all disabilities so that no one is left behind.*

# Context

## What is Autism?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability which affects how people communicate and interact with the world. There are several names used to describe the autism spectrum, including Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Autism Spectrum Condition, and others which have been used to describe a part of the spectrum, such as Asperger Syndrome or Classic Autism. In this strategy we use the term 'autism' to refer to the whole autism spectrum and the strategy recognises that autism, is one of a wider range of neurodiverse conditions.

The diagnostic criteria for autism include social communication and interaction challenges, and repetitive and restrictive patterns of behaviour or interests. However, the way that autistic people experience their environment can lead to areas of strength or difficulty that vary between individuals and may not be immediately obvious.

*For example, autistic children, young people and adults can have:*

- Strong attention to detail
- Above average technical or creative skills
- Character strengths, such as honesty and loyalty
- Differences in sensory processing, including over- and under-sensitivity
- Difficulty predicting what is going to happen next
- Difficulty knowing or understanding what other people think or feel



It is not possible to line autistic children, young people, and adults up in order of being more or less autistic. Different features of autism vary from individual to individual, as well as over the lifespan.

How an autistic person appears in a particular environment may not be representative of how they appear in other environments.

Babies, infants, children and adolescents all develop at different rates, and this does not always indicate a neurodevelopmental condition.

This means autism can become evident in different individuals at different ages.

When a child or young person has additional needs such as autism, it is important to identify this early, signpost to advice and support, and put the right interventions in place to support the child's ability to thrive.

We know that not everyone who is autistic has had or would like a diagnostic assessment. Our aim is that changes promoted by this strategy will benefit autistic and other neurodivergent children, young people, and adults whether or not they have a diagnosis.



## Co-occurring conditions

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) estimates that around 70% of autistic people have an additional condition, which is "often unrecognised".

The main conditions that co-occur more frequently in autistic people compared with the general population include:

### Mental health conditions

Research suggests that 70% of autistic people have a mental health condition, and that 40% have two or more. Autistic people are up to four times more likely to have anxiety disorder, and twice as likely to have depression.

Research has shown that autistic people are more vulnerable to negative life experiences, which may also impact mental health.

Compared to the general population, autistic people report having a lower quality of life. Research indicates that suicide is a major cause of early mortality in autistic people.

### Neurodevelopmental conditions

These are caused by differences in early brain development, and affect the way that a person processes information, thinks, or learns. Autism is one such condition, and it is common for autistic people to have other neurodevelopmental conditions. These include general learning disabilities (affecting between 15% and 30% of autistic people), specific learning difficulties (such as dyslexia and attention-deficit hyper-activity disorder), and other conditions such as epilepsy.

Delays in language development are common in autism, and up to 30% of autistic people are non-speaking (completely, temporarily, or in certain contexts).

Autism affects people of all ages, ethnicities and genders. Inequalities experienced because of disability may interact with discrimination and barriers based on ethnicity, beliefs, sex, gender, sexual orientation, age, pregnancy and maternity, marital status and socio-economic disadvantage.

Therefore, this strategy must be read in conjunction with other strategies such as:

- Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- SEND Commissioning Strategy
- Accommodation Strategy
- Adult Social Care Strategy
- Mental Health Strategy
- Autism JSNNA

# Feedback

## Feedback from Autistic People

A significant programme of co-production has been launched over the last few years.

Our residents with Autism have worked with us iteratively and in partnership to support in establishing the things that matter to them. Priorities have been set as part of this partnership and have been established through qualitative and quantitative measures to ascertain views.

Our residents have told us about what is important to them, however, it is important to reiterate that this is point in time data; the nature of true co-production is that views will change over time.

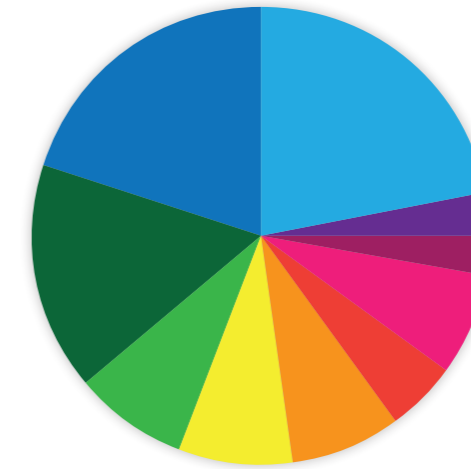
Below is some of the feedback.

## Autistic People Priorities



- Addressing Isolation
- Places for people to meet
- Employment
- Diagnosis
- Information and Advice
- Education
- Training
- Understanding Autism
- Autism in Women and Girls
- Mental Health
- More Support

## Families / Carers



- Diagnosis
- Training
- Education
- Joined up services
- EHCP
- Information / Advice
- Funding
- Understanding Autism
- Transitions
- Availability of Services

## Paid Carers



- Understanding Autism
- Joined up services
- Education
- Funding
- Transition
- EHCP
- Diagnosis
- Understanding Autism
- Transitions
- Availability of Services

# Summary of Plan

## Making our plan happen:

*The strategy sets out priorities.*

The priority themes have been structured into five workstreams as follows:

- Information Awareness and Understanding of Autism
- Education and preparation for adulthood
- Health and Support
- Housing and independent living
- Employment

Each workstream has support from either an autistic person / family member or an expert by experience and partners across the service system shaping the proposed actions and recommendations for the 4-year delivery of the strategy.

Each section will be backed up by an action plan developed and monitored by people from services working with autistic people and family carers.

**Our plan also includes four underpinning pieces of work:**

- 1. Quality Assurance** – All workstreams will evaluate their work to demonstrate the quality of what they deliver.
- 2. Digital and Data** – We need better data about autistic people in South Tyneside to inform service planning. We know that not all services currently collect good data about autism. Workstreams will seek to improve autism data collection, and to find ways to share data effectively while maintaining good information governance.
- 3. Pathways and linking of services** – Autistic people have told us that they experience “falling through the gaps” between services. All workstreams will seek to address this disjointedness by partnership working, building links between services, understanding where gaps cause problems for autistic people, and working to make people’s experience is more joined up.
- 4. Finance and Funding Implications** – Improving access for autistic people is the right thing to do and is also likely to be more cost effective for services and the support system. This strategy does not come with extra funding but is ambitious in making change across the system. All workstreams will seek to use the limited resources available in the most effective way. This may include bidding for external funding or making business cases to deliver services more efficiently.



## Workstream - 1

### Information, Awareness and Understanding of Autism

#### What we want to achieve ...

##### Autistic People

- Autistic children, young people and adults are supported to understand what their autism means for them; they understand their strengths and skills and so that they can live a fulfilling life.

##### Family Carers

- Family carers will be able to access training at the right time, to enhance their understanding of how autism affects their family member and explore practical ways to support them.

##### Community

- Autistic people are understood, welcomed and can access community services, for example transport, leisure facilities, shops, youth clubs and community events.
- Tackling stigma attached to autism in the community.
- Autistic people and family carers can live a fulfilling life in the community.
- Facilities available in the community make reasonable adjustments to be autism accessible.

This means that there are services and support available to autistic people whether they are eligible for statutory services or not.

##### Information and Navigation

- Information about where to find advice, signposting and support across education, health, care and the community is easily accessible to all.
- Autistic people and family carers can find information and support which helps them to live an active life.

##### Services

- Specialist and mainstream services across the system, from Health, Social Care, Education, Housing, Leisure, Police, Criminal Justice and others are inclusive, accessible and helpful for autistic people and family carers.



## Workstream - 2

### Education and Preparation for Adulthood

#### What we want to achieve ...

##### Autistic People

- The child's voice, hopes and aspirations will influence all planning and decisions made about them.

##### Family Carers

- Family carers will be actively involved in all matters concerning their child and plans will be co-produced.

##### Community

- Inclusive educational provision which enables children and young people to be taught within their local community.

##### Services

- Autistic children have their additional and special educational needs met as soon as possible.

## Workstream - 3

### Health and Support

#### What we want to achieve ...

##### Autistic People

- Autistic children, young people and adults have good mental health and wellbeing, and access to universal or specialist Mental Health services as required.
- Making it everybody's business to improve health and wellbeing for autistic children and adults.
- Families and autistic children, young people and adults will know how to access support, have an assessment of their needs, and be able to live a fulfilling life
- Diagnosis will happen at the time appropriate for the individual and in a timely manner.
- To have robust and personalised neurodevelopmental assessment pathways for children, young people, and adults.

##### Family Carers

- Families will be able to access support for their emotional wellbeing and mental health.

##### Community

- Autistic children and young people go on to live rich and fulfilling lives in their own communities.

##### Services

- There will be a range of suitable autism-accessible health and social care support in South Tyneside that children, young people and adults can use.
- Support when autistic people struggle with their mental health
- Support for older autistic people
- Low-level support for people to live in the community and avoid escalating levels of need
- Specialist support when things go wrong, to avoid unnecessary hospital admissions and facilitate timely discharge.
- Mainstream health services such as GPs, dentistry, optometry, audiology, chiropody etc. make reasonable adjustments to ensure autistic people get access to the health support they need, in line with the national NHS Long-Term Plan and NICE guidance.



# Notes

## Workstream - 4

### Housing and Independent Living

#### What we want to achieve ...

##### Autistic People

- Young people are better prepared for work and independent living when they leave education.
- Housing and support is available and accessible for autistic people eligible for Adult Social Care Support.

##### Services

- Autism accessibility is considered in all new buildings.
- Borough housing stock to be autism accessible.

## Workstream - 5

### Employment

#### What we want to achieve ...

##### Autistic People

- Autistic children and young people leave education with the skills and understanding they need to get employment.
- Autistic Adults are supported to find paid employment



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