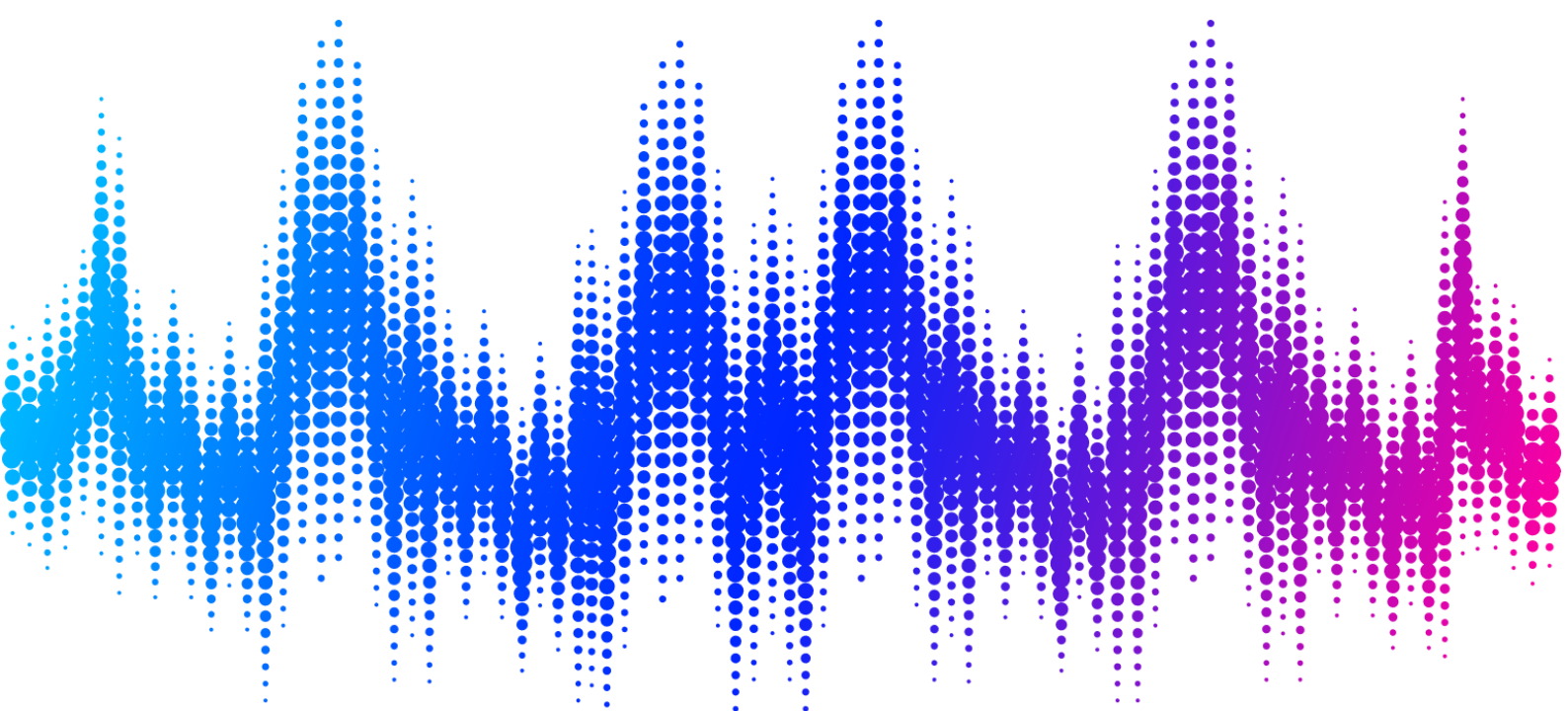




Think Autism in County Durham

Autism Strategy for Children, Young People
and Adults

2023 - 2026



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Purpose

This is our local strategy for autistic children, young people and adults in County Durham. In it we want to be clear about the priorities for improving opportunities, support and services for autistic people. We have called our strategy: 'Think Autism in County Durham.'

Based on engagement with autistic people and their families the strategy considers what life is currently like for autistic people in County Durham. It sets out where we want to be in three years and what actions we will undertake to achieve this. It provides a summary of the importance of support and services for autistic people and what they can expect.

This strategy has been prepared jointly by public services and voluntary and community services including the Council and local health services, who work together to improve outcomes for autistic people.

The strategy is a living document that is designed to be used regularly. For those responsible for delivering services, any future work programmes should contribute to achieving the aims set out in this strategy. It can be used as an aid in deciding both what to do and what not to do. Elected members and employees across Durham County Council (DCC), the National Health Service (NHS) and wider partners will find this document of practical use in evaluating whether to participate in new national initiatives and funding bids and help select the work programmes that we need to do.

Introduction

Who is included in this strategy?

Approximately 1% of the population of the United Kingdom are autistic and it affects individuals differently. Data from Public Health confirms that within the population of County Durham there is an approximate 1.1% prevalence rate of autistic residents.

Autism is a lifelong neurological developmental difference that affects the way a person communicates and interacts with others and experiences the world around them. Even though there are a set of diagnostic criteria that can be used to diagnose autism, everyday experience and research shows that there is no single way of describing autism that is universally accepted.

The previous 'Think Autism in County Durham' strategy used the terminology 'people on the autism spectrum', but since that strategy was published there has been further research and discussion with autistic people, their families and other stakeholder groups regarding preferences. Based on this research and feedback, the term used in this document is 'autistic people' as it hopefully acknowledges that each autistic person is unique. It is important to note that whilst identity-first language is generally preferred (i.e., 'autistic person' rather than 'person with autism'), ultimately the language used around autism is a personal choice. People should be aware that autistic individuals and their families may have their own preferences for what language they feel most comfortable using.

It is also important to be aware that not all individuals with neurodevelopmental differences may have (or even want) a formal diagnosis of autism. Adopting a neurodiversity affirmative approach can be really helpful in thinking about autism and how to support

autistic people. The term neurodiversity reflects the idea that there is natural variability in how we all think, learn and behave. As such, autism and other neurodevelopmental differences (e.g., Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)) are seen as different (i.e., neurodivergent) from the neurotypical majority – rather than disordered. The point is that we should not expect everyone to think and behave in the same way, and there is no such thing as the ‘right type of mind’. A neurodiversity affirmative approach celebrates difference and reduces stigma, while also acknowledging that some differences can be disabling (especially in particular environments/contexts). This strategy aims to adopt a neurodiversity affirmative approach and relates to people who are neurodivergent, who may or may not have a formal diagnosis, but who may have needs that require adjustments to be made or advice or support to be offered.

Life for an autistic person can be confusing and distressing and some people feel isolated. Autism is **not** a learning disability, nor a mental health problem, and many autistic people function well in many aspects of their life. However, mental health problems can be more common among autistic people and one in three adults with a learning disability are also thought to be autistic.

What is Included in this strategy?

The Autism Act 2009 required the Government to produce a strategy for autistic adults and young people from age 14 and guidance for local councils and health bodies to help implement the strategy and make sure that autistic adults got the help they needed. This was called [Fulfilling and rewarding lives](#) and was published in March 2010. An updated strategy - [Think Autism](#) – was published in April 2014.

The needs of autistic children under the age of 14 are met through more general legal frameworks including the Equality Act 2010 and the Children and Families Act 2014. There is no statutory requirement for a separate Autism Strategy for children and young people. However, the need to complete a Strategic Review of Autism featured as part of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Action Plan for County Durham.

In Durham we have combined these requirements to develop a life span Autism Strategy for County Durham to incorporate planning for both autistic children and adults. The first ‘Think Autism in County Durham Strategy’ was published in 2019.

The COVID Pandemic affected progress against the aims of this strategy and also caused extra stress and anxiety for many autistic people who struggled with the constant changing of rules and restrictions to help manage the control of the virus. As life began to return to normal following the lifting of many COVID restrictions the priorities of the strategy were revisited and six workgroups were created to look at key areas:

- Workforce Development
- Community Inclusion
- Employability
- Education
- Assessment of need

- Support for autistic adults and their families.

The National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People and Adults 2021 to 2026 was published in July 2021, building on the previous Think Autism Strategy. Whilst much of the Think Autism in County Durham 2019 Strategy was reflected in this, the refreshed Think Autism in County Durham 2023-26 is completely aligned with the more recent all age national strategy, and workgroups will be refreshed to align with this. For example, Workforce Development will no longer be a stand-alone group and will be a crosscutting theme.

National Policy

There is a great deal of national legislation and policy impacting on services for autistic people. These include:

- The **National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People and Adults: 2021 to 2026** is the governments refreshed national strategy for improving the lives of autistic people and their families and carers in England. It builds on and replaces the previous adult autism strategy **Think Autism** and has extended the scope to children and young people for the first time, in recognition of the importance of ensuring that needs are recognised, and the right support offered as early as possible and throughout their lifetime.
- The **Care Act 2014** covers the needs of people eligible for social care and also the duties of preventative approaches such as early support; advanced planning; helping people to maintain independence and wellbeing and avoid a crisis. The Care Act also requires statutory agencies to work together in partnership with individuals and families within assessment and care planning processes, including help with accommodation and employment/meaningful activity, supporting families and accessing necessary health and social care services.
- The **Children and Families Act 2014** addresses the needs of children and young people up to the age of 25, including those with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND). It includes improving cooperation and collaboration between all the services that support individuals and families, particularly local authorities, education providers and health services; and the introduction of the 'Local Offer' including centralised information, advice and guidance.
- The **Health and Care Act 2022** introduced new legislative measures that aim to make it easier for health and care organisations to deliver joined-up care for people who rely on multiple different services, building on earlier recommendations by NHS England and NHS Improvement. The Health and Care Act also includes that service providers must ensure that workers receive training on learning disability and autism which is appropriate to their role.
- The National Autistic Society (NAS) has produced **Autism Strategy Good Practice Guides (2016)** for local authorities and NHS bodies.
- **Future in Mind: Promoting, Protecting and Improving our Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing 2015** a report articulating the need to

tackle the problems to create a system that brings together the potential of all stakeholders.

- The **Equality Act 2010** is a law introduced to make discrimination or unfair treatment on the basis of certain personal characteristics against the law.
- All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism (APPGA) publications including **Transition to Adulthood 2009**, and **The Right Start 2012**.
- The **Autism Act 2009** and associated ‘Think Autism’ strategy imposes statutory duties on Local Areas for those with autism over 14 years of age.
- Department for Education (DfE) Preparing for Adulthood Programme.
- **The NHS Long Term Plan 2019** is a ten-year plan which includes reducing waiting times for autism assessments, improving mental health and learning disability services as well as improving coordination of care and preventing hospital admissions.
- The government and other leading organisations across the health and care system are committed through **Transforming Care for People with Learning Disabilities – Next Steps (2015)** to improving care for people with learning disabilities and/or autism who have a mental illness or whose behaviour challenges services.
- The Autism Education Trust (AET) has produced guidance for *Good Autism Practice (2019)* along with an **Early Years Standards Framework** and a **School Standards Framework** based around eight key principles of good autism practice in education. These principles are designed to support settings across the age range from Early Years to Post-16 to develop their practice.
- Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) were abolished in 2022 and their role was taken over by Integrated Care Systems, supported by Integrated Care Boards. From 1st July 2022 County Durham became part of the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENCICB).
- **Meeting the healthcare needs of adults with a learning disability and autistic adults in prison (2021)** is guidance on the design and delivery of prison healthcare for adults with a learning disability and autistic adults accessing healthcare services whilst in prison.

Local Policy

- **The SEND Strategy for County Durham Local Area Partnership 2022 – 2024** is our local strategy for children, young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) It will enable us to understand what we need to do together to make sure that children and young people with SEND are fully included in our communities, that we work together to achieve this vision, and what we can each contribute.
- The **Children and Young People’s SEND Promise for County Durham** is a charter developed by the eXtreme group – a group recognised as a representative voice for children and young people with SEND living in County Durham

- The **Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023 – 2028** is produced by the County Durham Health and Wellbeing Board, based on the Joint Strategic Needs and Assets Assessment (JSNAA) which provides an overview of the current and future health and wellbeing needs of the people of County Durham
- The **Approach to Wellbeing** has been adopted by the County Durham Health and Wellbeing Board as a means of ensuring all organisations and services within the county consider wellbeing as a shared priority
- The **County Durham Vision 2035** was developed together with partner organisations and the public and sets out what we would want the county to look like in 2035 and is structured around three ambitions:
 - More and better jobs
 - People live long and independent lives
 - Connected communities
- The **County Durham Inclusive Economic Strategy** aims to define priorities for growth and recovery from Covid-19, enhance and create opportunities across the county and is aligned with the County Durham Vision 2035
- The **County Durham Joint Health and Social Care Commissioning Strategy for People with Learning Disabilities (Adults and Young People aged 14+) 2019** sets out how Health and Social Care will work together and with other partners to deliver better outcomes for people with learning disabilities, increasing choice and control and supporting them to remain living in their communities. The focus of the strategy is adults and young people aged 14-25 with learning disabilities and it covers autistic people who also have learning disabilities

Our Vision

Our vision is that in County Durham all autistic people live fulfilling and rewarding lives within a society that accepts and understands them. They can access advice and support if they need it, and they can depend on mainstream public services to treat them fairly as individuals, helping them make the most of their talents.

We want to help autistic people living in County Durham:

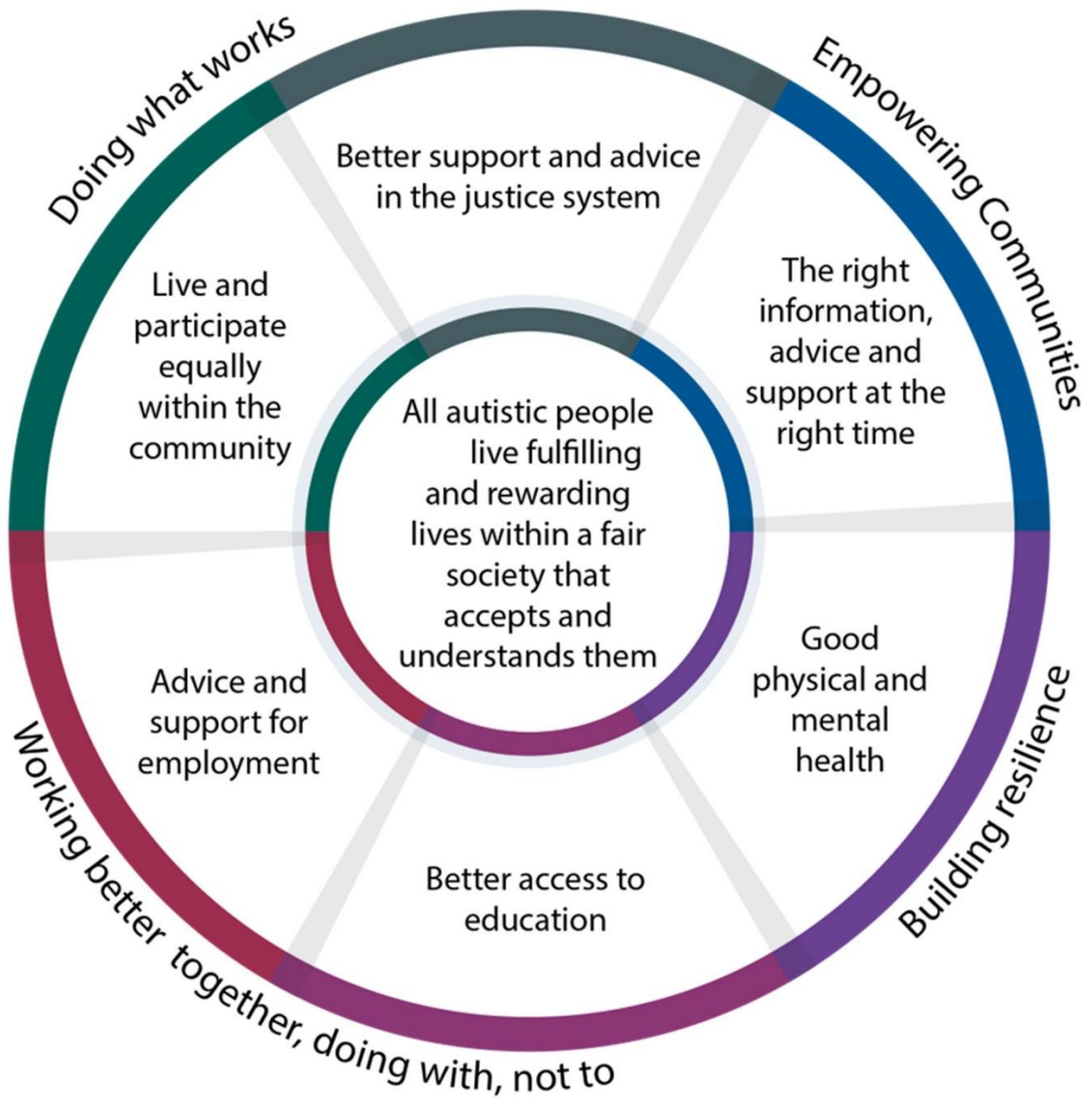
- **Be** an equal part of their local community.
- **Get** the right advice and support at the right time throughout their lifetime.
- **Develop** their skills and independence and work to the best of their ability.
- **Have** good mental and physical health.

Aims

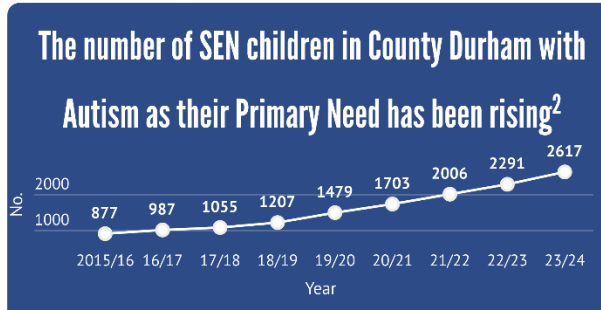
To achieve this vision, we have developed six interconnected aims based on the priority challenges of the 'Think Autism' and 'Preparation for Adulthood' agendas. These are:

1. Autistic people and their families are able to access the right information, advice and support at the right time.

2. Autistic people have good physical and mental health, which is supported by staff and organisations who have an improved understanding and knowledge of autism and access to appropriate advice and support.
3. Autistic people have better access to education, including further and higher education and life-long learning, with autistic young people receiving support to make positive transitions into adulthood.
4. Autistic people and employers have good advice and support to access, maintain and progress in employment.
5. Autistic people live and participate equally within their community and, when necessary, receive high quality care and support to maintain that community living.
6. Autistic people's experiences of both the criminal and youth justice systems are improved by ensuring that all staff understand autism and how to support autistic people.

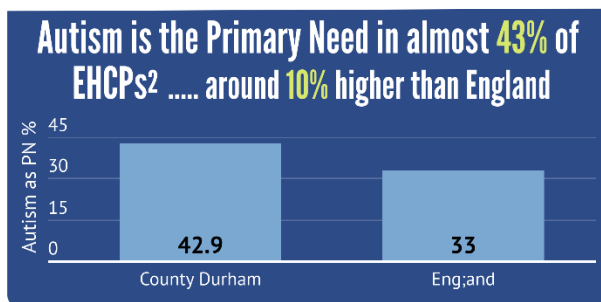
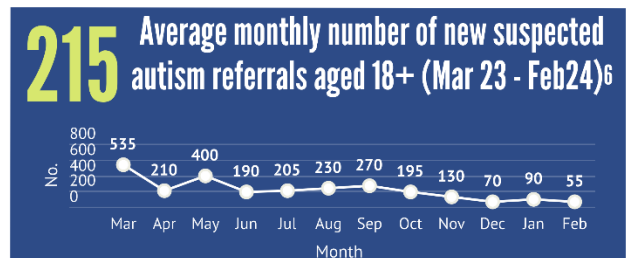
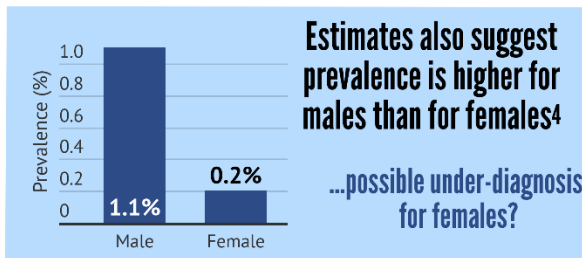
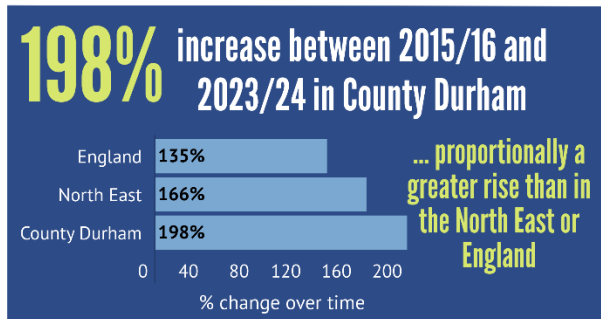
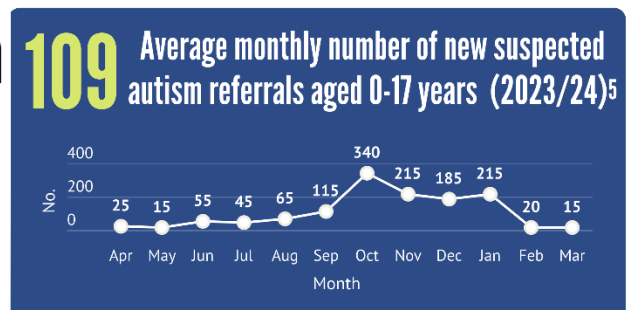


Where we are now - Autism in County Durham



Autism in County Durham

Estimated Autism prevalence (18+): 0.7%³
 ...that's around 3,000 adults in County Durham (aged 18+)
 ...other estimates put this around 4,200 adults⁴



94% of calls to SEND Information Advice and Support (SENDIAS) related to CYP with autism

1350 Children & young people on the waiting list for an Autism assessment locally⁷
 Average days waiting for Assessment.... **481**

94% of SENDIAS referrals are from families who have children with Autism or are on the Neurodevelopmental Assessment Pathway

128 referrals to Durham Mental Wellbeing Alliance for adults seeking MH support with/awaiting autism diagnosis (4.9% of total referrals 22/23)

Notes and Sources:

1. Spring School Census, Durham County Council, 2023.
2. SEN Statistics, DfE 2024.
3. Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (APMS), 2017.
4. PANSI and POPPI.
5. Autism Experimental Statistics, NHSE.
6. Autism Experimental Statistics, NHSE.
7. NHS County Durham Neuro Waiters Dashboard, Feb 1st 2023, TEWW.

Data being checked on new suspected autism referrals 0-17 years (Local data shows Approx. 200 referrals made to the children's neurodevelopmental pathway each month)

The data above shows an increasing prevalence of autism and greater demand for autism assessments and support in recent years, currently more than in other areas of the country. The average waiting time for an assessment is 481 days for children and young people, but locally we know some children and younger people are waiting a lot longer and there are approximately 200 referrals made to the children's neurodevelopment pathway each month, which include autism among other diagnoses.

The number of adult referrals are also increasing. Autism diagnosis is typically higher in males than females, but there is some evidence of under-diagnosis in females. The estimated prevalence of autism in adults ranges from 0.7% to 1.1%. The Durham Mental Wellbeing Alliance has received 128 referrals from adults with/awaiting Autism diagnosis who are seeking support related to mental health issues; this is 4.9% of the total referrals since the start of the Alliance in April 2022. National data also shows that autistic people have particularly low employment rates (fewer than 3 in 10 in paid work) (DWP April 2023).

ONS data (2021) reveals that autistic people are less likely to own their own home and more likely to be living with parents than the general population.

The following aims and objectives take these issues and inequalities into consideration in addition to local stakeholder feedback, and align with the national autism strategy and other local strategies including the Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust Autism Strategy and Framework.

Aim 1

Autistic people and their families receive the right amount of information, advice and support at the right time. This is a cross cutting theme that relates to all of the aims that follow

- To undertake reviews of resources in place to provide advice, support and help
- To undertake reviews of gaps and barriers in getting advice, support and more help
- To ensure that the autistic persons voice is present in each of the workstreams

Aim 2

Autistic people have good physical and mental health, which is supported by staff and organisations who have an improved understanding and knowledge of autism and access to appropriate advice and support.

- Whole system review for children and young people (CYP) relating to identification and meeting need, and diagnosis when appropriate in the area of neurodivergence
- More consistent communication about support and services available for CYP and adults.
- Further work to support autistic adults with autism but who do not have Learning Disabilities.

Aim 3

Autistic children and young people have better access to education and receive support to make positive transitions into adulthood.

- Autistic people access high quality inclusive education and training.
- Transitions through education into training and adulthood are appropriately supported.

Aim 4

Autistic people have good advice and support available to help them access and maintain employment

- Employment support services provide accessible and sustainable pathways into employment.
- Durham County Council, as one of the largest employers in the county, leads by example.

Aim 5

Autistic people live and participate equally within their community and, when necessary, receive high quality care and support to maintain that community living.

- Autistic people have access to a range of accommodation options
- Local community services to be made more accessible and accommodating for autistic people and their carers

Aim 6

Autistic people's experiences of both the criminal and youth justice systems are improved by ensuring that all staff understand autism and how to support autistic people.

- Improve understanding and recognition of the needs of autistic people among staff in the Criminal and Youth Justice Systems.
- Improve access to services for autistic people in touch with the Criminal and Youth Justice Systems

Think Autism Strategy Refresh

Aim 1:

Autistic people and their families are able to access the right information, advice and support at the right time. This aim relates to all of the other aims that follow

Objective: Undertake reviews of resources, gaps and barriers in getting advice, help and more help

Indicators of success

Mapping process in place identifying advice and support available across all areas.

Regular engagement meetings and events with autistic children, young people, adults and their families to map resources, gaps and barriers

Co-producing a process for people and families to self-refer for inclusion on the Dynamic Support Register, published on the local offer

Evidence

Reporting to Autism Steering group twice a year

Reporting to Health and Wellbeing partnership on an annual basis

Biannual reporting on central government self-evaluation framework*

Monthly reporting into the Dynamic Support Register Multi Agency meeting, becoming more responsive to changing needs and risks

Progress to date

Engagement group establishes with autistic adults and their families

Initial work undertaken to map resources, gaps and barriers

Engagement undertaken with families of autistic children and young people to understand strengths and challenges of the current system

This process is being developed alongside accessible information and guidance, to ensure access to the Dynamic Support Register and locally offered support. Developing responsive, person-centred services in the community

Steps towards this

Each working group of the Think Autism Strategy to include autistic people and their families

Reporting mechanism to Steering Group and Health and Wellbeing Board.

The Dynamic Support Register Group to publish a clear process and links to supporting documents.

Increasing local visibility and understanding of the DSR

Objective: Ensure that the autistic persons voice is present in each of the workstreams

Indicators of success

Each working group of the Strategy to have engaged with the autistic community to understand the best way to include autistic people and their families in understanding need and developing the offer

Updated Community (Education) and Treatment Review (C(E)TR) policy with an emphasis on advocacy, whether the person is living in the community or at risk of admission. The persons view, wishes and preferences are central in decision making and preferred communication methods respected

Evidence

Reporting into Autism Steering Group

Reported into the Dynamic Support Register Multi Agency meeting

Progress to date

All groups have undertaken engagement activity with autistic children, young people, adults and their families as part of action planning

Dynamic Support Register Group are exploring cases in which advocacy (independent or family carer) may be necessary and families wish to engage in

Steps towards this

The Think Autism Steering group to publish a clear engagement/co-production plan

Continue to review under new policy and cases where a C(E)TR takes place, ensuring greater accountability

Think Autism Strategy Refresh

Aim 2:

Autistic people have good physical and mental health, which is supported by staff and organisations who have an improved understanding and knowledge of autism and access to appropriate advice and support.

Objective: Undertake a whole system review for children and young people relating to identifying and meeting need, and diagnosis when appropriate in the area of neurodiversity

Indicators of success

All frontline and specialist services will be responsive to expressed concerns and be confident in meeting identified needs. This includes universal services such as schools and settings, and universal health services.

Referrals on to other services/parts of the system will form part of a response only if necessary.

Language used will reflect need and may include neurodiversity and will recognise strengths as well as difficulties

Evidence

Satisfaction measures from children and young people (CYP) and families.

Reduced waiting times for Tier 3 assessment diagnosis.

Professional confidence measures when identifying and meeting needs arising from neurodivergence

Increase in use of preferred terms for neurodivergence

Monitor the number of young people with autism and Learning Disabilities who access health checks.

Progress to date

Post diagnostic commission supported 127 CYP with 85% achieving targets, 100% staff felt their knowledge and behaviours had changed. 38 families accessed Cygnet with 100% feeling it was very helpful).

Language about autism video shared across the system and impact noted in all Autism Steering Group documentation and in Durham's SEND strategic partnership.

Autism Champion model rolled out across Early Help services.

Covid recovery funded 'Autistic and Anxious About School' project.

System transformation project is underway, following the presentation of a report to the County Durham Care Partnership Executive outlining the results of the engagement undertaken to re-imagine and re-design the help, advice and support available. The report includes a timescale to move from the current state to the future state and sets out some significant system re-design requirements.

Health professionals have accessed the mandatory Oliver McGowan training

Steps towards this

Engagement with all stakeholders supporting a shift to understanding neurodiversity rather than disability. Engagement to lead to service redesign. All stakeholders to work together to develop training and resources that support meeting needs at the earliest point.

Clearer understanding of extent of waiting times for diagnostic service across all 3 age phases, and recovery plan

Objective: Undertake further work to support autistic adults with autism but who do not have learning disabilities

Indicators of success

All frontline and specialist services will be responsive to expressed concerns and be confident in meeting identified needs. This includes universal services such as education settings and workplaces, and universal health services.

Referrals on to other services/parts of the system will form part of a response only if necessary.

Language used will reflect need and may include neurodiversity and will recognise strengths as well as difficulties.

Increased awareness and use of alternative communication strategies to help support and engage with autistic adults.

Evidence

Monitor the number of young people and adults with autism and learning disabilities who access health checks.

Monitor the number of autistic adults presenting in crisis.

Monitor waiting lists for secondary services.

Monitor the number of professionals in health and social care accessing mandatory training.

Professional confidence measures when identifying and meeting needs arising from neurodivergence.

Increase in the use of the preferred terms for neurodivergence

Feedback from service users and their family/carers.

Progress to date

Language about autism video (see above).

Adults can request an assessment from the local authority of their care and support needs under the Care Act 2014. Speech and Language Assessment can be requested via GP or local authority.

Services available which offer support to adults e.g.

- Durham Enable provides specialist support to all adults with support needs with accessing volunteering or employment (see Aim 4)
- Integrating children provides support for young adults up to 25.
- An integrated Crisis Team with listening service for all adults
- MAIN offers advice and support to adults/young people over the age of 16 who have a diagnosis of autism.

North East Autism Society offer specialist care, support, education and employment

Steps towards this

A rolling training programme for frontline staff, statutory and voluntary services. To include autism awareness, communication skills/strategies and service provision updates. E.g., Oliver McGowan training

A transition panel is due to be set up (Spring 2023) for young people transitioning from Children's Services to Adult Services.

Consideration of Autism Champions in social care teams.

Discussions are taking place in the local authority and health service as to how we can bridge the gap between Mental Health services and Learning Disability services for autistic adults who also have care and support needs.

A working group of senior managers from social care and health are due to meet in Spring 2023.

Objective: Promote more consistent communication about support and services available for children, young people and adults

Indicators of success

Information about advice, help and more help available in a variety of formats.

Information available is consistent across the system.

Evidence

Young people and families report that they have sufficient information available, in a format that is accessible and helpful.

Professionals report they are able to access resources that will enable them to support and signpost young people and families.

Data from usage (e.g., websites, contact with Special Educational Needs and Disability Information Advice and Support, SENDIASS, use of Hub).

Annual sampling of information that is within the remit of Durham Local Area to check for consistency.

Progress to date

Autism Hub launched 2021 offering advice, and signposting to help and support for young people and their families as needed.

Online portals provide information and advice on what support is available within the county for adults and how this can be accessed (e.g., Advice in County Durham, Locate Durham, County Durham Mental Wellbeing Alliance).

Young persons' information resource, developed by young people through Investing in Children

Steps towards this

Autism Hub rebrand to Neuro Hub 2022 and further roll out to support families and adults in 2023.

Refresh Durham 'Local Offer' website.

Information to be provided to young people and their family transitioning from school/college about the services available and where they can access advice and guidance.

Information to be disseminated to NHS services about where adults can access advice and support.

Think Autism Strategy Refresh

Aim 3:

Autistic people have better access to education, including further and higher education and life-long learning, with autistic young people receiving support to make positive transitions into adulthood.

Objective: Ensure autistic people access high quality inclusive education and training

Indicators of success

Attendance data will indicate:

- increased numbers of autistic children and young people (CYP) are maintaining their school placement and experiencing fewer school changes
- fewer suspensions and permanent exclusions for autistic CYP
- an increased number of autistic CYP will be participating in post-16 opportunities and there will be fewer autistic CYP within the Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) group

Feedback from children, young people and adults and families will indicate positive experiences

A range of local provision will be available in all areas of the county so that CYP can be educated in their local community if they so wish

CPD feedback from professionals will indicate that there are increased numbers accessing training; data will indicate changes in practice following training.

Dynamic Support Register (DSR) ensures the right support is built, working with local partners including education/training settings to best inform an individuals care

Evidence

Annual data 'snapshot' to include general and specific enquiries

Specific data enquiries about particular groups or cohorts where general data is indicating concerns or unexplained change.

Annual evaluations and feedback from CYP, adults and parent/carers.

CPD registers, evaluations and follow up feedback.

CYP, adults and families will indicate that education and training are accessible, supported where necessary with reasonable adjustments in place, and placements are maintained.

Increase in the use of preferred terms for neurodivergence

Reported into the Dynamic Support Register Multi Agency meeting

Progress to date

New Enhanced Learning Provisions (ELPs) now open and a plan to develop further in other areas of the county.

Plans in place to discuss autism champions role with ELP leaders as a starting point

A comprehensive CPD package is available for Early Years (EYs), school age, post 16 settings.

University of Durham 'Triple A' training available to staff in all settings

Dynamic Support Register sharing intelligence between care providers, social services and education settings. Serving as a guide to professionals in their roles

Steps towards this

Promote and extend Continuing Professional Development (CPD) offer to include adult learning providers and senior leaders within educational settings

Create autism champions role and set up peer support networks

Arrangements in place for annual data gathering

CYP and their families are involved in co-production of training and Autism Champions Network

Objective: Ensure transitions through education into training and adulthood are appropriately supported

Indicators of success

There will be more instances of successful sustained placements following a transition e.g., Year 7 (Y7) children, Post 16, EYs to school.

Feedback from parent/carers, CYP and young adults will indicate a positive and well-supported experience of transition.

The transition support for Y7 will be consistent at each transition point

Transitions support will also be available for Post 16 settings and from Early Years to primary.

More staff from education settings will be attending training specific to transitions

More autistic CYP and their families will understand the opportunities available at each phase.

Individualised pathways will be used more consistently.

Evidence

Annual data 'snapshot' to include information specific to transitions

- how many autistic CYP have transitioned and where to e.g.: mainstream to mainstream; mainstream to special; ELP to special etc
- how many CYP have maintained placement in their new setting
- Feedback from CYP, young adults and parent/carers
- Transitions groups running – feedback from practitioners

Transitions CPD offered and attended by staff

Progress to date

There is an offer of transitions training for school staff

There is a transitions support group for each secondary school

There are opportunities for autistic CYP to access work experience and taster courses e.g., at the end of Y10

Autistic CYP with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) have annual reviews with a focus on preparation for adulthood

Plans to support transition from EYs to primary already in place

Steps towards this

Develop transition guidance documents for education settings so that transition support follows best practice and is more consistent

Co-production and participation of CYP and their families in transition guidance and training

Transitions training and good practice guidance to be extended to Post 16 and adult providers

Secondary transitions support to be extended Post 16 transitions

Targeted transitions support to be offered to all autistic CYP e.g., one page plan

All autistic CYP (not only those with EHCP) receive support to prepare for adulthood from the point at which they are identified as having social communication differences (not necessarily a formal diagnosis)

Communication with parent/carers about Post-16 opportunities is consistent e.g., placements, transport applications.

Think Autism Strategy Refresh

Aim 4:

Autistic people and employers have good advice and support to access, maintain and progress in employment.

Objective: Employment support services provide accessible and sustainable pathways into employment

Indicators of success

Transparent and accessible information is available on the provision of employment services.

Employment support services measure the impact that they have on employment outcome, or progression towards, for autistic individuals.

Established pathways for progression from adult care services into employment support for autistic individuals.

Workforce development within employment support services includes autism awareness raising

Evidence

Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework (ASCOF) indicators for LD into employment.

Internal performance metrics for employment services – DurhamEnable ESF output and result indicators.

Case studies demonstrating qualitative impact of employment provision.

Employment support services staff indicate increased knowledge of autism; an understanding of the importance of adjustments required for clear communication; and increased skills and confidence in supporting autistic individuals.

Progress to date

Establishment of Durham County Council supported employment service with national British Association for Supported Employment (BASE) accreditation.

Referral channels between adult social care, Voluntary, Community Sector and Job Centre Plus have improved with increased referrals into employment services.

Development of an in-work support and training role within DurhamEnable with a focus on sustaining employment outcomes for neurodiverse individuals.

Increased awareness in the workplace of challenges faced by autistic people.

Steps towards this

Establishment of Durham County Council supported employment service with national British Association for Supported Employment (BASE) accreditation.

Referral channels between adult social care, Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and Job Centre Plus to increase referrals into employment services.

Development of an in-work support and training role within DurhamEnable with a focus on sustaining employment outcomes for neurodiverse individuals.

Increasing work experience opportunities as a pathway to paid employment.

In-work support for autistic individuals and to have a greater understanding of the everyday experience of autistic people.

Further engagement with Ambitious about Autism.

There is more awareness in the workplace of challenges faced by autistic individuals.

Objective: Durham County Council (DCC) will lead by example as one of the largest employers in the county.

Indicators of success

Recruitment for all roles within DCC is inclusive and where autistic disclosures are made, reasonable adjustments are implemented.

Disability disclosures for DCC staff are in line with prevalence in the local population.

Partnership working within DCC has a positive impact on employment in the local community for autistic individuals.

Increase in the number of autistic individuals employed and gaining apprenticeships at DCC.

Evidence

Human Resources (HR) data on recruitment and staff populations by disability disclosure.

Data from exit interviews on challenges faced by neurodivergent employees.

All staff, and staff wellbeing, surveys.

Consultation with staff disability network.

Progress to date

Ringfenced Durham County Council apprenticeships for DurhamEnable – Supported Employment Service – autistic jobseekers.

New starter surveys introduced as part of the onboarding process.

Development and launching new online training for all Durham County Council managers.

Durham County Council Human Resources supporting training and toolkits to support managers to understand risk assessment.

Development of training on guaranteed interview scheme, conducting interviews with autistic applicants, improved autism awareness training for employees and line management, changes being made to application forms.

Awareness of reasonable adjustment disability passport.

Raised awareness of support available through disability staff network group.

Bespoke workplace adjustments training being delivered to selected departments

Steps towards this

Improve the experience of apprenticeships within DCC.

Improving the quality of Supported Internships and increasing the number of opportunities across the county.

Better integration of reasonable adjustments within DCC and greater awareness of the disability passport.

Increasing work experience opportunities as a pathway to paid employment.

Development of neurodiversity toolkit and training on reasonable adjustments for lead recruiters within DCC.

Think Autism Strategy Refresh

Aim 5:

Autistic people live and participate equally within their community and, when necessary, receive high quality care and support to maintain that community living.

Objective: Autistic people have a range of accommodation options

Indicators of success

Reduction in the number of autistic people living with parents/carers due to lack of alternative accommodation

More specialist accommodation available for autistic people who have complex needs and require intensive support

Newly developed accommodation takes account of sensory issues which can affect autistic people

Evidence

National and local housing data.

Commissioning information

Progress reports the Autism Steering Group

Progress to date

A current review of DCC commissioned preventative services which provide housing related support, will take into account the needs of autistic people

Specialist accommodation plan is in the process of being developed by Integrated Commissioning, which includes the needs of autistic people with complex needs

Transforming Care includes the needs of autistic people including those with learning disabilities who require specialist services in the community for discharge from hospital or to prevent hospital admission

Steps towards this

Work closely with Housing Solutions and share information on needs to inform the Housing Strategy.

Ensure service/strategic reviews and procurement of new services consider the needs of autistic people

Implementation of the specialist accommodation plan, including Transforming Care

Objective: Local community services to be made more accessible and accommodating for autistic people and their carers

Indicators of success

All community services are responsive to expressed concerns from autistic people and are confident in meeting their needs.

Workforce development within community services includes autism awareness raising

Autistic people accessing general community services and not needing referral to specialist services

Language used in information and websites recognises and reflects the needs of autistic people

Evidence

Reporting into Autism Steering Group

The number of non-health care organisations providing autism training for their staff

Websites

Increase in the use of preferred terms for neurodivergence

Progress to date

Durham Mental Wellbeing Alliance includes needs associated with autism on the referral/assessment

Post diagnostic support/non assessed review includes the needs of autistic people

Integrated mental health teams to have posts specifically for autistic people

Steps towards this

Provide autism awareness training to non-health staff including training on reasonable adjustments e.g., Oliver McGowan training

Increase support from VCS, increasing training at appropriate level; increasing capacity for autism support to meet local need

Think Autism Strategy Refresh

Aim 6:

Autistic people's experiences of both the criminal and youth justice systems are improved by ensuring that all staff understand autism and how to support autistic people

Objective: Improve understanding and recognition of the needs of autistic people among staff in the Criminal and Youth Justice systems

Indicators of success

Transparent and accessible information is available on the provision of information / advice / support and services for autistic people within the Criminal and Youth Justice services and training for staff at all levels

Criminal and Youth Justice services measure the needs/impact/outcomes their services have on autistic people within their services

Workforce development within Criminal and Youth Justice services includes raising autism awareness

Language used recognises and reflects the needs of autistic people

Evidence

Call for evidence from CJS partners provides understanding of existing provision for neurodivergent people

Reports into the Autism Steering Group

Progress to date

Use of the National toolkit (Ministry of Justice) to educate frontline staff about neurodiversity, and additional support being developed Neurodiversity/autism training being delivered

New prison officers and youth custodial specialists undertake the new Custody and Detention apprenticeship, which includes a dedicated autism session

Staff training on autism e.g., in Youth Justice; basic training for Police

Use of resources designed for autistic young people within Youth Justice

Celebration Weeks in Criminal Justice System including neurodiversity celebration week

Neurodiversity Forum set up as a support for staff

Steps towards this

Oliver McGowan training implemented within CJS

More prisons and probation areas to register interest in/undertake the National Autistic Society's Autism Accreditation

Development of improved safety training for prison staff to include needs of autistic people

Implementation of revised policy/guidance on 'Advancing Diversity and Inclusion for offenders and children in custody'

To support autistic court and tribunal users:

- Delivery of 'Hidden Disabilities Scheme',
- reasonable adjustments to be in place including environmental adaptations
- delivery of mandatory training 'Human Voice of Justice' training to staff

Improve understanding of the specific needs of young people within the CJS (community, custody, secure children's homes and secure training)

Objective: Improved access to services for autistic people in touch with the criminal and youth justice systems

Indicators of success

Established partnerships and pathways to appropriate support for autistic people coming into contact with the criminal and youth justice systems with appropriate referral and sign posting

Services will be responsive to expressed concerns and be confident in meeting identified needs, backed up by feedback from autistic people/families where possible

Evidence

Call for evidence from partners to demonstrate that all parts of the criminal and youth justice systems, from police to prisons, have made demonstrable progress in ensuring that autistic people have equal access to care and support where needed and that autistic people who have been convicted of a crime are able to get the additional support they may require to engage fully in their sentence and rehabilitation.

Reports to the Autism Steering group

Progress to date

RECONNECT care after custody for all those with health vulnerabilities

Probation – mobilisation of the neurodiversity service commissioned by Ministry of Justice to support both people on probation and probation practitioners engaging with the Probation service and statutory services; learning from Neurodiversity Pilot across Co Durham and Sunderland; use of Regional Outcome Innovation Fund (ROIF).

Appointing Neurodiversity leads in each of the prisons as well as Probation; continuing/developing Through the Gate service - 'Pre-release team' in the big prisons

Transforming Care/Building the right Support/accommodation plan locally includes the needs of autistic people including those with a forensic background

Health data bases in Youth Justice to alert staff of any known concerns re autistic needs and health professionals within the service who can support and advise staff working with autistic young people

Screening in Youth Justice for sensory, language and communication needs (SLCN) using ClearCut Communication screen

Supporting parents/carers to refer to the Neurodevelopmental pathway; joint work between Youth Justice and CAMHS to prioritise young people on the waiting list for assessment.

Youth Justice signposting to parent support group and neurodivergent hub

Follow national documents which specify expectations for supporting autistic people e.g., NHSEs prison health primary care service specification (2020) and prison health integrated mental health service specification (2018)

Steps towards this

Partners working together to understand more clearly how autistic people come into contact with the criminal and youth justice systems, the type of support they may need

Through workforce development improve the police and wider criminal and youth justice system staff's understanding of autism and ensure that different parts of the justice system become more autism-inclusive

Review how police use Out of Court Disposals (OOCs) to support adults with vulnerabilities, including autistic adults (in line with national research MoJ)

Follow NHSE's guidance on the design and delivery of prison healthcare for autistic adults accessing healthcare services whilst in prison published September 2021

Consider development of autism (and learning disability) champion.

National RECONNECT neurodiversity pathway developed May 2023 to be implemented across north east

For those autistic people receiving care in secure mental health inpatient settings for offending behaviour, care should be delivered in line with Building the Right Support to develop safe, effective and timely transition back into the community and ensure that autistic people who require continued specialist support to address risk, psychological or social care needs, are offered support so they can be discharged from secure care into the community

Youth Justice

Improve data collection to increase awareness of the needs of autistic young people within the youth justice service and to understand trends e.g., more prevalent types of offending

Review resources within Co Durham Youth Justice Service, identifying any gaps in relation to the needs of autistic young people

Improve training for staff, in particular links between autism and offending and vulnerabilities of autistic young people

Police

Recognition that as Police custody lasts only 24 hours, the rest of the work needed is in the community.

Ensure workforce development for police is accessible and in place

Improve use of awareness tools such as Autism alert cards

Improve joint working between police and health/social care so that appropriate community support is in place

Strategic lead to be identified within the police to support the implementation of the strategy.

Improve understanding of the needs of autistic people who are victims of crime including victims of hate crime.

Prisons

IR8, IR16, IR20

Complete review of neurodivergent individuals in north east prisons and make recommendation to support improved outcomes

Ensure healthcare services for autistic people in north east prisons are improved, including mental health and neurodivergence pathway (see Commissioning for Quality and Innovation Scheme 2023/24)

New reception screening tool implemented for female estate with specific considerations re neurodiversity'

Additional funding to be allocated to NHS England regional Health and Justice commissioning teams in 2023/24 to support mental health and neurodiversity prison programmes including MH and neurodiversity pathway and workforce development and meeting recommendations of the centre for mental health report

Delivery Framework: There is a delivery framework underpinning the strategic aims and objectives which includes detailed action plans and programmes for improvement. These will be developed and monitored through the Autism Steering Group.

Monitoring and Review: Each delivery framework will be monitored through the framework described above using a range of performance indicators and actions (each of the work groups will have delivery plans and be responsible for the delivery of those plans).

Scrutiny of Progress: Working together to achieve the vision for children, young people and adults with autism will be through reporting to Overview and Scrutiny Committees and into the Health and Wellbeing Board.