

# Gateshead Autism Strategy

2025-2030



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# Foreword

Autistic people, their families, friends and caregivers make an important contribution to Gateshead. Partners across Gateshead work hard across the borough to give the right support. There is more to do, and we continue to deliver services and support in demanding times. We will keep reviewing and improving services, to ensure they meet the high expectations of the residents of Gateshead.

Autism is a spectrum; Autism will be slightly different for everyone, with each autistic person having their own strengths and challenges in different areas. Autistic people can have variety of care, support and health needs. Some people will require a high level of support, whilst others may need little or no support. Being Autistic should not stop people from leading a fulfilling life. Like everyone, autistic people have their own individual strengths, challenges, interests and ambitions. Being autistic does not prevent people from making friends, being in a relationship or getting a job.

However, depending on the individual, some people may need support to help them achieve what is important to them. It is appreciated that needs may change throughout an individuals' life or in different situations. Getting the right balance of support across all ages and all levels of need is the key for our health and care services, voluntary sector, the wider community, as well as the families and caregivers involved.

Our aim is to support autistic people throughout life, ensuring that people have:

- Access to timely assessment and diagnosis as well as pre and post-diagnostic support
- Equitable access to preventative health and social care services
- Access to meaningful education and employment opportunities
- Support from the criminal justice and youth justice services where needed
- Opportunities to lead healthy and fulfilling lives where people are understood, welcomed and can access their local community
- Access to appropriate mainstream and specialist services which are inclusive, accessible and helpful.

We recognise the enormous contribution that caregivers of autistic children, young people and adults make. While the [Gateshead Caregivers Strategy](#) is for all caregivers and there is common ground with those providing care to people with other social and health care needs, it is important to recognise there are differences. Increased time spent caring, levels of tiredness and stress, and more years' caring are significant variations. Often caregivers report that the autistic person they are caring for has other health or social communication issues. This strategy also aims to support and reduce the challenges that some caregivers experience.

This Autism Strategy (2024 - 2029) sets out what Gateshead residents say are the key priorities, based on local engagement. It brings together the views of autistic people, families and caregivers, key partners across health, social care, education, voluntary sector and community services, criminal and youth justice services and other key stakeholders.

For the national and local context as well as the strategies that underpin and drive this work, see Appendix I, (documents referenced 1-9).

We want autistic people to be central to this important work.

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Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care

**Cllr. Gary Haley**

Cabinet Member for Children & Young People

**Cllr. Bernadette Oliphant**

Cabinet Member for Health & Wellbeing

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**Terminology**

Throughout this strategy, the terminology “Autistic Person” is used. This is because the majority of autistic people say this is how they would like to be addressed. Where this is not the case, Gateshead colleagues will accommodate individual preferences.

The information below explains the preference.

<sup>10</sup>NAS How to talk and write about autism

<sup>11</sup>Autistic not weird language survey

<sup>12</sup>More than word report 2022

<sup>13</sup>Language of Autism Project: Short film (with subtitles) - YouTube

# Introduction

This autism strategy sets our priorities and plans for the next five years (2024 – 2029) across Gateshead’s local authority, health and voluntary sector organisations.

With an overarching multi-agency Autism Board to steer the work, each priority will have its own working group. Membership across both the board and working groups will include those with lived experience as active members. The work of the Autism Board will be overseen by Gateshead’s Health and Wellbeing Board.

The NHS Long Term Plan 2019, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) National Strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021-2026 and the National framework and operational guidance for autism assessment services all highlight the need for health and social care systems to work together. This is echoed by Gateshead<sup>14&15</sup> residents, who would welcome a consistent approach across all areas regardless of where services are delivered (be it clinical, educational, or simply the high street).

People with their own lived experience are the experts and very often their voices are lost within the system. Our commitment is to make sure that autistic people, their families and allies are leading the changes needed.

Gateshead has chosen to make this an autism strategy rather than a neurodiversity strategy. Understanding in this area is developing very quickly and there are common experiences between neurodivergent people (including autistic people). It is also recognised that autistic people may also have other co-occurring health conditions, it is therefore important to consider this strategy alongside other local strategies (for example, Special Educational Needs and Disability Strategy).

This is an ambitious all-age autism strategy, and we have worked with autistic residents to identify areas to start with. We know we can do more, and this strategy aims to start working on those areas and build upon existing good practice in Gateshead.

## Who is this Strategy For?

This is an all-age strategy to support autistic people who live in Gateshead. This strategy is aimed at all services and professionals in Gateshead, as well as the wider community including autistic people and their caregivers. One of the key outcomes of this strategy is that people and local organisations are clear about what is needed and expected to make Gateshead an autism friendly borough.

## What is autism?

Official definitions<sup>7</sup> describe autism is a lifelong developmental disability. However many autistic people do challenge the idea that it is a disability, autism is something which affects how people communicate and interact with the world. The diagnostic criteria for autism references specific challenges relating to communication and interaction, and/or repetitive or restrictive patterns of behaviours or interests.

However, brain differences in autistic people are natural variations, not deficits, disorders or impairments. Such differences vary from person to person and can lead to strengths and difficulties in different areas. For example, autistic people may have a strong attention to detail, above average technical or creative skills, ability to easily identify patterns, ability to focus attention, highly rational decision-making, a powerful memory, and a strong work ethic amongst other strengths.

Autistica has summarised some examples of the wide-ranging presentation of autism in different people, examples include:

- Have a strong preference for routine, sameness, or certainty. Autistic people might experience anxiety during times of change or uncertainty.
- Experience sensory differences. Autistic people could be over or under-sensitive to sound, touch, taste, smell, or light. It may also take longer for an autistic person to process what you are saying.
- Enjoy focused, more intense interests. Autistic people may be passionate and knowledgeable about certain topics. They may have fewer, but more specific interests. These interests can be anything, from microbiology to vintage clothing. An autistic person might find it more challenging to focus on areas that aren't their preferred topics.
- Have support needs. Every autistic person will have different strengths and areas where they could benefit from additional support.
- Communicate differently to non-autistic people. This could include differences with eye contact, or having a direct communication style, which some non-autistic people may interpret as blunt. Many autistic people can struggle to connect with non-autistic people, which can negatively affect their wellbeing.
- Have delayed or absent speech. Around one in four autistic people speak few or no words. Some autistic people may stop speaking during times of stress.
- Stim to express emotion. The term stimming derives from 'self-stimulation' and may be described in medical terms as 'restrictive and repetitive behaviour' Some autistic people stim to help manage feelings of anxiety or express emotions such as happiness or excitement. Examples of stimming include hand flapping, twirling, or rocking.

Autistic people need different levels of support.<sup>16</sup> NHS England Digital suggest about 3 in 10 autistic people also have a learning disability. Some autistic people will have high support needs, which may mean that they require full time care and support. Some people may need a bit of support with day-to-day activities, while others live fully independent lives.

It is appreciated that all autistic people are different, some people may mask autistic characteristics which can lead to mental and physical exhaustion and/or low self-esteem.

More recent research has highlighted the difference between how Autistic characteristics in women and girls may differ<sup>17</sup>. Historically this has meant that fewer females receive a diagnosis compared to their male counterparts, likewise, some Autistic females have been misdiagnosed. With the right support in place, all autistic people should be able to live the life they choose.

We know that not every autistic person, has, or would like a diagnosis. Whilst for others, a diagnosis is important and affirmative. The intention of this strategy is to make positive changes in Gateshead to benefit all autistic individuals irrespective of a diagnosis or not.

Data suggests that more than one in 100 people are autistic and there are around 700,000 autistic children, young people, adults in the UK. However it is likely that the numbers are higher than this.

## Some statistics

The population of Gateshead is 196,100 (2021 UK Census figures). Government prevalence surveys last estimated that around 1 in 100 people are autistic. In addition, there are an estimated 3 million family members and caregivers of autistic people in the UK (National Autistic Society).

It should be noted that data is changing very quickly particularly in relation to age and gender of people being diagnosed. In the past five years (2017 to 2022) there has been a 96% increase in autism, as highlighted by the school census as per<sup>3</sup> [Gateshead SEND strategy 2023-2026](#).

At the time of writing, the \*total number of Gateshead residents diagnosed as autistic from the ages of 5-18 years (incl) is 1,850 people which equates to 5.6% of that total age group, Appendix III. This is likely to be an underestimate as there will be people who have a diagnosis not recorded or are waiting for an assessment. Likewise, anecdotal evidence suggests that prevalence is likely to be higher than national data suggests.

The [18NHS England National Autism Framework](#) sets out how an autism diagnosis can serve several important purposes and why universal, equitable and timely access to autism assessment across England is important.

\*Data source: Primary Care Clinical Systems (RAIDR Collection – provided by North of England Commissioning Support [NECS] Information Services)



# Vision

**Our vision is for Gateshead to be a place where autistic people can thrive. People can live healthy and fulfilling lives in communities which value their individuality and support them to achieve their goals.**

The vision of this strategy is closely aligned to the Gateshead Health & Wellbeing and Thrive strategies. These documents set out the Gateshead Vision for health and wellbeing. Simply this is; Good Jobs, Homes, Health and Friends. To do this we have pledged to:

- Put people and families at the heart of everything we do
- Tackle inequality so people have a fair chance
- Support our communities to support themselves
- Invest in our economy to provide sustainable opportunities for employment innovation and growth across the borough
- Work together and fight for a better Gateshead
- We want Gateshead to be a place where everyone thrives

A key challenge of this vision is to make sure that the vision is delivered for autistic residents, in partnership with our autistic residents.

To make this happen, these are some of the things we know and plan to do:

## Intention

### **Tackle inequality so people have a fair chance.**

#### **What we know**

Autistic people are more likely to have chronic mental and physical health conditions and report lower quality healthcare than others  
[19Cambridge research.](#)

Autistic children, young people and adults are known to experience far higher inequalities than non-autistic people. These inequalities are far reaching across society and our communities. They also impact on how autistic people access health and social care and can and do result in poorer outcomes, on average someone who is autistic will die 16 years younger than someone who is not autistic.

Autistic children, young people and adults living in the most deprived areas of Gateshead will be at an even greater disadvantage.

#### **Outcome**

Autistic children, young people and adults will have access to the same health and wellbeing services and support as their peers.

#### **What we plan to do**

We will make sure that services and support understand and implement reasonable adjustments, acknowledging that a reasonable adjustment will vary from individual to individual.

## Intention

### **Work with autistic people to ensure they can understand themselves and achieve what matters to them.**

**What we know** <sup>15</sup>Autistic people have shared that they were dissatisfied with the amount of local information and support available to them. Provision is not always accessible in terms of location and operating hours. While there is a lot of information available about autism, autistic people feel that much of it is written for parents/caregivers or professionals rather than autistic people themselves.

“On diagnosis I was handed some leaflets and that was it.”

“I’ve never felt like the support was for families like ours.”

“Once you get a diagnosis you don’t get any help towards anything.”

“Everything just seems to be about kids. I get that’s probably their biggest funding and they have to but it’s really not fair. It’s quite off-putting when you’re like trying to find out stuff about autism and you just keep getting, here’s what your parent should be doing for your children and you’re kind of like, this isn’t helpful, that won’t work for me.”

“Autism is a genetic condition, it is therefore more likely that parents and siblings are also on the spectrum. As a consequence, any support offered should take this into account.”

## Outcome

Autistic children, young people, adults, and their families/caregivers will say that they are able to get clear information when they need it and find the right support to meet their needs. Staff will have a good understanding of how to support autistic children, young people, adults, and their families/caregivers.

## What we plan to do

Work with experts by experience to understand the various routes people use to get information and support. Work alongside and use insight from autistic residents to test out different approaches to pre and post diagnostic support for adults. Review the offer available to children and young people and their families, making improvements as needed based on their experiences.



## Intention

## Create fair employment and good work for all.

### What we know

The recent <sup>21</sup>[Buckland Report](#) said that only around 3 in 10 working age autistic people are in employment, compared with around 5 in 10 for all disabled people and 8 in 10 for non-disabled people.

### Outcome

People will say that local recruitment practices meet their needs

### What we plan to do

Confirm that all Gateshead organisations are clear about their obligations in this area, and they are reflected in each organisation's workforce strategy and in practice. The <sup>22</sup>[Equality Act 2010](#) legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society.

Work with the Department for Work and Pensions and wider employers, including the thriving technology sector, in Gateshead to help support their recruitment practices and support on the job. Reasonable adjustments may need to be able to be flexible throughout employment. There are some excellent examples of the talent of autistic people being realised through recruitment organisations such as Auticon.



# Priorities

There is an overarching aim to reduce health and social inequalities. All work will be developed alongside autistic children, young people, adults and their families and supporters.

## Priorities

**Priority 1:** Pre & post-diagnostic support- all age moving to a needs led approach

**Priority 2:** Reducing health inequalities & barriers to health and social care services

**Priority 3:** Education & lifelong learning

**Priority 4:** Employment & skills

**Priority 5:** Criminal justice and youth justice

**Priority 6:** Community inclusion and involvement

**Priority 7:** Increasing understanding & promoting reasonable adjustments within universal services.

Alongside the overarching Health & Wellbeing and Thrive strategies that inform this work, we thought about:

- What autistic residents and those with lived experience have told us [\(14&15\)](#)
- Input from our workforce, including health and social care, education, criminal and youth justice, and employment professionals
- Feedback from the voluntary sector
- Local and national policies
- Available funding and resources, including the availability of specialist staff

As part of setting the priorities of this strategy, autistic people identified what a good service/support would look like to them. These insights have been summarised as "I statements". I statements reflect what people would be able to say if the service was working for them.

## Priority 1:

### Pre & post-diagnostic support- all age moving to a needs led approach

#### I statements

- I can get information and advice that helps me to manage while I am waiting for an assessment, and to be as well as possible – physically, mentally and emotionally.
- I can get clear, accurate, accessible information and advice that helps me to:
  - Think about and plan my life
  - Think about my health and how I can be as well as possible – physically, mentally and emotionally
- I am supported to understand what being autistic means to me
- I can get support from people who have a similar lived experience to me
  - I do not have to wait until i get a diagnosis to have my needs met.

#### Where are we now?

The difficulties and stresses sometimes created by a long wait times for an autism diagnosis can place increased expectations on the assessment. It is unlikely that a diagnosis will relieve all the pressure on the individual and family as it is part of a wider journey, not a solution.

For children and young people in education, support is offered pre-diagnosis. New tools are being developed such as the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) thresholds to support education settings to identify barriers to learning and make reasonable adjustments at the earliest opportunity regardless of diagnosis. Likewise, support is offered by the Early Years Service (0-5 support), High Incident Need Team (HINT), and the Quality Assurance and Monitoring Team and Education Support Service to support education settings with SEND provision.

The Daisy Chain project delivers Gateshead Autism Hubs offer for parents and carers of autistic children, young people and young adults (0-25 years). Autism Hubs offer information, advice and support on a range of challenges that can impact on those who are autistic and their families. The Hubs provide drop-in sessions, peer support groups, and training for parents, carers, and professionals. Additional information on various support offers for children, young people and their families can be found on the SEND Directory and the SEND Local Offer. Peer support can also be accessed via Gateshead's Parent/Carer forum.

Progress has been made in relation to support for children, young people and their families. However, more work is required to ensure that the offer is clearly articulated to families. Likewise, specific support for adults pre and post diagnostic is required to ensure our autistic residents are fully supported and can reach their full potential.

From 1st January 2025 Tyneside and Northumberland Mind will be providing pre and post autism diagnostic support for adults who live in Gateshead.

The overwhelming feedback from autistic adults, is that there is little follow up and support, particularly with those considered more able. <sup>14</sup> [YVC Understanding autistic people's experiences of being diagnosed with autism](#)

"I was thinking to myself, 'what happens now? What do I do now?"

Is my life going to change since the diagnosis?' I feel like I've got worse. It's like, 'there you go, there's your diagnosis. Bye bye, now.'"

"I got more info when diagnosed with diabetes last year than I got from my autism diagnosis. I've asked multiple times and got nothing."

## Our commitment

Children, young people and adults and their families and/or caregivers will have access to information, advice and support pre-diagnosis, as well as post assessment support. People will not have to wait for a diagnosis before they can get the help they need. We will undertake regular reviews of services and support to make sure that they meet the needs of the people and families of Gateshead. We want to offer people the help and support they need when they need it.

## What we will do

### Information review:

Review and, where needed, redesign information for children, young people and adults who are on the waiting list for an assessment and who have been diagnosed, as well as their families and/or caregivers. Ensure that information available will provide details of existing services and support that is able to be accessed while awaiting assessment and once diagnosed.

### Review the current advice/support offer:

Where appropriate, across the age ranges, provide Psychoeducation support for autistic individuals.

Clarify the Autism Central offer available (nationally funded) and clearly advertise and articulate the offer available for children and young people.

### Reduce challenges associated with waiting

#### Children & Young People:

Work jointly across the system, linking into existing improvement work already underway in relation to mental health and neurodevelopmental pathway development.

Work collaboratively with children/young people, their families and/or caregivers, as well as key partners in co-production to identify any gaps in pre/post-diagnostic support. Work will be undertaken in partners and will link to existing local strategies and plans (i.e. SEND Strategy)

People and their families will not have to wait for a diagnosis before they can access the support they need.

#### Adults:

Undertake work in partnership with people with lived experience to understand best practise and explore options for support. Test out and work towards implementing a model of pre and post diagnostic support for adults.

## What does good look like?

Autistic children, young people and adults can access support regardless of if they have a diagnosis or not.

## Priority 2:

### Reducing health inequalities & barriers to health and social care services

#### I statements

- I know how to get an autism assessment and how long I will wait.
- I can get a Care Act assessment if I want one
- I receive the care and support I need to stay well and do the things that are important to me.
- If I need support, the services offered are suitable for me and understand my individual needs.

#### Where are we now?

The demand for autism assessments has risen rapidly and it accepted that waiting lists for autism assessments across England are too high. The national pressure is reflected in Gateshead average waiting times.

At present, support does not automatically follow diagnosis, but having a formal diagnosis can be helpful. For many a diagnosis is helpful in validating and understanding how they see and perceive the world, while others might find it difficult to come to terms with. This is also true for parents/caregivers or friends.

#### Our commitment

People will know where to go and what to do if they have questions about getting an autism assessment.

All health and social care support for children, young people and adults will be autism-accessible to reduce health inequalities for autistic people. This will include mental health services, social care support and mainstream health services (i.e. GP, dentists, audiology etc.)

#### What we will do

##### Information review:

This work needs to dovetail across health, social care and the independent sector, as well as considering the work being done in Priority 1. It needs to go across the age ranges and include what is available universally for those lower level or non-eligible needs.

Work with people to better understand inequalities and to analyse data and intelligence to understand if some groups are underrepresented.

##### Reducing challenges associated with waiting:

Work will be undertaken in co-production with people to explore best practise and review gaps in the offer. Proof of concept work will be trialled to evidence outcomes and make a case for change.

#### What does good look like?

People will get a timely diagnosis and get the support they need to understand how being autistic impacts on them.

Reduction in waiting times and fewer people on waiting lists.

People being able to remain on the waiting list but having access to support and strategies to cope whilst waiting.

## Priority 3:

### Education and lifelong learning

#### I statements

- I can go to school, college and university confident my needs will be met through reasonable adjustments.
- Regardless of whether I have a diagnosis or not, my individuality is understood, and my needs are met.
- I am confident that my school understands how being autistic impacts on me and makes the changes I need to be educated

#### Where are we now?

The difficulties autistic people experience in schools, colleges and universities are well documented. Exhaustion relating to the demands of the educational environment can lead to dysregulation in private (sometimes termed "meltdowns") and difficulties experienced moving from one education setting to another.

Children, young people and their families continue to experience challenges in relation to transitions, particularly between primary and secondary school, but also between years and into further education.

#### Our commitment

Support autistic children, young people and adults to be able to access the education, lifelong learning and skills offer. Ensuring that people can achieve their best possible outcomes which will support their aspirations in life.

Offer support around transitions throughout education stages and consider how more in-depth preparation could be offered.

#### What we will do

Work will be undertaken alongside post-16 education providers to better understand the range of specialist and mainstream provision that is available to autistic young people and adults.

Aligned to the to the Post-16 Strategy Delivery Plan, gaps will be identified collaboratively, in order to develop the curriculum to provide opportunities that enable autistic people to meet their full potential. Work being completed via the SEND Strategy improvement plan will deliver improvements in relation to children and young people receiving the right support at the right time. This includes:

- The implementation of SEND thresholds to proactively remove barriers
- Education settings making reasonable adjustments to support attendance
- School settings continuing to be supported to improve their offer for children and young people with social, emotional and communication needs, regardless of diagnosis.

Work will be undertaken to identify what support would be useful moving on to post-16 education (including university) and into employment (including apprenticeships). To this end, post-16 education providers will be asked to support all autistic children and young people with transition between school years and between settings. Likewise, key partners will work together to ensure educational settings understand their role in preparing autistic children and young people for key transitions in their educational journey.

#### What does good look like?

Autistic people, their families and friends find accessing and navigating education settings less stressful. Being supported in an inclusive education environment will ensure that learners are less likely to mask. It is hoped that this will positively impact on both the attendance and wellbeing of learners as they tell us that masking can be exhausting." They will feel better understood by the staff teaching and supporting them. During transitions within education, students will have access to the tools, skills and support they need to ensure that they achieve the best possible outcomes with regards to attendance, engagement and achievement.

## Priority 4:

### Employment

#### I statements

- I have opportunities to work in paid employment.
- My employer understands how autism impacts me and makes reasonable adjustments.

#### Where are we now?

Aside of the issues reported by the recent <sup>21</sup>[Buckland Report](#) Autistic people report difficulty in work with other staff/managers not understanding what is needed to maximise their potential and support them appropriately.

#### Our commitment

Accept that each autistic person will have different strengths that they can and do bring to the workplace.

Continue to use the Gateshead Special Educational Needs and Disability Employment forum to support young people into employment.

#### What we will do

The largest employers in the area, Gateshead Council and the NHS will look at how to deliver best practice for autistic staff. We will engage with a number of SME's (small and medium sized employers) on current best practice to overcome potential challenges of supporting autistic staff, particularly where resources and expertise is limited.

Building on success of Gateshead Council's supported internships scheme in partnership with Project Search, various departments within the council will be asked to "pledge a placement". This will ensure that a bank of placements is available to match the interests of more young people seeking a supported internship.

We will actively encourage recruitment of autistic people into our workforce, offering workplace experiences such as work placements, and consider job carving where possible, that enables our autistic workforce to perform at their best.

Work with the Department of Work and Pensions and Job Centre to adopt best practise which enables unemployed autistic residents to move into work and education.

Where employment or formal education is not being considered, ensure our autistic residents have access to community-based learning opportunities that develops confidence, encourages community participation, and promotes positive physical and mental well-being.

Learn from organisations and experts by experience to help employers understand that support may be ongoing and flex rather than a rigid set of adjustments that can't alter. Autistic employees will need different reasonable adjustments at different times and in different contexts.

#### What does good look like?

We will ensure autistic young people at school have early access (year 8) to a robust employability curriculum that is complimented with good workplace experiences (visits, placements, employer talks etc), providing more time to develop appropriate workplace skills, knowledge and behaviours.

## Priority 5:

### Criminal justice and youth justice

#### I statements

- I am 'seen' as an autistic person and my reasonable adjustments are accommodated.
- I am supported to stay out of the criminal justice system with proactive support at an earlier age.

#### Where are we now?

Following the [22Criminal Justice Joint Inspection review of evidence](#) into Neurodivergence in the Criminal Justice System, it is believed that approximately half of people in prison are neurodivergent (it doesn't specifically identify autism separately).

Additionally [23Neurodiversity – a whole-child approach for youth justice](#) report by Professor Amanda Kirby, suggests that at least one in three people moving through the justice system are thought to be neurodivergent.

#### Our commitment

Continue to support the existing work across the criminal justice system.

In the Youth Justice team, alongside Children & Young People colleagues, work closely with the autism assessment service to ensure those who need it can access a timely assessment.

#### What we will do

Explore with youth and criminal justice colleagues, what extra training (aside of any mandatory training) would help support them to be able to support autistic people who are in the justice system.

Capture experiences from autistic people, their families as the professionals involved in their lives to clarify if there if any indicators/events that might have provided earlier insight and possibly triggered more support.

#### What does good look like?

For autistic people in the justice system to be able to be listened to and feel understood. For a reduction in the number of autistic people entering the justice system.

## Priority 6:

### Community inclusion and involvement

#### I statements

- I can meet people who share my interests and can join and participate in a range of groups.
- I feel welcome and safe in my local community and valued for my contribution.
- Parents, families and caregivers feel confident that their loved one is able to safely access an inclusive and supportive local community.

#### Where are we now?

Many aspects of our community are not inclusive for autistic people from the environment to the approach of some people within the community. There remains a lack of understanding in relation to autism which results in people being excluded from their communities.

#### Our commitment

We work in partnership with others to make our local area welcoming, supportive and inclusive for everyone.

#### What we will do

Be guided by the working group on this aspect and take the lead from autistic people in our community and what they consider important to work on first. This underpins the intention of the strategy to be truly responsive and for solutions to be co-produced.

#### What does good look like?

Autistic people are able to access community events, venues and feel welcome.

Autistic people can and do contribute to the direction of this workstream.



## Priority 7:

### Increasing understanding & promoting reasonable adjustments within universal services.

#### Where are we now?

The significant health inequalities experienced by autistic people indicate services across the system are not genuinely accessible. These are extensively covered in the [<sup>7</sup>DHSC National strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026](#) and the [<sup>8</sup>National framework and operational guidance for autism assessment services](#).

This work is essential to ensure that autistic people can and do access provision available to them.

#### Our commitment

Now more than ever, it is important to make sure services are truly universal and ensure staff are supported to understand and accommodate autism and wider neurodivergence. Additional effort may be required to understand and overcome the barriers that autistic people may face in trying to access these universal services

Workforce - without a well-trained and supported workforce none of this work can be expected to be consistent and embedded into business as usual. These colleagues will help drive change.

Alongside the Department of Health and Social Care mandated Oliver McGowan training, ensure there are other training opportunities for professionals, right across council services as well as more traditional health and social care teams.

For example, one area of working training is driven by the implementation of the reasonable adjustment flag across the NHS. It is a national record, immediately visible (to staff, as permitted by local role-based access controls) and shows a person needs accommodations and will ensure that details of impairments and other key information (such as communication requirements) are shared consistently across the NHS – with patient consent.

The implementation of the flag means staff must be trained how best to accommodate autistic people.

#### What we will do

Map training available currently (mandatory and non-mandatory) and assess its impact and use across different groups of staff.

Draw on learning from many existing organisations of what good practice looks like and identify areas to trial.

#### What does good look like?

Agreement and clarity on which areas within workforce training and good practice for organisations to be tackled.

# Next steps

We have considered a lot of engagement work and consultation in order to develop this strategy to ensure we have included what is important to Gateshead residents.

The consultation work has confirmed support for the broad priorities in the strategy, and some changes and additions have been made as a result of the constructive feedback received.

We will continue to regularly review this strategy to make sure the conversation continues, and our residents' needs are first and foremost.

We will create a multi-agency Autism Board with seven working groups, one for each priority. Both the board and each workstream will have people with lived experience contributing and shaping the work. We will develop a comprehensive delivery plan which will set out in more detail the tasks that need to be undertaken to deliver the strategy, and this will be updated annually.

As this is an ambitious plan, delivery will be iterative. Depending on the feedback of the Autism Board, this may involve focusing on a proportion of priorities year on year. Further details will be agreed within the delivery plan.

The delivery plan will be overseen through relevant Council and ICB governance. Regular review and monitoring of the strategy will also ensure that any future stakeholder feedback can be considered, and changes can be made to the strategy and delivery plan where appropriate.

## **Governance:**

Overall responsibility and over – Gateshead Place Committee, Health & Wellbeing Board, Cabinet  
Annual report – Health & Wellbeing Board (formal report), Cabinet (for noting)

## **Operational workstream groups comprising:**

Dedicated individuals from each organisation [incl Mental Health provision] (with capacity to make decisions – or access to senior colleagues)

Autistic people and people with lived experience, funded for their input and supported to attend as appropriate.

Each respective organisation will be required to progress decisions through their own governance arrangements, this will be captured within the terms of reference for the Autism Board.

## References:

1. [Gateshead Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#)
2. [Gateshead Thrive Strategy Corporate Plan 2023-2028](#)
3. [Gateshead SEND Strategy 2023-2026](#)
4. [ICB Final NENC Integrated Care Strategy 2022](#)
5. [Gateshead Integrated Adults and Social Care Strategy 2023-28](#)
6. [Gateshead Caregivers Strategy](#)
7. [DHSC National strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026](#)
8. [National framework and operational guidance for autism assessment services](#)
9. [Operational guidance to deliver improved outcomes in all-age autism assessment pathways: Guidance for integrated care boards](#)
10. [NAS How to talk and write about autism](#)
11. [Autistic not weird language survey](#)
12. [More than word report 2022](#)
13. [Language of Autism Project: Short film \(with subtitles\) - YouTube](#)
14. [Your Voice Counts Integrated Care System \(ICS\) Autism Peer Research Report](#)
15. [Involve North East - stakeholder-views-of-autism-services-in-gateshead-final 2023](#)
16. [NHS England Digital](#)
17. [Autistic Women and Girls](#)
18. [NHS England National Autism Framework](#)
19. [Autistic adults have poorer quality healthcare and worse health based on self-report data. Cambridge - Molecular Autism \(2022\)](#)
20. [A systematic review and meta-analysis of suicidality in autistic and possibly autistic people without co-occurring intellectual disability Molecular Autism \(2023\)](#)
21. [The Buckland Review of Autism Employment](#)
22. [Criminal Justice Joint Inspection – Neurodiversity in the Criminal Justice System - review of evidence](#)
23. [Her Majesty's Inspectorate of probation - Neurodiversity – a whole-child approach for youth justice](#)

# Appendix I

- <sup>1</sup>[Gateshead Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) Good jobs, home, health and friends
- <sup>2</sup>[Gateshead’s Thrive agenda](#) The strength of Gateshead is the people of Gateshead
- <sup>3</sup>[Gateshead Special Education Needs and Disabilities \(SEND\) strategy 2023-2026](#) For all children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability to thrive
- <sup>4</sup>[Integrated Care Board \(ICB\) Final North East North Cumbria Integrated Care Strategy 2022](#) Better health and wellbeing for all
- <sup>5</sup>[Gateshead Integrated Adults and Social Care Strategy 2023-28](#) To work with our communities to enable residents to live thriving lives, be independent and individual, support themselves and each other, and access personalised quality support when they need it.
- <sup>6</sup>[Gateshead Carergivers Strategy](#) acknowledges the role of caregivers and aims to make sure they can thrive with their own needs fulfilled alongside their caring role.
- <sup>7</sup>[Department of Health & Social Care National strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026](#)
- <sup>8</sup>[National framework and operational guidance for autism assessment services](#)
- <sup>9</sup>[Operational guidance to deliver improved outcomes in all-age autism assessment pathways: Guidance for integrated care boards](#)



# Appendix II

Latest data on Gateshead population with autism from North of England Commissioning Support (NECS) Information Office