

Sheffield All Age Autism Strategy

2023-2026: Year One Priorities

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Introduction

This strategy has been developed based on feedback received from autistic children, young people, adults and family carers on what our priorities need to be in order to make Sheffield an Autism friendly city.

It describes how we will work collaboratively with people with lived experience, their families and carers, our partners and stakeholders to address the inequalities faced by autistic people, their families and carers.

This strategy sets out our ambition for a cultural shift to make Sheffield an understanding and welcoming place where autistic children, young people and adults can thrive.

To find out what support is currently available for autistic people and their carers and families in Sheffield

please visit:

<https://www.sheffielddirectory.org.uk/>

or call Sheffield City Council

First Contact Team on:

0114 273 4908

Why we need a strategy

There are significant inequalities autistic people face, such as the gap in life expectancy, access to employment and lack of appropriate housing.



Some autistic people face additional inequalities such as groups marginalised by race, who are overrepresented in the justice system and experience unconscious bias and institutional racism.



There are a number of transition points across age, services and sectors that require us to take a more coordinated approach.



A more joined up approach is required by all the partners across Sheffield to make the changes we need to see in addressing these inequalities.

What is Autism?

Autistic people see, hear and feel the world differently to other people. Autism varies widely and is often referred to as a spectrum condition, because of the range of ways it can impact on people and the different level of support they may need across their lives.

Like all people, autistic people have their own strengths and weaknesses. We need to understand, celebrate and maximise the value that autistic individuals can bring to our communities.

Autistic people may need help with a range of things, from forming friendships, coping at school, managing at work, or being able to get out and about in the community.

Autism can become evident in different individuals at different ages. When a child or young person has additional needs such as autism, it is important to identify this early, and signpost to advice and support.

Some autistic people will need very little or no support in their everyday lives while others may need high levels of care, such as 24-hour support in residential care.

What we know about Autism in Sheffield

Number of autistic people

The Sheffield Joint Strategic Needs Assessment states the number of autistic people in Sheffield is unknown, and could be between 8,500 to 20,000 people (all ages). We need to develop a more accurate picture to make sure the right support is available.

Please note: some of the information on this page may be distressing

Life expectancy and health

Autistic people face substantial and concerning health inequalities, which we must tackle:

- Autistic people die on average 16-30 years earlier than the general population, mostly from preventable illnesses.
- Autistic people are more likely to experience mental health problems.
- Autistic people are more likely to have chronic physical health conditions, e.g. heart, lung and diabetic conditions, epilepsy and gastrointestinal disorders
- In Sheffield 25% of autistic people who have told their GP they are autistic also have a learning disability. The national figure is 40-60%.

What we know about Autism in Sheffield

Children and Young people

- Early identification and timely support is required in order to better meet the needs of autistic children including early years.
- The transition to adulthood is a particularly difficult time, and for those with additional needs means more changes in how they access health and care services. This can be extremely disruptive and is often described as a 'cliff edge'.

Access

- The lack of a widespread understanding of autism is a barrier to autistic people living well in their own communities, finding accommodation, work or higher education and other opportunities.
- More work is required in supporting employers to be confident in hiring and supporting autistic people, and to improve autistic people's experiences of being in work.

What people have told us

Societal misunderstandings about autism need tackling, across different communities and services.

There is a 'lost generation' of older autistic women.

More into work and work-based support is needed.

Some autistic people don't feel safe around Sheffield (mainly environmental issues and worries about police response) and some experience harassment.

Support and access offers need to be clear, flexible and simple to use (including good promotion).

There are long waits for assessment, poor pathway information and a lack of support.

There are limited housing options for autistic adults living with their families wanting independence.

Carers and family members of autistic people need support and should be valued as experts and partners.

Some autistic people are finding good support and activities but cost is a barrier and there's a lack of tailored social opportunities.

Schools, GP practices and other formal environments are overwhelming and difficult to cope with.

How this strategy has been developed

The strategy has been developed through the Sheffield Autism Partnership Board including:

A review of 16 local consultations and engagement exercises with autistic people, their families and carers over the past 5 years



Further engagement in 2022 with particular focus on groups that were less represented in previous work such as Black, Asian and minoritised Ethnic (B.A.M.E.) and LGBT+ communities, older people, parents, those with other long-term conditions and non-speaking people.



An options workshop for Board members in November 2022 and a focused workshop for Children and Young People in March 2023.

How this strategy has been developed

The strategy is overseen by the **Sheffield Autism Partnership Board** and has been developed in partnership with **Board members:**

Autistic people, their families and carers	Autism Plus	Autistic Children and Carers Together Sheffield	Citizenship First	Citizens Advice Sheffield	Disability Sheffield	Safe Places
Sheffield Asperger's Parent Action Group	Sheffield Autism Partnership Network	Sheffield Autistic Society	Sheffield Carers Centre	Sheffield City Council	Sheffield Health and Social Care NHS Foundation Trust	Sheffield Parent Carer Forum
	Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust	South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board Sheffield Place	South Yorkshire Police	University of Sheffield	Voluntary Action Sheffield	

Our Vision

To make Sheffield an Autism friendly city through:

Ensuring the views of autistic people and their families and carers drive change and contribute directly to planning



Raising the profile of autism in Sheffield



Improving the experience and life chances of autistic people

How we will work towards our vision over the next 3 years

We will focus on 6 key themes:

Theme 1	Helping people to understand autism
Theme 2	Helping autistic children and young people at school and into adulthood
Theme 3	Helping autistic people to find jobs
Theme 4	Making health and care services equal for autistic people
Theme 5	Making sure autistic people get the right health and social care help in their communities
Theme 6	Help for autistic people in the justice system

These themes match the priorities in the National Autism Strategy 2021 - 2026

Helping people to understand autism

What people have told us

Autism is known as an invisible disability – people have no idea how difficult it can be

People think that you are stupid or rude

I'm often not seen as 'Autistic enough' to need help

My husband is my carer – he needs a peer support group but has been unable to find one

Our priorities for 2023 – 2024

Ensure that training and understanding opportunities are wider than front line services

- Ensure delivery of high quality training about autism across all statutory frontline services
- Significantly improve the public's understanding and acceptance of autism including a training offer
- Ensure that there is help for everyone to understand autism, throughout the wider community and in education settings from nursery school age onwards.
- Ensure high quality support for unpaid carers

Our Commitments

- We will roll out the Oliver McGowan training for all frontline NHS and social care staff.
- We will develop enhanced training content to increase autism awareness - developed and delivered with autistic people as part of the Compassionate Sheffield project
- We will map out how we should improve support for families and carers of autistic people.
- To aim for 'Everywhere we go – an Autism Friendly City'

Helping autistic children and young people at school and into adulthood

What people have told us

I feel isolated as a parent and unsure of how to take things forward

Parents don't have previous knowledge and need advocates with a strong voice who can work effectively with them

Transition discussions need to start earlier – there are some that can start at birth

There's a preconception about what autism looks like in schools

Our priorities for 2023 - 2024

- Improve the transition process for young people moving into adulthood
- Ensure all schools provide neurodiverse accessible environments, with commitment and improved awareness and acceptance from all school leaders

Our Commitments

- We will start discussions to support effective preparation for adulthood in social care and education as early as possible - conversations with families about the transition to adult services will begin at Year 9.
- We will develop training materials for health, education and care staff to ensure that each child's individual special education needs are understood and met, they are supported to attend school and prepared for a smooth transition to adulthood.
- We will make educational, health and care settings more supportive for autistic people by improving the sensory environment and ensuring education, health and care staff are culturally aware and have the right skills and training.

Helping autistic people find jobs

What people have told us

I was made redundant from a job as they couldn't accommodate my needs – I only needed a bit of support

We need understanding from HR that reasonable adjustments are essential

Autistic people are often only offered repetitive work

We need a list of employers who are open to recruiting autistic people

Our priorities for 2023 - 2024

- Promote reasonable adjustments for autistic people in the workplace
- Improve post 16 support for finding meaningful activities, training and work opportunities – including people who do not communicate verbally
- Improve preparation for adulthood including lifeskills training

Our Commitments

- We will ensure autism training for employers includes guidance for work-place reasonable adjustments.
- We will develop a campaign to promote autistic people's right to ask for work-place reasonable adjustments
- We will ensure the new Local Supported Employment Project recruits autistic people with different support needs including those with and without a learning disability.
- We will continue to work with providers to develop new opportunities for young autistic people

Making health and care services equal for autistic people

What people have told us

Having to fight for a diagnosis of your child so they can get the appropriate support and care should not be that difficult

A lot of GPs still have old fashioned views on Autism

Turn the music off in waiting rooms and bright lights should be dimmable

As family members, we're very skilled people - care providers should ask us, we're the experts

Our priorities for 2023 - 2024

- Improve the diagnosis pathway, reasonable adjustments, awareness raising and training for health and care staff (including providers, doctor's surgeries, hospital, dentists, pharmacies).
- Improve mental health support for all children and young people

Our Commitments

- We will aim to reduce autism diagnosis waiting times for adults and children/young people
- We will improve support during waiting for assessment and post assessment, with support based on need and not assessment and a mental health offer for children & young people that is wider than CAMHS.
- We will continue to implement learning from the LeDeR (Learning from Lives and Deaths – People with a Learning Disability and Autistic People) programme.
- We will pilot ways to improve how GP surgeries record and flag autism, and ensure that annual health checks are carried out, with the aim of improving care of autistic people.
- We will develop a peer support and carer role recognition campaign.

Making sure autistic people get the right health and social care help in their communities

What people have told us

These support systems and processes can be really hard to understand and really overwhelming

I'd like more opportunities like painting and drawing but I can't afford them – the financial impact of my autism is hidden

Getting my own place is a long-term aim - but I don't know where to get information

Our priorities for 2023 - 2024

- Reduce the number of autistic people being admitted inappropriately into inpatient mental health services through improved processes and providing more joined up health and care support earlier - including more mental health support for children and young people and through the involvement of health & social care at locality panel meetings
- Make it easier for autistic people to access local activities and support, with support based on need and not diagnosis

Our Commitments

- We will work with partners across South Yorkshire to develop an adult safe space residential service to support adults in the community and prevent inappropriate admissions.
- We will work with partners to deliver an autism drop-in service, and ensure that help/signposting/autism friendly environments are available in all local communities and GP surgeries
- We will improve the autism listings on the Sheffield Directory, Sheffield Mental Health Guide and other local websites and develop an Autism-friendly kitemark linked to the Compassionate Sheffield project.
- We will develop an accommodation plan that considers innovative housing and support options, working with new and existing housing and support providers, NHSE and Homes England.

Help for autistic people in the justice system

What people have told us

I worry about police contact if I do get into danger, as I don't think they are very good at dealing with Autistic people and may just cause further issues

We need more advertising and information sharing about Safe Places – I've heard about them but am not sure if I know all the locations

Our priorities for 2023 - 2024

- We will ask the police and justice services to produce and publish materials that are easy for autistic people to understand in relation to the Criminal Justice System
- We will ensure that there is early identification of neurodiversity in children and young people with support in place to prevent entry to the Criminal Justice System
- We will ensure that awareness training and understanding is rolled out to the police and Criminal Justice System staff

Our Commitments

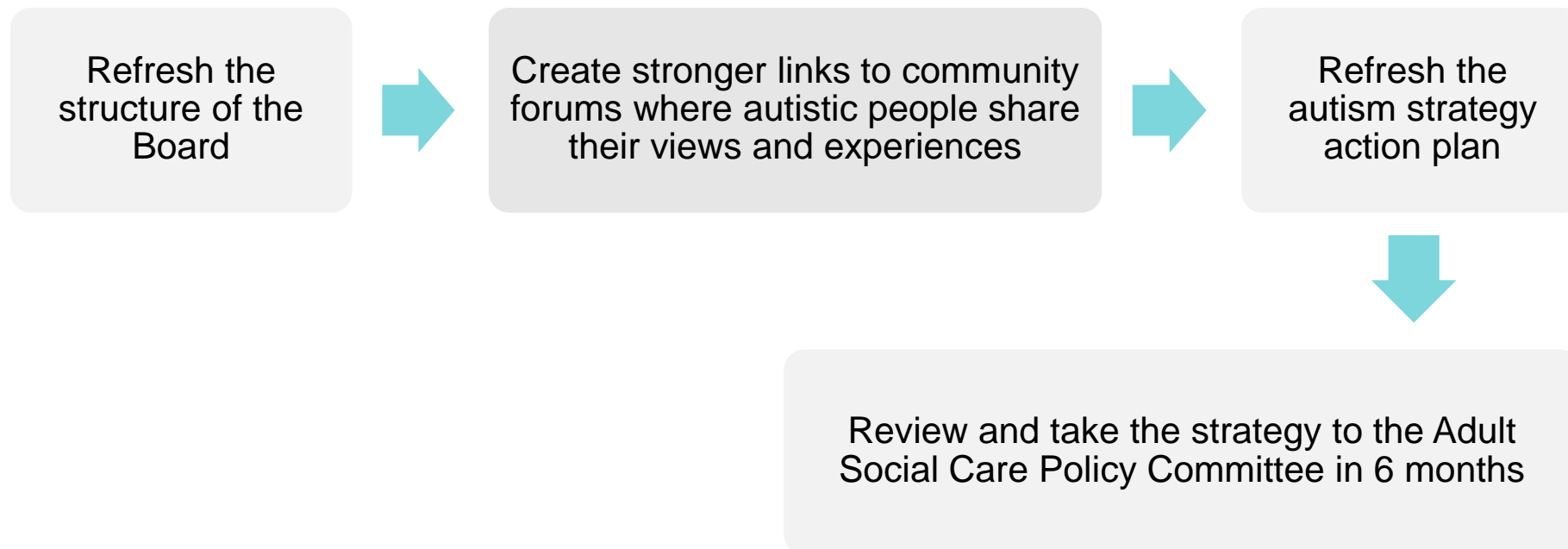
- We will ensure the Safe Places scheme is promoted to autistic people with low support needs. We will make sure the campaign is co-delivered with the police, to help build confidence and trust with autistic people.
- We will develop greater links with the police, Crown Prosecution Service, Youth Justice, Court Liaison and Diversion and Probation services, to influence their practice and raise awareness, understanding and acceptance in relation to the autistic community.

How we will monitor progress

Our vision will take time to achieve. That is why this strategy will be reviewed annually by the Autism Partnership Board.

As part of this annual review we will set key priorities in relation to each theme for the upcoming year, in consultation with local people.

In the first year of our strategy, we will also:



Other strategies we will link in with

- Inclusion Strategy for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)
- All-Age Mental and Emotional Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Learning Disability Strategy (pending)
- Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy for Children and Young People
- Compassionate Sheffield
- Improving Physical Health for People with Learning Disabilities, Autistic People, and People with Severe Mental Illness Strategy
- Sheffield's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Sheffield's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
- Sheffield's Adult Health and Social Care Strategy, Future Design and Market Position Statement
- Sheffield's Race Equality Commission
- South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw Integrated Care System Plan
- All Age Sheffield Unpaid Carers Strategy
- All Age Sheffield Direct Payments and Personalisation Strategy

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please visit:

<https://sheffieldautisticsociety.org.uk/useful-links/>

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