

Buckinghamshire All-Age Autism Strategy

2025 -2030



Working in partnership



Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire West Integrated Care System
Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust
Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust

Introduction

We are delighted to present this Buckinghamshire All-Age Autism Strategy that has been co-produced with so many autistic people and partner organisations.

This local strategy sets out how all partners will work together with local communities to understand and support autistic people in our county. We know that autistic people are diverse individuals who have unique experiences and have developed a strategy that recognises and responds to people's individual journeys, both pre and post diagnosis. The strategy aims to create an effective and inclusive framework, aligning with the principles of co-production and the use of innovation and technology to meet the diverse needs of autistic people and their carers.

This local strategy is based on understanding the needs and views of autistic people in Buckinghamshire and what we can do together to improve outcomes and experiences for our residents, underpinned by a partnership action plan delivered jointly across health and social care, with our schools, businesses, communities and alongside people with lived experience and their families/carers. This strategy will be delivered alongside the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy ([SEND and Inclusion Strategy](#)) ensuring sufficiency of high-quality education provision, continuity of support and services for autistic young people as they move into adulthood and throughout their lives.

We would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to get involved with creating this strategy. Through developing a shared set of priorities and actions across organisations we will work together to create a more inclusive county that improves the lives of autistic people.



Cllr Isobel Darby

Cabinet Member for
Health and Wellbeing



Cllr Adekunle Osibogun

Cabinet Member for
Education & Children's
Services

Our Vision

We want autistic people to get the support that they need to live full and independent lives in their communities. We want professionals, services and communities to understand how to support individuals so that autistic people can access information, services and support at the right time.



Summary

The National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People, and Adults 2021 to 2026 is a comprehensive plan by the UK government aimed at improving the lives of autistic people and their families in England. It builds on the previous 'Think Autism' strategy and extends its scope to include children and young people for the first time.

The national strategy focuses on the following aims:

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

This local strategy builds on and aligns with national and local guidance (Think Autism, [The National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People and Adults](#), and [Integrated Care System \(ICS\) Learning Disabilities and/or Autism 3 Year Plan](#)).

Our Buckinghamshire strategy priorities reflect national priorities and feedback from local engagement and consultation:



Priority 1

Tackling health and care inequalities



Priority 2

Improve awareness and understanding of autism



Priority 3

Meeting the needs of autistic children and young people



Priority 4

Developing better support for employment



Priority 5

Ensure autistic people can live independently and access activities in their community

Context

Autism is a developmental condition that affects how people process information, understand the world around them, and make sense of their place in it. Autism impacts how people communicate, relate to, and interact with others.

Historically, autism has been identified within health and social care as a medical condition linked to either a learning disability or a mental health condition. However, as research and understanding of autism gets better, it is now thought of as neurodivergence instead of a condition. Autism is often referred to as a spectrum because of the range of ways it can impact people, and the levels of support people may need at different stages of their lives. Some people will need very little or no support in their everyday lives while others may need more formal support.

Autistic individuals often struggle to communicate their emotions, particularly regarding mental health. Understanding the link between suicide and autism is crucial for recognising their challenges and improving support systems. Autism affects at least 1% of the global population, though underdiagnosis suggests this number is higher.





According to Department for Education data, in 2020 there were 1,508 children in Buckinghamshire (1.75% of Buckinghamshire children) who had autism recorded as their primary support reason in the school census.

National figures rose by 8% between 2020 and 2023/24, so we can assume approximately 1,630 of children in Buckinghamshire (1.9% of Buckinghamshire children) currently have autism recorded as their primary SEN support reason.

In Buckinghamshire, there are approximately 4,200 recognised autistic people aged 18 plus, 1,043 of these are over the age of 65.

The latest data from the Labour Force Survey shows that only around 3 in 10 working age autistic people are in employment.

The National Autistic Society launched a report in January 2025 named *A Constant Fight: The Reality of Autistic People's Struggle for Support Across Health and Social Care, Education, Employment and Mental Health*. The report highlighted various issues for autistic people including:

- Autistic people die around six years earlier than the general population, and autistic people who also have a learning disability die up to 15 years earlier.
- Almost three in four parents of autistic children (74%) think their children's school place doesn't meet their needs.
- 89% of people have been waiting for an assessment longer than the NICE recommended 13 weeks. Many wait years for a diagnosis.
- The latest data from the Labour Force Survey shows that only around 3 in 10 working age autistic people are in employment.

Autism - Legal Rights

- **Autistic people should be assumed to have capacity unless it is established that they lack capacity**
(Mental Capacity Act 2005)
- **Autistic people have a right to reasonable adjustments in the workplace and in using services**
(Equalities Act 2010)
- **Health and social care organisations must meet people's information and communication needs**
(Health and Social Care Act 2012)
- **Local authorities and schools have a legal duty to meet children and young people's special educational needs. Not all autistic children and young people will need an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), if they are not eligible for an EHCP, schools must identify their needs and provide support to meet their needs under a system called Special Educational Needs (SEN) Support.**
(Children and Families Act 2014)
- **Local authorities have a duty to assess an adult's need for care and support, and to meet their eligible needs**
(Health and Social Care Act 2012)

The Autism Act 2009 is an important part of the law, because it was the first Act in England to cover a specific group in society. It requires the government to publish a strategy for meeting the needs of autistic adults in England and keep it under review.

The government must give advice to local councils and NHS bodies to make sure the plan is followed and keep this advice up to date.

Local authorities have a duty to implement the plan, which repeats the laws and duties, but also shows how the government wants local bodies to support people and their families.



What Support is Currently Available?

Autistic young people

Within Buckinghamshire Council, the following support is available to autistic young people and their families:

- **Family information service**: Autism toolbox for parents and carers.
- **Parents Portal**: A free digital platform for parents/carers of children aged 2 to 17 who are exploring neurodivergence, or have an autistic child, or who are awaiting diagnosis.
- **The SEND Local Offer Directory**: A searchable directory of local organisations, services and activities that support children and young people with SEND.

Within Oxfordhealth NHS Foundation Trust, the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services(CAMHS) provide online information and support, as well as a diagnostic service. The Learning Disabilities and Autism @ Home Service works with young people with a learning disability and/or autism (with functional impairment) to provide an alternative to inpatient admission, via an intensive model that links into existing community services.

Autistic adults

Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust has a Learning Disability Liaison Team who support adult patients with learning disabilities and autism, and their carers, to access high quality care and have a positive experience in hospital. Learning Disability Nurses provide support with emergency admissions, outpatient appointments and inpatient stays. They also help when someone leaves hospital, and support families and carers throughout the patient journey.

Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust, offers a diagnostic and intervention service alongside an online information offer. The Trust also offers a reasonable adjustment service, providing advice and education to other professionals on what reasonable adjustments are, and how they can adapt the care they provide. As part of this offer, a Neuro-Inclusion Passport is available: [Reasonable Adjustment Service \(Oxfordshire\)](#).

Adult social care provides support to autistic adults where there is a need for care and support, and works closely with health partners to ensure that each person's needs are fully understood with tailored support where possible.

Autism Bucks provides resources, advice, and social activities for autistic adults and their carers. It offers face-to-face and online meetings, guest speakers, and community events.

Talkback offers support programs designed for all stages of life, from young adults to seniors. Their services include social activities, employment support, and personal development programs.

Strategy Development

The strategy has been developed based on the experiences and needs of individuals with lived experience of autism. It has also been shaped by the valuable input of professionals, providers, partners, and our residents.

We recognise that people prefer different ways of saying that they have autism. For example, an autistic person, person with autism, neurodiverse and neurodivergent. We asked how people with autism would like to be referred to when discussing their autism and 75% of people who responded preferred identity-first language over the other options. For the purposes of this document, we will refer to people with a diagnosis of autism as 'autistic people.'

To make sure we captured the voices of autistic people, we undertook several co-production activities:

In early 2025, engagement meetings with more than 20 specialisms from across Buckinghamshire Council, Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust (BHT), Voluntary Sector organisations, Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), GPs, Hertfordshire Partnership Foundation Trust (HPFT), Schools and Talkback.

In 2022, Buckinghamshire Council commissioned a report from Talkback, engaging with local organisations, parents/carers, and autistic people in the county to gather their views. In total, 484 people contributed to the report via a quantitative survey which received 356 responses, and 7 workshops and 24 interviews.

We ran a wide range of smaller, specific workshops across adults' children's, health, mental health, education, disabilities and providing services.

In December 2022 and January 2023, the Your Views Survey was shared to gather the views of autistic children and young people (CYP) across Buckinghamshire.

As part of a public consultation, we held numerous face-to-face engagement sessions, telephone calls and workshops.

In total, 350 individuals provided feedback on the draft strategy.



Strategic Priorities



Priority 1:

Tackling health and care inequalities



Priority 2:

Improve awareness and understanding of autism



Priority 3:

Meeting the needs of autistic children and young people



Priority 4:

Developing better support for employment



Priority 5:

Ensure autistic people can live independently and access activities in their community

How Will We Achieve Our Priorities



Priority 1: Tackling health and care inequalities

What you told us:

- Autistic people face significant health inequalities, having poorer physical health outcomes and a lower life expectancy than the general population.
- Wait times for both children's and adult diagnostic services are long, leading to some people seeking a private assessment.
- Receiving a timely autism diagnosis is vital in getting the right support and helping autistic people and those supporting them to better understand their needs.

We will

- Improve recording and data systems across health and social care on autism so that organizations have the right information to plan and design and deliver accessible services.
- Develop and embed tools to improve access to health services for autistic people.
- Improve people's engagement with social care when in receipt of a social care service.



Priority 2: Improve awareness and understanding of autism

What you told us

- Individuals have had positive experiences, however there is a general feeling that awareness and understanding in health and social care services, schools and in the wider community on how to support autistic people needs to be improved.
- Specialist training for staff to increase awareness and develop knowledge and skills when supporting autistic people would improve people's experiences and feelings of acceptance.
- Poor awareness and understanding has a direct impact on accessibility, early identification, and effective diagnosis, the take up and experience of services, which can lead to inequalities in access to health and social care inequalities and school exclusion.

We will

- Ensure staff have access to appropriate training to increase awareness and understanding of autism, including on how autism can affect people differently.
- Develop a single access point for online signposting to Information, Advice and Guidance for autistic people.



Priority 3: Meeting the needs of autistic children and young people

What you told us

- Increased information and support is needed for pre and post diagnosis.
- Support should not just be based on a diagnosis or being in receipt of an Education Health and Care Plan).
- The transitional pathways from children to adults' services (health, education, and social care for 16–25-year-olds) should be clear and process's accessible to support autistic people and their carers to prepare for adulthood.
- Earlier support could be provided in educational settings.

We will

- Support autistic young people and their families by providing information and guidance for their journey to adulthood.
- Ensure that services work together, in partnership with family carers and the young autistic person; providing early and additional support when needed.
- Provide guidance for schools and early years settings with a focus on creating autism friendly sensory environments.



Priority 4: Developing better support for employment

What you told us

- Autistic people should have the same opportunities to access employment to increase their independence and support opportunities for social interactions.
- Autistic people need increased support to find work or training opportunities.
- Unemployment can result in lowered self-esteem and poorer mental health.

We will

- Encourage employers across Buckinghamshire to recruit and support autistic staff with the support of reasonable adjustments.
- Share best practice with providers to promote neurodiverse accessible services.
- Support autistic people to feel equipped to make decisions about their work, training, and volunteering opportunities.
- Raise awareness of autism across partners, businesses, employers, and the wider community to support inclusion.



Priority 5: Ensure autistic people can live independently and access activities in their community

What you told us

- Autistic people's needs can vary throughout a person's life and therefore support received should seek to help them with their mental health, wellbeing, and confidence.
- There is a gap in the provision of practical social support for autistic adults.
- Autistic people can find it harder to gain and maintain their own housing offers, including holding independent tenancies and managing landlord relationships.

We will

- Ensure that autistic people are made aware of the local support and accessible services available to them.
- Work in partnership with others to promote opportunities for autistic people to access community facilities, shops, and leisure services.
- Ensure the need for housing for autistic people is understood and the model of housing delivered meets the identified need in terms of design, service delivery and geography.
- Improve the opportunities for autistic people to live independently, in homes that meet their needs and wants, with the relevant support.



Delivering our priorities

In Buckinghamshire, we want the All-Age Autism Strategy to drive improvements in support and services for autistic people. To deliver the Buckinghamshire All-Age Autism Strategy 2025-2030, we have developed a partnership action plan with clear measures for each priority area identified. This action plan demonstrates the partnership commitment to autistic people and is published alongside this strategy.

This strategy and action plan are endorsed by the following organisations:

- Buckinghamshire Council
- Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire West Integrated Care System
- Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust
- Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust

The Autism Action Plan has been developed in alignment with the ongoing work within the SEND Strategy, Health and Wellbeing Strategy and other plans. A partnership approach will be adopted to implement the actions of this strategy ensuring continuity and collaborative efforts to maximize the effectiveness of each initiative.

To reflect all age arrangements and partnership approach towards delivering the strategy, all actions and the associated progress will be formally reported annually to the Buckinghamshire Learning Disability and Mental Health Partnership Board on progress, with an updated action plan produced at least annually. Respective owners of the actions will bring updates to the SEND Partnership Board (Children's), and other organisational boards as required on a more frequent basis.



For more Information visit:

Buckinghamshire Council 'Supporting people with Autism'

Provides information, advice and guidance, and details of services supporting people with autism.

Buckinghamshire Family Information Service

Provides information, advice and guidance for young people and families with autism in Buckinghamshire.

Autism Bucks

Supporting autistic individuals and their families through various programs and resources. Visit their website for more details.

