



Learning Disability and Autism Strategy – background information

This document gives a summary of research and the challenges people with a learning disability and autistic people face. The learning disability strategy and action plan aim to address these.



Feeling safe and accepted – background information

Public awareness of autism and of learning disabilities still has a way to go. A lack of understanding can make life harder. It can have an impact on people's health, wellbeing, friendships and work. It can also make it harder to get help when needed. Autistic people and people with a learning disability can experience bullying or harassment and can feel unsafe when out and about. Research and evidence tell us:

- 40 in every 100 local residents say crime is their top concern (2021 Barking and Dagenham residents survey)
- 87 in every 100 autistic people say they sometimes or often experienced bullying (2021 government survey)
- 35 in every 100 adults with a learning disability say their top worry was people calling them names or bullying them (Mencap survey, 2019)
- Autistic adults in Barking and Dagenham told us that people can feel unsafe travelling by bus due to bullying and harassment.
- 6 in every 100 autistic adults believe police officers have a good understanding of autism (national survey)

This topic links in with other local plans, including the Community Safety Partnership Plan and the Safeguarding Adults Board Strategic Plan.





Good health – background information

People with a learning disability and autism die, on average, at a younger age than everyone else. They are more likely to have mental health issues and certain physical health problems, such as epilepsy. People do not always get help at an early stage. It can be harder to get healthcare if the information is not easy to understand, if people meet a different person at each appointment, or if no reasonable adjustments are made. People have a wait a long time for an autism diagnosis. Research and evidence tells us that:

- The 2022 Learning Disabilities Mortality Review found the median age at death was 63 for adults with a learning disability across the UK. The 2023 review found 42% of deaths were avoidable.
- Common associated health conditions for people with a learning disability include mental health problems, epilepsy and being underweight or overweight. The rate of dementia is also high.
- Common associated health conditions for autistic people include Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), mental health issues, learning disabilities, epilepsy, insomnia and gastrointestinal problems.
- An average of 470 people were in contact with learning disability and autism health services each month in 2022-23 (North East London Mental Health, Learning Disability and Autism Provider Collaborative report, 2024)
- There are waiting lists for adult autism diagnoses locally and nationally. 127 people were waiting for an assessment by the Adult Autism Service run by the North East London NHS Foundation Trust as of September 2023.
- Health services estimate a 12% growth in referrals and waiting lists over the next 5 years for mental health, learning disability and autism services (North East London Mental Health, Learning Disability and Autism Provider Collaborative report, 2024)
- 71 adults in every 100 with a learning disability got a health check in 2023-24

This topic links in with other local plans, including the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Residents and Communities Strategy and the work of the Adults Delivery Group.



The right support – background information

Young people with a learning disability or autism may need support to get ready for adulthood, and some adults will need going support from social care. Planning for adulthood does not always start at an early stage. It can be harder to interact with social care if communication is not clear, if meetings are not face-to-face, or if the staff who are supporting people often change. Research and evidence tells us that in Barking and Dagenham:

- The number of children with an Education, Care and Health Plan (EHCP) for autism has tripled from 201 in 2015-16 to 670 in 2022-23.
- 469 children and young people had an Education, Care and Health Plan in 2022-23 with autism as their primary need. In 2022-23, 68 of the 2043 children in contact with children's social care had autism recorded as a disability.
- 17 adults in every 100 getting support from social care had a learning disability in 2022-23. This equates to 518 people. This went up to 571 people in 2023-24.
- 5 adults in every 100 getting support from social care were listed as autistic in 2022-23.
- 78 in every 100 adults with a learning disability who get support from social care said "I am very happy with the way staff help me, it's really good". The England average is 75 (2023-24 Service User Survey).

This topic links with other local plans, including the Adult Social Care Improvement Plan, the Carer Charter and Action Plan and the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Improvement Plan.



A good home – background information

There are different types of housing in the borough, including supported housing and care homes for people who need this. However, sometimes the housing that people with a learning disability need or would choose is not available. This can cause difficulties for people or mean that people move further away. Any problems with housing can be harder to solve if planning does not start early, or if no reasonable adjustments are made. Research and evidence tell us that:

- Research indicates that a lack of suitable housing can sometimes be a barrier to people with a learning disability and autistic living where they would choose.
- In England and Wales people with a learning disability who live with their family and friends report that they want greater independence, with around 70 per cent reporting that they want to change their housing arrangements to achieve this (Mencap, 2012).
- There are 12 care homes available for adults with a learning disability or autism in the borough, along with a range of supported housing and extra-care supported housing options. 42 adults with a learning disability lived in a care home outside Barking and Dagenham in 2022-23.
- 89% of adults with a learning disability who get support from adult social care lived independently or with family or friends in 2022-23. The England average was 80%.
- In north east London, there has been an 11% reduction in the number of people with a learning disability (including those with autism) in inpatient facilities between January 2022 and November 2023, compared with 16% across England. The figures for people with an autism-only diagnosis is 33% and 30% respectively.

This topic links with other local plans, including the Adult Social Care Improvement Plan and local housing plans.



More job opportunities – background information

The proportion of people with a learning disability and autistic disabled people who have a job is low. It can be hard to find a job that matches people's skills and interests, hard to apply for a job, and hard to stay in work. A lack of understanding, awareness and reasonable adjustments from employers can make it harder still. Research and evidence tells us that:

- 30.6% of disabled people with autism as a main or secondary health condition were in employment in 2022-23 across England, compared with 53.9% for all disabled people and 81.9% of non-disabled people (Office for National Statistics).
- 3 in every 10 working-age autistic disabled people have jobs compared with 8 in 10 for non-disabled people across England (Buckland Review)
- Autistic people face the largest pay gap of all disability groups, receiving a third less than non-disabled people on average. Autistic graduates are twice as likely to be unemployed after 15 months as non-disabled graduates, with 36% finding full time work in this period. Autistic graduates are most likely to be overqualified for the job they have, most likely to be on zero-hours contracts, and least likely to be in a permanent role (Buckland Review)
- 13 adults with a learning disability who receive support from adult social care in Barking and Dagenham were in employment as of September 2024, representing 2.5% of all adults with a learning disability receiving support. A further 4 people are in employment and were previously known to adult social care. The average for London is 5%.

This topic links with other local plans, including plans held by the Supported Employment service in the council and the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Improvement Plan.



Having friends, relationships and feeling connected to others – background information

Feeling connected to others is important. This includes spending time with people who have similar experiences, feeling safe and accepted to take part in activities that are open to everyone, and sex and relationships. Feeling lonely or socially isolated can have an impact on people's health and wellbeing. Research and evidence says:

- Children and teenagers with a learning disability take part in fewer activities, less frequently than others (Mencap)
- Rates of loneliness are substantially higher among autistic compared with nonautistic individuals (Swansea University and Brighton and Sussex Medical School, 2023)
- Many people with a learning disability have the same aspirations for loving relationships as others (Lane et al., 2019). The companionship that a partner provides is important to people with a learning disability (Bates et al., 2017a; 2017c; Retzik et al, 2021).
- There can be barriers to people with a learning disability having the relationships they want. Many people with a learning disability are not given appropriate support needed to engage in loving and sexual relationships with others (NIHR, 2020).

This topic links with other local plans, including plans to tackle social isolation, loneliness and build community connections.