

Living my best life with autism

Stoke-on-Trent strategy for autistic children, young people and adults

Easy read



Who we are



We are **Stoke-on-Trent City Council** and **Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care Board (ICB)**.



We have been talking to autistic people in Stoke-on-Trent about their lives.



Together, we have been thinking about ways to make life better.



This document is about our **strategy** (plan) for making sure autistic people in our city have safe, healthy and happy lives.

What is autism?



Autism is the short name for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). When people have autism, we say they are **autistic**.



Not all autistic people are the same or have the same needs. Some autistic people may find some things difficult – like communicating or being with other people.



A doctor can look at a person's health and behaviour and decide if they have autism. This is called a **diagnosis**.



Autistic children and young people may also have **special educational needs and disabilities** (SEND). They may need more support with learning.



We also talk about **neurodiversity**. This is when a person's brain learns in a different way from what others may think is usual.

What autistic people in Stoke-on-Trent have told us



About 2,500 autistic people live in Stoke-on-Trent. More than 2,000 are male and about 250 are female.

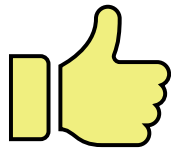


But not everyone who is autistic has a diagnosis. This means there may be even more autistic people than we know about.

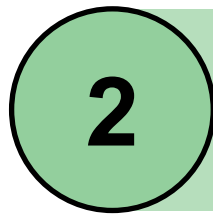


We talked to autistic people and their families about what a good life would look like.

Autistic people and their families chose these **5 outcomes**:



I feel safe in my community and people value me.



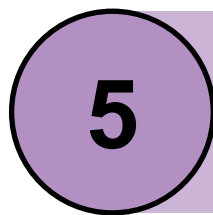
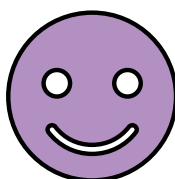
I am healthy.



I achieve my goals.



I love my home – I have chosen my home and the people I live with.



I enjoy my life and I feel included.

Our vision

If you are an autistic person in Stoke-on-Trent, we want you to be able to:



- Live a safe, healthy, happy life in your community.



- Get help easily when you need it.



- Get the help that is right for you.



Our strategy is about making these things happen.

Our strategy in Stoke-on-Trent



Our strategy is for any autistic child, young person or adult in Stoke-on-Trent.



When we were writing our strategy, we asked local autistic people, their families and carers for their views.



Our strategy uses the same **6 main ideas** as the national strategy for autistic children, young people and adults.



We have added 1 more idea, which is about supporting parents and carers.

We talk more about each idea on pages 9 to 20.

1

Better understanding and acceptance of autism



Autistic adults want the same chances as other adults to enjoy life and have jobs and relationships.



Autistic children want the same chances as other children to have friends and be safe from bullies.

These things will be easier if:



- People and services have a better understanding of autism.



- People have a diagnosis of autism. This is often needed before a person can get help and support.

We want to make changes like:



- Making public transport and places like community groups and sports centres more **autism-friendly** – for example, less noisy or bright.



- Making sure staff in these services, shops and schools have training on autism. Autistic people should help plan and give the training.



- Giving people more support to deal with official documents and bills, which can be stressful.

2

Better access to education and support for young people as they become adults



Autistic children and young people said it is important that they feel included and that they do well in school.

These things will be easier if:



- Schools have a better understanding of autism and neurodiversity.



- Teachers understand that some behaviour is linked to autism, and is not just 'bad' behaviour.

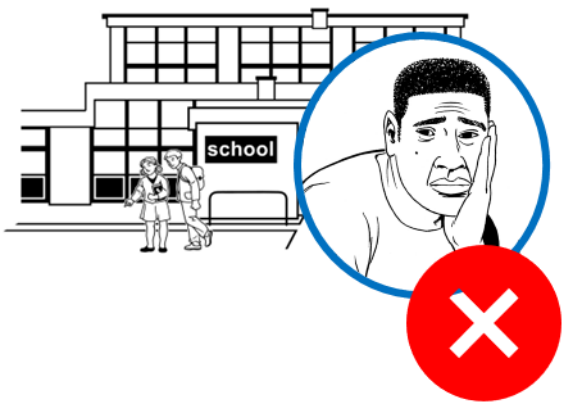


- **Education, Health and Care Plans** meet their real needs. These plans are for children and young people who need extra support, above what is usually available.

We want to make changes like:



- Doing more planning and checks to help children move through the different stages of school.



- Helping autistic children go to school and not be **excluded**. This is when a school says they are not allowed to go.



- Not using so many **residential education placements**. This is where children live away from their homes, families and friends.



- Giving young people lots of support to work, like having a coach who helps them learn the job and get used to the workplace. A team from the council will do this.

3

Supporting more autistic people into work



Autistic people may find it hard to get a job, even when they have the right skills and **qualifications** (like A-Levels or a university degree).

We want to make changes like:



- Making the NHS an autism-friendly place to work. For example, offering more **supported internships**. These are unpaid jobs where you learn skills to help you get a paid job.



- Working with other employers to give autistic people more work experience. This could be through placements or volunteering.

4

Tackling health and care inequalities



Health inequalities are when some people have worse health and get less good care than other people.



Autistic people may have health inequalities if medical and care staff do not understand their needs.



Autistic people in Stoke-on-Trent told us that medical staff do not always listen to them. This would be easier if they had better mental health support.

We want to make changes like:



- Making sure people get the right health checks at the right time.



- Training NHS staff better to understand autism.



- Doing more **assessments** (checks) to diagnose autism, and doing these assessments earlier.



- Giving more support after diagnosis.



- Not using medication that is not needed. For example, a sleep clinic might be better for children than taking sleeping pills.

5

Building the right support in the community and inpatient care



Autistic people want to live as independently as they can.



Autistic people want good information and choice about care and support, if they need it.

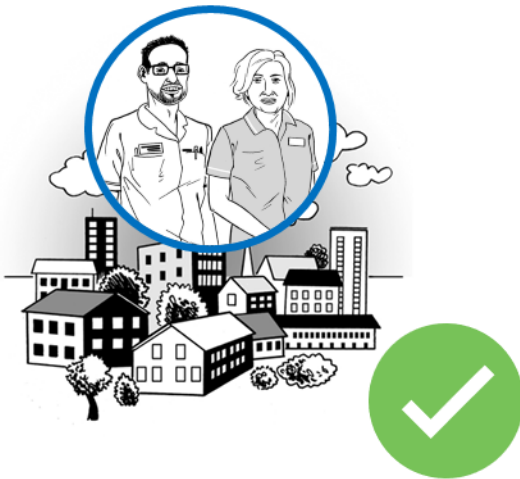


Autistic people want to feel safe and included. We will see if changes are needed to make community activities more autism-friendly.

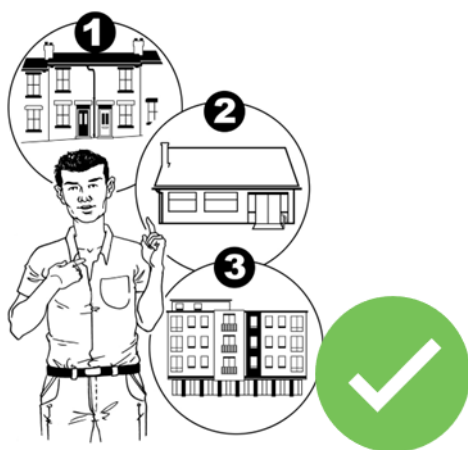
We want to make changes like:



- Not using so many residential education placements. This is where children live away from their homes, families and friends.



- Giving mental health support in the community whenever possible. This can help people avoid staying in hospital.



- Giving autistic people more choices about where to live.

6

Better support in the criminal justice system



The **criminal justice system** means the police and law courts.



If autistic people are scared or upset, they may behave in a way that scares other people. This can mean they get into trouble with the police.



Autistic people may also be **victims**. Other people may bully or attack them because of their autism.



We know that police officers and other staff in the criminal justice system do not always understand autism well enough.

Staffordshire Police want to make changes like:



- Giving police officers more training so that they can support autistic people better.



- Helping autistic people feel more confident about reporting crimes against them.

7

Supporting parents and carers



Parents and carers are very important to an autistic person's health and happiness.



We want to make it easier for parents and carers to get support when they need it.



Autistic people who are parents worry about not being seen as good parents. They worry that their children might be taken away.



We want to give more support to autistic parents.

Next steps



We will set up a new **autism partnership board**, which will include autistic people.

The board will make sure our most important aims happen:



- We get better and quicker at assessing and diagnosing autism, so that people can get help and support.



- People's real needs are recognised.



- Autistic people can live in the community, and do not have long stays away from home.



- Autistic people have the same chances as other people to join in social activities, and to have jobs and relationships.



- Services are more autism-friendly, and staff are trained to better understand autism.

Contact us



If you want to tell us something about the strategy, or you would like to get involved, please email **commissioningandpartnerships.sp@stoke.gov.uk**

Produced by NHS Arden and Greater East Midlands Commissioning Support Unit and NHS Midlands and Lancashire Commissioning Support Unit.

www.ardengemcsu.nhs.uk

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