

All Age Autism Strategy 2025-2028.



August 2025
Version 1

Introduction

The journey of improvement for autistic people started with the Autism Act 2009.

In the last 15 years we have made progress in developing a greater understanding of autism and the needs of autistic people. We've also developed a much deeper appreciation of the significant barriers autistic people face and the additional services and support they need, to help them live full and rewarding lives in the community.

This All-Age Autism Strategy (2025-2028) offers an overview of the actions that we now need to take to meet the needs of people with autism. The Strategy is underpinned by the *National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People and Adults: 2021 to 2026*, and captures the views of various groups; autistic people, carers, the SEND Strategy Board, and multidisciplinary professionals, from across MK to highlight our joint ambition.

We want Milton Keynes to be a city that offers opportunities for autistic people so they can live healthy and fulfilling lives. A place that supports, protects and values people so no-one feels left-out or disadvantaged. Working alongside autistic people, their families, carers and our partners, is helping us achieve this goal.

What is Autism?

Definition

The National Autistic Society describes autism as a developmental disability that affects how people communicate and interact with the world.

Autism is a spectrum condition that affects people in different ways, which may include any of:

- Challenges with social communication or social interaction;
- Repetitive or restrictive behaviour;
- Sensory differences – over- or under-sensitivity to light, sound, taste or touch;
- Highly focused interests or hobbies;
- Autistic people can also experience extreme anxiety, or ‘meltdowns’ and ‘shutdowns’.

Legislation

Under the Care Act 2014 Sections 42 to 47, Milton Keynes City Council has a responsibility to protect people who are at risk from abuse or neglect.

The Children and Families Act 2014 sets out the duty of local authorities to identify the needs of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in their area and commission services to support these children.

The SEND Code of Practice 2015 explains the duties of local authorities, health bodies, schools and colleges to provide for those with special educational needs aged 0-25 under this Act.

National and Local Picture

National data

Although national statistics vary, it's believed that 1 in 100 people are on the autism spectrum and there are around 700,000 autistic adults and children in the UK. In addition, there are an estimated 3 million family members and carers of autistic people in the UK (National Autistic Society). It's estimated that 79% of autistic people also have some mental health needs.

Local data

Department for Education data identified 1,589 pupils with autism as their primary need in the 2023/24 academic year. 52% of these children and young people had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and 48% received some other form of support. Nearly three-quarters of these children attend mainstream schools.

National prevalence data suggests there were 1,630 autistic adults in Milton Keynes in 2025 and forecasts an increase to 1,647 by 2040. However, data provided by Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board (ICB) in March 2025 indicates that there are 3,562 autistic children and 2,552 autistic adults registered with GP surgeries in Milton Keynes – far higher than population estimates would suggest.

Putting People First

Need and diagnosis

Milton Keynes City Council delivers education, social care, and housing services to autistic people based on assessed needs, regardless of formal diagnosis. While diagnosis is not a prerequisite for support, many individuals find it crucial for self-understanding and accessing appropriate help. Late or incorrect diagnoses, particularly among adults, have often resulted in missed opportunities for support and improved quality of life. Planning and delivering services must therefore consider individual circumstances.

Identity-first language

Language plays a vital role in shaping perceptions. The Council respects personal preferences in terminology and adopts identity-first language (“autistic person”) in its materials, reflecting the view that autism is integral to identity. This approach aligns with the majority preference among autistic individuals and the National Autistic Society.

Coproduction

The strategy was co-produced through extensive engagement, including a 2024 event hosted by Talkback with 70 participants - autistic residents, parents, carers, and stakeholders - followed by interviews and further workshops in 2025. These consultations identified nine key themes and four cross-cutting priorities, emphasising understanding and acceptance across all areas. Autistic young people in particular highlighted the importance of being asked how they wish to be described and stressed that acknowledgment fosters belonging and equal opportunities. Their feedback reinforced priorities around timely support, clear pathways, and professional awareness.

Key Priorities and Themes

Autistic people, their parents and carers have told us that their priorities are:

Priority One:

More (and faster) access to support at all stages of life

Priority Two:

More information on support, services and social groups available

Priority Three:

Clearer pathways through diagnosis and education to employment and other adult support

Priority Four:

More training for all, but particularly professionals and employers

The nine key themes identified by autistic people are set out below. Each of the priority areas includes one or more of these themes:

- ❖ Understanding and acceptance
- ❖ Diagnosis
- ❖ Health
- ❖ Social care
- ❖ Education
- ❖ Training and work
- ❖ Housing
- ❖ Community access
- ❖ Criminal justice

Priority One | More (and faster) access to support at all stages of life

Why is this important?

Autistic people have told us that there are long waiting times for a diagnosis, which means support is often delayed. This can impact the whole family. Accessing wider support services can also be difficult for autistic people due to lack of understanding of their needs, application and referral processes that are not supportive of neurodivergence, service capacity, and time-limited interventions that leave people without ongoing support when they need it. It can be challenging to contact professionals, meaning some people's needs escalate before they can receive support.

Outcomes

- ✓ Autistic people, their families and carers will be able to access the right support at the right time
- ✓ Support will be tailored to people's needs and reflect their lived experience of autism
- ✓ Services can confidently support autistic people through life transitions, e.g. to adulthood, changes in housing, ageing with autism, and loss of parents/carers

What are we currently doing well and will continue?

- Refreshed our SEND and Preparing for Adulthood strategies to support children and young adults with SEND.
- Promoted early intervention without requiring diagnosis.
- Commissioned mental health inclusion support for peer groups and wellbeing hubs.
- Grant-funded Talkback to develop adult support pathways and participation opportunities.
- Provided Occupational Therapy and home adaptations for independent living.
- Embedded a Community Engagement Officer in Adult Social Care to raise awareness and connect to community support.

What else will we put in place?

- Improving capacity, consistency, preventative support and adaptations for MKCC services.
- Work with our commissioned services to meet autistic people's needs better.
- Explore how we can strengthen community support.

Priority Two | More information about support, services and social groups available

Why is this important?

Autistic people told us that there is a lack of clear information about pathways, support and services, both for themselves and their families and carers. The information available online can be overwhelming, and many people face digital exclusion – there is a lack of hard-copy information to fill this gap. Entitlements, application processes and complaints procedures are often unclear, meaning some people are not aware of how to get support even after an assessment or diagnosis. This means information comes from a range of sources (education settings, GPs, social care or informal networks), and not all professionals are aware of services and access routes.

Outcomes

- ✓ Autistic people, their families and carers will be able to access information about support, services and social groups easily from a centralised platform
- ✓ The Council's website will give clear information and signposting about autism
- ✓ People will not be excluded from accessing support because of digital poverty or digital literacy

What are we currently doing well and will continue?

- Set up an Autism area in our Local Offer website for support for children and young people aged 0-25 with SEND needs.
- Host an Adult Social Care Directory on the Council's website.
- Support Talkback groups and piloted our 'Hearts Without Limits' social group.

What else will we put in place?

- Review our webpages with autistic people to ensure the information we publish is clear, consistent and helpful, and support with digital literacy.
- Ensure information is accessible in a range of formats and share this with other organisations.
- Explore making our application processes and forms more neurodiversity-friendly.

Priority Three | Clearer pathways through diagnosis and education to employment and other adult support

Why is this important?

Autistic people have told us that there is not enough support for them to enter or return to education, when searching for and applying for jobs and accessing appropriate housing. This impacts on people's ability to be economically active and live fulfilling lives.

People spoke positively about youth programmes up to age 25 and supported volunteering/employment, and some had found long-term homes and a sense of belonging in Supported Living. However, others found difficulties accessing housing that met their needs, or developing the skills to sustain tenancies. If they were not already involved with social care services before turning 18, they often did not have a clear pathway to independent adulthood before leaving school.

Outcomes

- ✓ Autistic people receive the right support during education to help them prepare for the workplace
- ✓ Support is in place to help autistic people secure jobs and do well in employment
- ✓ A range of housing options help people lead independent, fulfilling adult lives in their family home, supported accommodation or other housing types

What are we currently doing well and will continue?

- Delivered Preparation for Adulthood training for young people in transition to link outcomes to their aspirations for the future.
- The Employment Support Service helps adults with SEND and learning difficulties to gain successful employment.
- Recommissioned our Supported Living service, including autism-specific services, to meet people's housing and independence support needs better.

What else will we put in place?

- Improve joined up working between education, health and social care for post-16 pathways.
- Strengthen life skills training and tenancy support in our services for young people and autistic young adults.
- Continue to improve the availability and range of housing options, especially for younger adults, and help them plan for independent living.

Priority Four | More training for all, but particularly professionals and employers

Why is this important?

Autistic people have told us that professionals, educators and employers don't always have the skills and ability to recognise the needs of autistic individuals, and a lack of understanding impacts on how autistic people are treated and the support they receive.

People had had positive experiences of staff who understand autism and adapted accordingly but also spoke about workers making assumptions about their needs, not being aware of how autism intersects with other needs, and of service providers being inflexible or missing appointments and not communicating.

Outcomes

- ✓ The needs of autistic people are understood by those working with them
- ✓ MKCC, our partners and commissioned providers lead the way for other organisations in staff training and development

What are we currently doing well and will continue?

- Piloted Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) in 40 primary schools.
- Rolled out Oliver McGowan training for all Adult Social Care and Housing staff. MKCC Managers are also given guidance on supporting neurodiverse colleagues.
- Regularly monitor workforce and training data in our commissioned services.

What else will we put in place?

- Continue to review our own skills and practice in supporting autistic people.
- Explore Oliver McGowan training for service providers working with autistic people, and autism-specific training for our contractors and maintenance teams.
- Promote opportunities colleagues' understanding and knowledge of the local support offer.

Governance

Due to the importance of this strategy, it is our intention that all parties sign up, which includes: Social Care, BLMK ICB, CNWL, Public Health, Wellbeing Board and autistic people. The completion of the strategy and sign-up process will be by the end of 2025.

Monitoring of delivery will take place via the ALT Assurance Board, SEND Partnership Board and the Stronger Together Board.

The Strategy will be reviewed annually to ensure that all commitments remain relevant to meeting the needs of autistic people in Milton Keynes.

Supporting documents

[Milton Keynes SEND Strategy 2022-28](#)

[Milton Keynes Preparing for Adulthood Strategy 2024-29](#)

[BLMK Learning Disabilities and Autism Strategy 2023-26](#)

[MKCC Carers Strategy 2025-26](#)

[MKCC Supported Housing Strategy 2023-26](#)

[Milton Keynes Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2025-27](#)

Thank you for reading this document.

If you have any comments or feedback, please contact the MKCC Commissioning Team at:

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