

Our Lives, Our Plan - A Strategy for Adults with a Learning Disability in Redcar and Cleveland

2025-2029 (Updated July 2026)

'This is about making things go in the right direction for people with a learning disability.' (Mary, Independent Voices)



Redcar and
Cleveland Council



Independent
Voices



Skills for People



Inclusion North

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This strategy sets out:

- Our shared vision.
- The main priorities for improving services, based on what matters most to adults with learning disabilities in the Redcar and Cleveland.
- The key actions needed over the next five years to provide high-quality services, working in partnership to support adults to achieve what matters most in their lives.

This strategy sits alongside:

- [Redcar and Cleveland Corporate Plan 2024-2027](#)
- [Adult Social Care Strategy 2024-2027](#)
- [Adult Social Care Prevention Strategy 2024-2027](#)
- [Adult Social Care Engagement Strategy 2023-2029](#)
- [Adult Social Care Commissioning Strategy 2024-2029](#)
- [Adult Social Care Safeguarding Adults Strategy 2026-2028](#)
- [South Tees Public Health Strategy 2023-2026](#)
- [Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024-2030](#)
- [Housing Strategy 2024-2027](#)
- [Volunteer Strategy 2024-2027](#)
- [Children and Families Strategy 2024-2027](#)
- [Joint Strategic Needs Assessments](#)
- Redcar and Cleveland Adult Social Care Co-production Framework
- South Tees Carers Strategy 2021-2026
- Redcar and Cleveland Supported Housing Strategy (In development)
- South Tees All Age Autism Strategy (In development)

If you know someone who needs this information in a different format, for example Easy Read, large print, braille or a different language please contact [**ascengagement@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk**](mailto:ascengagement@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk).

Foreword

We are proud to present Our Lives, Our Plan, Redcar and Cleveland's Learning Disability Strategy for 2025-2029.

This strategy has been developed in partnership with people with a learning disability, family members, carers, providers, community organisations, partners and, most importantly, Independent Voices, our local self-advocacy group. It reflects what people have told us matters most in their lives and sets out our shared commitment to making a positive difference over the next five years.

People with a learning disability have told us that they want the same things as everyone else. They want to be safe, healthy, listened to and respected. They want opportunities to make choices, have meaningful relationships, contribute to their communities, learn new skills, find work, and live independent and fulfilling lives. Throughout this strategy, their voices have guided our priorities and ambitions.

We know that while there have been many positive developments in recent years, people with a learning disability continue to face inequalities and barriers. Too many people experience poorer health outcomes, social isolation, limited employment opportunities, challenges accessing suitable housing and difficulties having their voices heard. This strategy recognises those challenges and sets out how we will work together to address them.

The title of this strategy, Our Lives, Our Plan, reflects our commitment to genuine co-production. It is not a plan created for people with a learning disability; it is a plan developed with people, based on their experiences, aspirations and expertise. We are particularly grateful to Independent Voices, whose members have shared their ideas, experiences and ambitions so openly throughout the development of this strategy. Their contribution has been invaluable and demonstrates the importance of ensuring people with lived experience are involved in decisions that affect their lives.

Over the next five years, we will focus on the priorities that people told us matter most: being safe, having good health, receiving good support, maintaining family and friendships, and having opportunities for work and purpose. These priorities are about more than services. They are about helping people to live good lives, have choice and control, be part of their communities and achieve the things that are important to them.

We look forward to working alongside people with a learning disability to turn this strategy into action and to ensure that Redcar and Cleveland is a place where people are valued, included, respected and supported to live the lives they choose.



Patrick Rice

Executive Director for
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Lisa Robson

Cabinet Member for
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Mary

Independent Voices
Member

Introduction

Our Lives, Our Plan sets out how we will work together to improve outcomes for adults with a learning disability in Redcar and Cleveland between 2025 and 2029. It provides a clear framework for planning, commissioning and delivering services, support and opportunities that help people lead safe, healthy, independent and fulfilling lives.

The strategy identifies the key areas where we will focus our efforts over the next five years and describes what success will look like for people with a learning disability. It will guide the work of the Council, providers, community organisations and other partners as we work together to improve experiences and outcomes.

This strategy aims to support adults aged 18 and over with a learning disability who live in Redcar and Cleveland, as well as people who live outside of the area but receive care and support from Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council.

This strategy is built around the priorities that people with a learning disability identified as having the greatest impact on their wellbeing, independence and quality of life.

The strategy also recognises the importance of wider issues that influence people's quality of life, including housing, advocacy, independence, community inclusion, accessible information, employment opportunities, support for carers and effective transition into adulthood. These themes are reflected throughout the strategy and the actions that sit beneath it.

This strategy should be read alongside other local strategies and plans that contribute to improving health, wellbeing, independence and inclusion for people with a learning disability in Redcar and Cleveland.

The strategy will be supported by a delivery plan which sets out the actions, measures and timescales that will help us achieve our ambitions.

Section 1 – Understanding learning disability in Redcar and Cleveland

Understanding Our Community

Redcar and Cleveland is home to approximately 136,500 people living across twenty towns and villages. The borough has an older population than the national average and people generally experience poorer health outcomes than across England. Life expectancy is lower than the national average and there are significant health inequalities between the most and least deprived communities. The population is also ageing, with the number of people aged over 65 expected to continue increasing over the coming years.¹

As our population changes, demand for health, care and support services will continue to evolve. Understanding local needs helps us plan services and support that enable people with a learning disability to live healthy, independent and fulfilling lives.

What is a Learning Disability?

A learning disability is a reduced intellectual ability that begins before adulthood and affects someone throughout their life. It is usually identified during childhood and can affect how a person understands information, learns new skills and manages everyday activities.

Many people with a learning disability may find certain everyday tasks more challenging, including managing money, maintaining a home, travelling independently or building social connections. Other people may require significant support in areas such as communication, personal care, decision-making and staying safe.

People with a learning disability are likely to take longer to learn new skills and may need support to understand information, make choices or access services and opportunities within their community.

A learning disability is lifelong, but people can and do continue to learn, develop and gain new skills throughout their lives. With the right support, opportunities and inclusive communities, people with a learning disability can live healthy, independent and fulfilling lives, achieve their aspirations and make valued contributions to their communities.²

People with a Learning Disability in Redcar and Cleveland

Around 2% of adults in Redcar and Cleveland are estimated to have a learning disability. Although this proportion is expected to remain relatively stable over time, the number of older people with a learning disability is expected to increase as the population ages.³

There are currently almost 600 adults with a learning disability receiving support from Adult Social Care in Redcar and Cleveland. Most people are supported within their local communities, enabling them to maintain independence, develop relationships and remain connected to the people and places that matter to them.

¹ [How life has changed in Redcar and Cleveland: Census 2021](#)

² [What is a learning disability? | Mencap](#)

³ [Projecting Adult Needs and Service Information System](#)

Many adults with a learning disability continue to receive support from family members and unpaid carers throughout their lives. Families play a vital role in helping people remain safe, healthy, connected and independent and will continue to be important partners in delivering the ambitions of this strategy.

Planning for the Future

People with a learning disability are living longer than ever before, creating opportunities for longer, fuller lives, but also increasing the need for services and support that respond to changing needs as people age. This includes planning for good health, suitable housing, independence and support for older adults with a learning disability.

We are also seeing increasing numbers of young people with complex needs moving from children's services into adulthood. Transition planning begins from the age of 14 and helps young people, families and professionals prepare for adult life. This includes education, employment, housing, health, independence, relationships and participation in community life. Effective transition planning is essential to ensuring young people achieve their aspirations and are supported to live the life they choose as adults.

Challenges and Opportunities

Evidence shows that people with a learning disability experience significant inequalities compared with the general population, including poorer physical and mental health, higher levels of loneliness, lower rates of employment, discrimination and barriers to accessing health and care services. These inequalities can also limit people's opportunities to participate fully in their communities and everyday life.⁴

At the same time, Redcar and Cleveland benefits from strong community networks, active self-advocacy groups, committed families and carers, dedicated providers and growing opportunities for co-production and partnership working. By building on these strengths, we can continue to improve outcomes and create opportunities for people with a learning disability to achieve their goals and ambitions.

Why This Strategy Matters

Understanding the current and future needs of people with a learning disability helps us plan for the future and ensure that support, services and opportunities continue to develop in response to local need. This strategy provides a shared framework for how organisations, communities and people with lived experience will work together to reduce inequalities, promote independence and improve quality of life for adults with a learning disability in Redcar and Cleveland.

⁴ [Learning disability - applying All Our Health - GOV.UK](#) and [LeDeR Report, 2024 - published in July 2026](#)

Section 2 – How we developed this strategy

Our Co-production Journey

This strategy has been developed through a genuine co-production approach, guided by the council's Coproduction Framework, working alongside people with a learning disability, families, carers, providers, community organisations and partner agencies. From the outset, we wanted the strategy to reflect what matters most to people with lived experience and to build on people's strengths, aspirations and ambitions.

Throughout the development of the strategy, we listened to people with a learning disability about their lives, the opportunities that help them thrive, and the barriers they continue to face. People told us about the importance of feeling safe, staying healthy, having good support, maintaining relationships, being part of their community, having a place to call home, and having opportunities to learn, work and contribute. These conversations have shaped the priorities, ambitions and commitments set out within this strategy.

A key part of this work has been our partnership with Independent Voices, an award-winning self-advocacy group supported by Skills for People. Their members have been involved throughout the development of this strategy, sharing their experiences, ideas and aspirations to help ensure the strategy reflects what is important to people with a learning disability in Redcar and Cleveland.

The strategy has also been informed by learning from the Inclusion North Citizenship Project, which engaged with people with a learning disability, autistic people, families and carers across the North East and North Cumbria. The project explored what helps people live a good life and identified the importance of citizenship, choice, control, inclusion, relationships, purpose and belonging. These themes have helped strengthen our understanding of what matters most to people.

We developed this strategy by:

- Working with members of Independent Voices through regular meetings, workshops and discussions.
- Listening to the experiences of people with a learning disability, families and carers.
- Learning from the Inclusion North Citizenship Project and the Seven Keys to Citizenship model.
- Gathering feedback from providers, professionals, community organisations and partner agencies.
- Reviewing local and national evidence about the needs, experiences and outcomes of people with a learning disability.

Co-production does not end with the publication of this strategy. We are committed to continuing to work alongside people with lived experience to monitor progress, review priorities and influence future developments. People with a learning disability will continue to play an active role in shaping services, policies and decisions that affect their lives.

Working Together with Independent Voices



Independent Voices has been championing the voices and rights of people with a learning disability in Redcar and Cleveland since 2010. Through weekly meetings, workshops and community projects, members support one another, build confidence, develop skills and influence positive change across the borough.

The group works closely with local organisations including the Council, NHS, Police, schools, providers and community groups to improve accessibility, inclusion and understanding of the experiences of people with a learning disability. Members help create accessible information, contribute to training, share their experiences and raise awareness of issues that affect people's lives.

Over the years, Independent Voices has delivered a wide range of projects and workshops covering topics such as staying safe, cancer awareness, healthy lifestyles, road safety, personal hygiene, friendships and bereavement support. The group also plays an important role in promoting safeguarding and helping people understand their rights and where to get support when they need it.

Independent Voices was instrumental in developing and promoting the local Safe Places Scheme, helping people feel safer and more confident when out in their communities. As Safeguarding Champions, members work alongside the Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board to raise awareness of abuse, exploitation, hate crime and safeguarding. In recognition of this work, Independent Voices received the National Safeguarding Innovation Award in 2024.

More recently, members have become active participants in Voices for Real Change, a co-production group that works alongside Redcar and Cleveland Adult Social Care to influence decisions, shape improvements and ensure that lived experience remains at the centre of service development.

The views, experiences and ideas shared by Independent Voices have been fundamental to the development of this strategy and will continue to influence its implementation over the next five years.



'People take time to listen to us.'

Mary, Independent Voices

'It has made me more independent and confident.'

Aaron, Independent Voices

Our Shared Vision

Everything we heard through our engagement and co-production activity reinforced a simple message: people with a learning disability want the same opportunities as everyone else. They want to be safe, healthy, listened to, respected and included. They want choice and control over their lives, meaningful relationships, a place they can call home and opportunities to pursue their goals and ambitions.

The conversations that informed this strategy helped us identify the areas that matter most to people and provided a clear direction for the priorities and actions that follow. Together, these shared experiences, aspirations and ambitions have shaped a strategy that is rooted in partnership, informed by evidence and guided by the voices of people with lived experience.

Section 3 – Our vision for a good life

Our Vision

Redcar and Cleveland's Corporate Plan sets out an ambition for the borough to be a place where people start life well, live and age well, prosper and flourish in a clean and thriving community. Adult Social Care contributes to this ambition by improving health and wellbeing, promoting independence, supporting community participation and helping people achieve the outcomes that matter most to them.

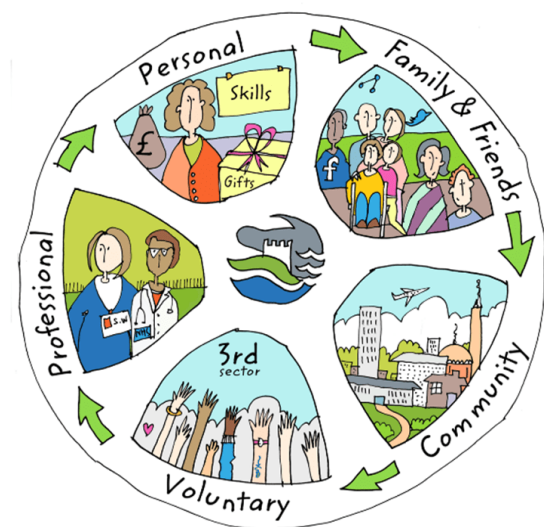
Our Adult Social Care vision is:

"We will help you live safe and well, in the place you call home, with the people and things you love, connected to your community, doing the things that matter to you."

This Learning Disability Strategy builds on that vision. We want Redcar and Cleveland to be a place where people with a learning disability can lead good lives, have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else, and be supported to achieve their goals and ambitions.

Our Approach

We believe that everyone has strengths, talents, relationships and experiences that can help them live a good life. Support should build on these strengths and help people develop confidence, independence and connections within their communities.



Our approach is based on the principle that people draw on a range of resources throughout their lives. Family, friends, community groups, neighbours, employers, voluntary organisations and local services all play an important role in helping people live well. Formal care and support should work alongside these relationships and strengths, not replace them.

The Resource Wheel illustrates how people's own strengths, relationships and communities form the foundation of a good life, supported by targeted and specialist services when needed.

What Does a Good Life Mean?

Between 2021 and 2024, the Inclusion North Citizenship Team Project worked with people with a learning disability, autistic people, family members and carers across the North East and North Cumbria to explore what helps people live a good life. Their work was based on the Seven Keys to Citizenship, a model that focuses on rights, inclusion, relationships, contribution, purpose, belonging and independence.

The project found that people want:

- Choice and control over their lives.
- A safe and comfortable home.
- Good relationships with family and friends.

- Opportunities to participate in their communities.
- Support that builds confidence and independence.
- Meaningful opportunities to learn, volunteer and work.
- To be listened to and involved in decisions that affect them.

The findings closely reflected what people in Redcar and Cleveland told us during the development of this strategy. People consistently said they want the same things as everyone else: opportunities, relationships, independence, safety, belonging and purpose.

➤ The 7 Keys to Citizenship ➤



What People Told Us

People with a learning disability told us that living a good life means:

- Feeling safe at home and in the community.
- Being healthy and well.
- Having a place to call home.
- Having choice and control over decisions that affect their lives.
- Having support when it is needed.
- Being listened to and respected.
- Maintaining relationships with family and friends.
- Being part of their community.
- Having opportunities to learn, volunteer and work.
- Pursuing personal goals and ambitions.

People also told us about barriers that can prevent them from living the life they want, including:

- Health inequalities.
- Social isolation and loneliness.
- Feeling unsafe.

- Limited employment opportunities.
- Difficulties accessing suitable housing.
- Lack of accessible information.
- Transport and accessibility challenges.

Our Vision for Learning Disability Services

We will work alongside people with a learning disability, families, carers, providers and communities to ensure people can say:

- I am safe, healthy and supported to live a fulfilling life.
- I have choice and control over decisions that affect me.
- I have a home that is right for me and helps me stay independent.
- I am valued and included in my community.
- I have relationships, friendships and opportunities to contribute.
- I am supported to achieve my goals and ambitions.
- I can access the right support at the right time when I need it.

Our Priorities

While every aspect of a good life is important, people with a learning disability in Redcar and Cleveland identified five areas that matter most to them. These priorities will guide our work between 2025 and 2029:

1. Be Safe
2. Good Health
3. Good Support
4. Family and Friends
5. Work and Purpose

Together these priorities provide the foundation for this strategy and describe the outcomes we want to achieve alongside people with a learning disability, their families, carers and partners over the next five years.

Section 4 – Foundations for a good life

Throughout the development of this strategy, several cross-cutting themes were highlighted by the people we spoke to. These cross-cutting themes run throughout all five priorities, shaping how we will deliver this strategy and improve outcomes for adults and carers.

Having a Home: People said having a home is about more than having somewhere to live. A good home provides safety, security, privacy, independence and a sense of belonging. People told us they want choice about where they live, who they live with and the support they receive to remain independent.

We recognise the importance of planning for future housing needs, supporting people to remain in their communities, developing appropriate accommodation options and ensuring people can access housing that promotes independence and wellbeing. This is particularly important for young people moving into adulthood, older adults whose needs may change over time, and people with more complex support needs. To support this ambition, Redcar and Cleveland Council is developing a Supported Housing Strategy, which will help shape future accommodation options, identify areas of unmet need and support the development of housing and support models that enable people to live as independently as possible while remaining connected to their communities.

Speaking Up and Being Heard: People with a learning disability have the right to influence decisions that affect their lives. Being listened to, having access to information and receiving support to express views and preferences are fundamental to choice, control and independence.

We know that understanding rights, choices and advocacy services is an important part of having control over your life. In partnership with Skills for People, the "Advocacy is not an Avocado" campaign was developed to increase awareness of advocacy services and help people understand where they can access support to speak up, make informed decisions and have their voices heard. This work supports our commitment to co-production, self-advocacy and ensuring people with a learning disability can participate fully in decisions about their lives.

Healthwatch South Tees plays an important role in promoting the voice of people with a learning disability, their families and carers. As the independent champion for people who use health and care services, Healthwatch gathers feedback, promotes opportunities for people to speak up about their experiences and uses this insight to influence service improvement. Through engagement, advocacy and co-production, Healthwatch helps ensure that people's views are heard, valued and reflected in decisions that affect their lives.

Money and Financial Wellbeing: People said having enough money and understanding how to manage it are important parts of living independently and having control over everyday life. People told us that financial pressures can affect housing choices, health, social opportunities, relationships and community participation. We want people with a learning disability to have access to good quality information, advice and support about benefits, budgeting, direct payments, employment and financial planning. Improving financial wellbeing can help people make informed choices, increase independence and participate more fully in their communities.

Section 5 – Our Priorities

Priority One: Be Safe

Being safe means being protected from harm and knowing where to get help when you need it.

Why this matters

People told us that feeling safe is one of the most important parts of living a good life. In the Citizenship Project the most commonly mentioned barrier (27%) was people not feeling safe, with some people describing experiences of bullying, discrimination, mate crime, hate crime and feeling unsafe in the community. Others spoke about feeling vulnerable when travelling independently or accessing local services. For many people, a sense of safety and belonging is created through everyday positive interactions, with 37% identifying friendly gestures such as a smile or greeting as important factors in helping them feel welcomed and included.⁵

What people said



What is going well

Staying Safe Workshop: January 2024 Independent Voices identified staying safe as a project they wanted to focus on. They came up with a plan to reach out to professionals and start developing the project. During their weekly meetings, Independent Voices planned and developed the Staying Safe workshop. They co-designed activities and shared their personal experiences of safety issues.

⁵ [Inclusion-North-Seven-Keys-to-Citizenship-A4-JUNE24-V4.pdf](#), page 20



August 2024: The group had a visit from Priya from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. They gave feedback on the Police and Crime Plan and shared their project work on safety. The group came up with ideas on how to work in partnership on the project.

September 2024: The group had a visit from Anna from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, and Barbara from Redcar and Cleveland Council. They shared tips and ideas about nighttime safety and fed into development work for their project.

November 2024: Independent Voices successfully co-delivered the workshop on 12th November to an audience of 35 professionals and 11 people with a learning disability.



January 2025: Independent Voices were invited to speak about their experiences of nighttime safety and their project at the Cleveland Unit for the Reduction of Violence Night-time Economy Safety Forum. Around 80 people from businesses, voluntary organisations, and statutory agencies attended the event.

What happened next:

- People with learning disabilities reported increased confidence and self-esteem through sharing their lived experiences and contributing to the development and delivery of the workshop.
- The project strengthened relationships with local partners and created new opportunities for collaborative work.
- Independent Voices helped raise awareness of safety issues affecting people with learning disabilities, including mate crime and hate crime.
- Opportunities were identified to work in partnership with the local authority and other agencies to improve responses to hate crime affecting adults with disabilities.

Safe Places: Redcar and Cleveland has a network of Safe Places located across the borough, including community venues and local organisations, where people can access support if they feel unsafe or need assistance.

The Safe Place Scheme provides clearly identified locations where individuals can go for help and reassurance. Trained staff at Safe Place venues can offer practical support, such as contacting a family member, friend or carer, helping someone find their way home, or assisting them in accessing appropriate services. The scheme helps people to feel safer, more confident, and supported when out in their local community.



Our ambition

We want adults with a learning disability to feel safe, respected, and confident in their daily lives. People should be supported to understand their rights, make informed choices, take positive risks, and know where to go for help if they have concerns.

We want people with a learning disability to:

- Feel safe at home.
- Feel safe in their community.
- Know how to report concerns.
- Understand their rights.
- Have access to support when needed.

We will

- We will continue to support Safe Places across Redcar and Cleveland so people know where to go if they need help or support.
- We will raise awareness of hate crime, bullying, abuse, exploitation and scams, and help people understand how to report concerns.
- We will provide accessible information, including Easy Read resources, so people know their rights, how to stay safe and where to get help.
- We will work with the Police, health services and community organisations to improve safety and provide support when concerns arise.
- We will help people develop the confidence and skills to stay safe, be independent and make informed choices.
- We will support people to have their voices heard, be involved in decisions about their lives and access advocacy when they need it.

We want people to be able to say...

"I feel safe at home and in my community."

Priority Two: Good Health

Being healthy means getting the support, care and information you need to stay well and live a healthy life.

Why this matters

People with a learning disability experience significant health inequalities and poorer health outcomes than the general population. More than half (56.6%) of people with learning disabilities die before the age of 65 compared with 14.8% of the general population. The median age at death was 19 years younger — 62.8 years compared with 81.8 years. Nearly four in ten deaths (39%) are considered avoidable, almost twice the rate seen in the general population. People with a learning disability are more likely to experience physical health problems, mental ill health, social isolation and age-related conditions such as dementia, contributing to poorer health outcomes throughout their lives.⁶

According to Sense, the leading disability charity that supports people with complex needs, 26% of people with complex disabilities describe their health as bad or very bad, compared with just 9% of the general public.⁷

People told us that staying healthy and well is important to living a good life. They said that exercise, healthy food, good information and support from health services help them stay well, while costs, low confidence and a lack of support can make this more difficult. They want accessible information, opportunities to learn from others and support to build the skills and confidence to manage their own health. Many people told us they want health professionals to listen to them, communicate clearly and make reasonable adjustments when they access services.

What people said



⁶ [LeDeR Report, 2024 - published in July 2026](#), page 14 and 19

⁷ [Potential and Possibility 2024: Tackling Loneliness - Sense, Tackling Loneliness section](#)

What is going well

Learning from Lives and Deaths - People with a Learning Disability and Autistic People (LeDeR):

This programme was established in 2015 to review the deaths of people with a learning disability and identify lessons that can improve care, support and health outcomes. Learning from reviews helps services make changes to reduce health inequalities and improve the quality of care for people with a learning disability.

Locally, LeDeR reviews continue to help partners identify areas for improvement and take action to improve access to healthcare, communication, reasonable adjustments and person-centred support.

Independent Voices: The group continue to deliver health and wellbeing workshops that help people with a learning disability learn about important health issues, build confidence, and make informed choices. By working with health professionals and sharing lived experiences, the workshops provide accessible information, encourage discussion, and support people to take a more active role in their own health and wellbeing.



STOMP: The national STOMP (Stopping Over Medication of People with a Learning Disability, Autism or Both) programme is helping to ensure people receive the right medication, for the right reasons and are involved in decisions about their treatment. Through regular medication reviews and person-centred approaches, STOMP aims to reduce inappropriate prescribing, improve quality of life and promote better health outcomes for people with a learning disability.

MUST: The Managing Undernutrition South Tees (MUST) service provides training and support for care home staff to improve nutrition and hydration standards. This supports people living in elderly, learning disabilities and mental health care homes across South Tees. Staff are trained to implement MUST screening, deliver appropriate care packages, and monitor residents' nutritional status. This initiative contributes to better health outcomes and supports local public health objectives, including reducing health inequalities.

Our ambition

We want people to:

- Live healthier and longer lives.
- Access healthcare more easily.
- Receive good mental and physical health support.
- Understand information about their health.
- Experience fewer health inequalities.

We will

- Promote annual health checks and Health Action Plans to help people identify and manage their health needs.
- Improve access to social care information in accessible formats, including Easy Read and other communication methods that meet individual needs.
- Work with health and care partners to reduce health inequalities and improve health outcomes for people with a learning disability.

- Support people to live healthy lifestyles through access to physical activity, healthy eating, social opportunities and wellbeing support.
- Raise awareness of the importance of screening programmes, vaccinations and preventative healthcare.
- Continue to learn from LeDeR reviews and use the findings to drive improvements in services and support.
- Support people to develop the knowledge, confidence and skills to make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing.
- Work with health professionals to improve understanding of learning disability and deliver more person-centred care.
- Promote early intervention and timely access to support to prevent health needs from escalating.
- Listen to the experiences of people with a learning disability and their families and use their feedback to shape and improve services.
- Ensure that people with a learning disability are supported to have a voice in decisions about their health, care and treatment, and are treated with dignity, respect and compassion.

We want people to be able to say...

"I get the healthcare and support I need to stay healthy and well."

Priority Three: Good Support

Having good support means getting the right help, at the right time, in a way that works for you.

Why this matters

Good support enables people to live independent and fulfilling lives. People told us that support works best when it is personalised, flexible, focused on strengths and helps people achieve their goals.

People told us that good support comes from a range of people and opportunities, including family, friends, groups, social workers and one-to-one support when it is needed. They said that support works best when people listen, understand their individual needs and recognise that everyone is different.

People also told us that some individuals need more help to access the right support and that negative experiences can make it harder to ask for help in the future. They want services and communities to better understand what it is like to live with a learning disability so that everyone receives the support, respect and opportunities they need to live a good life.

What is going well

Oliver McGowan Mandatory Learning Disability and Autism Training: This training is helping to improve understanding and awareness amongst health and social care staff. The training was developed following the death of Oliver McGowan and aims to ensure that professionals have the knowledge, skills and confidence to provide safe, effective and compassionate care.

The training helps staff to:

- Better understand the needs, strengths and experiences of people with a learning disability and autistic people.
- Recognise and make appropriate reasonable adjustments.
- Improve communication and person-centred care.
- Reduce health inequalities and improve people's experiences of services.
- Listen to and learn from people with lived experience, who are involved in delivering the training.

The continued rollout of the Oliver McGowan training across Adult Social Care services is helping to build a more informed, inclusive and responsive workforce, contributing to better outcomes for people with a learning disability and their families.

Direct payments: The Council has completed a comprehensive review of Direct Payment practice and processes and implemented a number of improvements, strengthening practice through a co-produced training programme shaped by people with lived experience and providers. Direct Payments are an important way of promoting choice, control and independence, enabling people with a learning disability to design support around their lives rather than fitting into traditional services. By providing greater flexibility and personalisation, Direct Payments can help people pursue their goals, participate in their communities and live the life they choose.



Transition support: Supporting young people with a learning disability to move successfully into adulthood is a key priority. Transition planning begins from the age of 14 and helps young people, families and professionals prepare for adult life, including education, employment, housing, health, independence and community participation.

In 2026, a new Strategic Transitions Board was established to strengthen leadership, oversight and planning across Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Health, Education, Housing and Commissioning. The Board oversees transition pathways, forecasts future demand and helps ensure that services are planned and developed to meet the needs of young people moving into adulthood.

These arrangements are supported by a monthly multi-agency Transitions Operational Group, which brings together professionals from across health, social care, education and commissioning. Working together helps ensure that support is coordinated, risks are identified early, and plans are in place before changes occur. This approach promotes continuity of care, improves outcomes and supports young people to achieve their aspirations as they move into adulthood.

We are committed to ensuring that transition arrangements are personalised, strengths-based and responsive to individual needs, helping every young person to achieve the best possible start to adult life.

Unpaid Carers: Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council works in partnership with Middlesbrough Council through the South Tees Carers Strategy and jointly commissions carers' services through the Better Care Fund. This collaborative approach helps to provide a more consistent offer for carers across the South Tees area, reducing variation in support and ensuring carers can access information, advice and services regardless of local authority boundaries.

A range of free support is available to unpaid carers through commissioned and partner organisations, including:

- We Care You Care, providing information, advice and support for carers.
- Carers Together, offering practical and emotional support.
- Teesside Mind, supporting carers with their mental health and wellbeing.
- The Junction Foundation, providing support for young carers and families.
- Mobilise, an online carers community offering information, peer support and resources.

Through this partnership approach, carers are supported to maintain their own health and wellbeing, continue in their caring role where appropriate, and plan for the future.

Our ambition

People with a learning disability should have the same opportunities as everyone else to make choices, be independent and achieve their goals. Having the right support, information and advice can help people live the lives they want and take part in their communities. We want support to be flexible, person-centred and shaped by what matters most to each individual.

We want people to:

- Have choice and control over their lives.
- Get the right support at the right time.
- Be involved in decisions about their care and support.
- Learn skills that help them be more independent.
- Have access to information, advice and advocacy when they need it.
- Achieve their goals and live the life they choose.

We will

- Promote person-centred approaches that place people at the heart of decision-making.
- Support people to have greater choice, control and independence in their day-to-day lives.
- Ensure people are actively involved in planning, reviewing and shaping their support.
- Improve access to information, advice and advocacy in formats that meet individual communication needs.
- Develop flexible and creative support options that reflect people's goals, preferences and circumstances.
- Ensure commissioned services promote independence, inclusion, wellbeing and positive outcomes.
- Work alongside carers and families as key partners in support planning, while recognising and respecting the wishes of the individual.
- Support people to develop practical life skills, confidence and resilience.
- Promote opportunities for people to have their voices heard and influence how services are designed and delivered.
- Encourage early intervention and preventative approaches that help people maintain independence and avoid crisis.
- Co-produce services with people with a learning disability and their families to ensure support is shaped by lived experience.

We want people to be able to say...

"I get the right support at the right time."

Priority Four: Family and Friends

Having family and friends means having people in your life who care about you, support you, and help you feel connected.

Why this matters

Relationships are important to wellbeing, confidence and happiness.

People told us that friends, family and social connections help them feel valued, included and supported. Many people also described loneliness as a significant challenge.

Spending time with people who care about them helps them feel connected, valued and included. However, the cost of activities and travel, and a lack of support to stay in touch with family and friends, can make this more difficult.

People said they want opportunities to build friendships, grow in confidence and take part in community life. They also told us that accessible, safe and welcoming places are important for helping people connect with others and maintain meaningful relationships.

Developing and maintaining friendships can be challenging for many people with a learning disability. The Citizenship Project found that 41% of people identified confidence and anxiety as significant barriers, often linked to concerns about things going wrong, previous negative experiences, and the complexities of navigating relationships. A further 24% said they lacked the support they needed to make friends, access opportunities, or travel independently within their community. Financial pressures, transport difficulties and geographical barriers were highlighted by 20% of people, while 8% felt that the closure of services and a lack of local options limited their opportunities to build and maintain social connections.⁸

According to research conducted by Sense, a leading charity for people with complex learning disabilities, over the last few years people with complex disabilities have continued to be twice as likely to report feelings of loneliness than the general population. 55% of those with complex disabilities reported feeling lonely always, often or some of the time compared to 26% of the general public. Loneliness and social isolation disproportionately affect people with disabilities, who may face barriers to building, maintaining and strengthening social relationships and community connections.⁹

Research shows that LGBTQ+ people with a learning disability can experience discrimination and barriers linked to both their disability and their sexual or gender identity. Some report concealing their sexuality because of fears about negative reactions, rejection, or a lack of acceptance.¹⁰



⁸ [Inclusion-North-Seven-Keys-to-Citizenship-A4-JUNE24-V4.pdf](#), page 25

⁹ [Potential and Possibility 2024: Tackling Loneliness - Sense, Tackling Loneliness section](#)

¹⁰ Robinson, Z.M., Marsden, D., Abdulla, S. and Dowling, F. (2020) 'Supporting people with learning disabilities who identify as LGBT to express their sexual and gender identities', *Learning Disability Practice*, 23(6), pp. 24-31. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7748/ldp.2020.e2094>.

What is going well

Community Opportunities: People have consistently told us that opportunities to meet others, spend time with friends and be part of groups are an important part of living a good life. Many people described commissioned day services, community groups and activities as places where they can build friendships, improve their social skills and stay connected to their communities.

Members of Independent Voices described some of the benefits of attending services and groups as:

- Meeting friends and making new friendships.
- Improving social skills and confidence.
- Getting out and about in the community.
- Having opportunities to travel and try new experiences.
- Having a regular routine and structure.
- Accessing support from staff they know and trust.

Feedback from engagement activities showed that friendships and meaningful relationships are often one of the most valued outcomes of attending services. People spoke positively about spending time with others, having fun, learning new skills together and accessing opportunities that they may not otherwise experience.

These findings reinforce the importance of continuing to invest in opportunities that bring people together, reduce social isolation and help people develop and maintain the relationships that matter most to them.

Promoting Inclusion and Respect: Through the recommissioning of day opportunities, we are strengthening expectations that providers deliver inclusive, person-centred support that recognises people's individual identities, experiences and relationships. Future service specifications will require providers to ensure staff are appropriately trained and able to support people to access information, advice and specialist support relating to relationships, sexual orientation and gender identity where needed. We are also exploring opportunities to improve how equality information is collected so that we can better understand and respond to the needs of local communities.

Our ambition

Meaningful relationships are fundamental to living a good life. Friendships, family relationships, community connections and a sense of belonging all contribute to wellbeing, confidence and independence. However, many people with a learning disability experience loneliness, isolation and barriers to developing and maintaining relationships. We want people to have the opportunities, support and confidence to build the connections that matter to them and to feel valued members of their communities.

We want people to:

- Maintain important relationships with family, friends and people who matter to them.
- Build new friendships and social connections.
- Feel valued, connected and included in their communities.
- Develop meaningful and lasting relationships.
- Have opportunities to meet new people and take part in social activities.
- Access support to develop relationships safely and confidently.
- Express their identity and be accepted for who they are.

We will

- Promote opportunities for friendship, connection and belonging through community-based activities and events.
- Support people to develop the confidence, skills and independence needed to build and maintain relationships.
- Work with partners to reduce loneliness and social isolation.
- Support people to maintain relationships that are important to them, including family and romantic relationships.
- Increase awareness of local social, leisure and community opportunities.
- Promote accessible information and guidance about friendships, relationships, wellbeing and staying safe.
- Ensure people have access to support when they experience loneliness, isolation, bullying or discrimination.
- Work with community organisations to create welcoming and inclusive environments where people can make connections and develop friendships.
- Celebrate diversity and promote acceptance, ensuring people feel respected, valued and able to be themselves.
- Listen to people's experiences and use their feedback to improve opportunities for social connection and inclusion.

We want people to be able to say...

"I have people in my life who matter to me."

Priority Five: Work and Purpose

Having work and purpose means having opportunities to learn, contribute, achieve your goals and do things that are meaningful to you.

Why this matters

People told us they want opportunities to work, volunteer, learn new skills and make a contribution. Work is about more than employment. It is also about confidence, purpose, independence and being part of their community.

People also told us that negative attitudes, health issues and a lack of opportunities can create barriers. They want support that recognises their strengths, understands their individual needs and helps them find and keep meaningful work or volunteering opportunities.

Employment opportunities for people with a learning disability remain significantly lower than for the wider population. Only around 6% of adults with a learning disability known to local authorities in England are in paid work, compared with around three-quarters of the general working-age population.¹¹

In Redcar and Cleveland, a small number of people ¹² with a learning disability known to the local authority are currently in paid employment. Over the years, although proportionally higher than the regional and national average, this has steadily declined.

Through this strategy, we will work with employers, education providers, support services and community partners to increase opportunities for employment, volunteering, skills development and meaningful occupation, helping people to achieve greater independence, financial security and social inclusion.

People told us that opportunities to work or volunteer can help build confidence, develop skills and give people a sense of purpose. They said that understanding employers, good training and having the right support can make a real difference.

The Citizenship Project reported a need to support people to understand what it means to have purpose, and what their goals, ambitions, and purpose might be. More than a quarter of the people they spoke to were unable to identify what gives them purpose. Without a clear sense of purpose, it becomes incredibly difficult for people to define, pursue, and achieve their ambitions.



What gives you a sense of purpose and why is that important to you?

- 38% of people said that their personal goals and happy ordinary living gave them a sense of purpose.

¹¹ Department of Health & Social Care (2025) [Adult social care activity report 2024 to 2025: commentary](#)

¹² Department of Health & Social Care (2025) [Adult social care activity report 2024 to 2025: data tables, table 56](#)

- 23% of people said that being part of something, giving back, helping others, making a difference and following a passion, gave them a sense of purpose.
- 17% of people said that friendships, family, relationships, and the kindness of people, gave them a sense of purpose.
- 10% of people said being included and listened to gave them a sense of purpose.
- 29% of people said that they were unsure what gives them purpose, they didn't know, or didn't respond to this question.

The Citizenship Project concluded that people's goals, ambitions, and purpose, for the most part, are wonderfully ordinary things which society should be able to provide. We must ensure that all disabled people are able to access the support and the provision that they require, so that their ambitions and goals can reflect their true desires rather than addressing unmet needs. We must encourage people with a learning disability to explore broad and ambitious opportunities for their purpose and dreams.

What is going well

Getting a Job service: Skills for People continue to deliver the Getting a Job service, supporting adults with a learning disability and autistic people to access volunteering, employment, training and work-related opportunities. The service has provided personalised support to help people build confidence, develop skills and improve work readiness. As part of this work, individuals have been supported with CV development, skills assessments, job searching, interview preparation and overcoming barriers to employment.

The service has already achieved positive outcomes, supporting adults into volunteering opportunities, paid employment and paid co-production roles. It has also worked alongside people with lived experience to develop information and guidance for employers, helping to increase understanding of the benefits of employing people with a learning disability.

The service is continuing to build relationships with local employers, education providers and voluntary organisations across the borough. Through this work, it aims to increase awareness, confidence and opportunities for people with a learning disability, while encouraging more organisations to become inclusive employers and create meaningful pathways into employment and volunteering.

Volunteering at the Council: Working with the council, Skills for People have co-produced an Easy Read volunteering application form which has been adopted by the Council's volunteering team, helping to improve accessibility and reduce barriers for people with a learning disability who wish to volunteer. People with lived experience also continue to play an active role in shaping the service through the employment steering group, ensuring that future developments are informed by their experiences and aspirations.

Council job carving initiative: Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council is committed to being an inclusive employer and is working to increase opportunities for people with a learning disability through volunteering, work experience and paid employment. As part of this commitment, the Council is exploring the use of job carving across its services to create roles that build on people's strengths, skills and interests.

Job carving involves identifying tasks from existing roles that can be combined into meaningful jobs that are accessible to people with a learning disability. This approach focuses on what people can do and helps create opportunities that match individual abilities and aspirations. It can also support employees to develop confidence, gain workplace experience, learn new skills and progress towards longer-term employment goals.

This work complements the Getting a Job service and reflects our wider ambition to increase employment opportunities, challenge barriers and ensure that people with a learning disability have the same opportunities as everyone else to develop skills, contribute to their communities and achieve their career aspirations.

Supported Employment Forum: The Supported Employment Forum brings together Children's Services, Adult Education, Commissioning teams, local colleges and other partners to improve employment and learning opportunities for young people and adults with learning disabilities and additional support needs as they prepare for adulthood. By working together, partners are developing clearer pathways from education into volunteering, training and paid employment, helping people build the skills, confidence and experience needed to achieve their ambitions.

Our ambition

People with a learning disability should have the same opportunities as everyone else to develop their talents, pursue their ambitions, contribute to their communities and achieve fulfilling lives. We will work alongside people, families, employers and partners to make these opportunities a reality.

We want more people with a learning disability to:

- Access paid employment
- Volunteer in their communities
- Develop skills, confidence and independence
- Pursue personal goals and ambitions
- Make meaningful contributions to their communities
- Be recognised for their strengths, talents and potential
- Have the same opportunities as everyone else to learn, work and progress

We will

- Raise aspirations around employment and career development
- Promote volunteering, work experience and supported employment opportunities
- Support people to develop the skills, confidence and experience needed for employment
- Work with employers to improve opportunities and create more inclusive workplaces
- Champion the abilities, strengths and contributions of people with a learning disability
- Support people to identify their interests, strengths, goals and sense of purpose, enabling them to make informed choices about their future
- Increase access to careers information, advice and guidance that is accessible and person-centred
- Work with education providers, community organisations and employers to create pathways into employment and volunteering
- Celebrate success stories to challenge perceptions and demonstrate what is possible
- Ensure people receive the right support to sustain employment, volunteering and other meaningful activities

We want people to be able to say...

"I have opportunities to do things that matter to me."

Section 6 – Delivering Our Strategy

This strategy sets out a shared ambition for improving the lives of adults with a learning disability in Redcar and Cleveland between 2025 and 2029. Achieving this ambition will require continued collaboration between people with lived experience, families, carers, communities, providers and partner organisations.

No single organisation can deliver this strategy alone. Success depends on strong partnerships, shared responsibility and a commitment to working together to improve outcomes for people with a learning disability.

The strategy will be supported by a delivery plan which will identify the actions, milestones and responsibilities needed to achieve the priorities set out within this document. The delivery plan will be regularly reviewed to ensure it remains focused on what matters most to people and responds to emerging needs and opportunities.

Working Together

The publication of this strategy is not the end of our co-production journey. We are committed to continuing to work alongside people with a learning disability, families and carers throughout the life of the strategy.

People with lived experience will play an important role in helping us:

- Monitor progress against our priorities.
- Identify areas for improvement.
- Influence decisions about services and support.
- Review information and communications to ensure they are accessible.
- Shape future developments and opportunities.

We will continue to build on the strengths of local self-advocacy and engagement groups, including Independent Voices and Voices for Real Change, ensuring that the voices of people with a learning disability remain central to decision-making and service improvement.

By working together, sharing knowledge and aligning resources, we can create more coordinated support and improve experiences and outcomes for people with a learning disability.

Key partners include:

- Adults with a learning disability and their families.
- Independent Voices and other self-advocacy groups.
- Adult Social Care.
- NHS organisations.
- Public health services.
- Education and training providers.
- Housing providers.
- Independent and voluntary sector organisations.
- Employers and employment support services.
- Healthwatch and advocacy services.

Measuring Success

We want this strategy to make a real difference to people's lives. Success will be measured not only through performance data, but also through the experiences of people with a learning disability and their families.

Over the lifetime of this strategy, we want to see:

- More people feeling safe at home and in their communities.
- Improved access to healthcare and preventative support.
- More people reporting that they have choice and control over their lives.
- Increased opportunities for independence and community participation.
- More people developing and maintaining meaningful relationships.
- Reduced social isolation and loneliness.
- Increased opportunities for employment, volunteering and purposeful activity.
- Improved experiences of transition into adulthood.
- More people actively involved in co-production and decision-making.

We will use a combination of local performance measures, national indicators, feedback from people with lived experience and partner data to understand the impact of this strategy and identify where further improvements are needed.

Progress against this strategy will be reviewed regularly through existing governance arrangements and partnership structures. Updates will be shared with people with lived experience, partners and stakeholders so that progress remains transparent and accountable.

Where necessary, priorities and actions may be refined to respond to new evidence, changes in legislation, emerging opportunities or the feedback of people and families. Continued learning, innovation and collaboration will help ensure the strategy remains relevant and effective throughout its lifetime.

Conclusion

Everyone should have the opportunity to live a good life, be valued by their community and achieve the things that matter most to them.

This strategy represents our shared commitment to creating a borough where people with a learning disability can live safely, stay healthy, build relationships, pursue their ambitions and have the same opportunities and life chances as everyone else.

Together, through continued partnership, co-production and shared ambition, we will work to make this vision a reality.

We are very grateful for the work and support of all of those people who have contributed directly or indirectly to the production of this strategy including Independent Voices, Skills for People, The Citizenship Project, Inclusion North, People First, and Healthwatch South Tees.