Essex County Council
Adult Social Care

Disability Strategy – Review and What's Next

September 2026

Making the difference every day



ECC supports people with all disabilities; learning disabilities, physical disabilities and sensory disabilities. It also supports autistic people.

In 2021 (census) there were 250,500 disabled people in Essex and 309,000 in Greater Essex (including Southend and Thurrock).This equates to 16.7% of Essex residents – broadly in line with the average of England as a whole (16.9%). However, the prevalence of disability varies substantially. The coastal areas of Tendring, Southend, and Castle Point have the highest levels of disability within their populations.

ASC supports 4336 people with learning disabilities and 2493 people with physical and/or sensory impairments.

There has been a small but steady growth in the number of people eligible for Care Act support due to an increase in life expectancy and diagnosis, increase in complexity of need and an increase in people with autism.

The strategy is for anyone with a disability including autism if the person sees their autism as a disability.

- Visual
- Auditory
- Cognitive/Learning
- Motor/Physical
- Neurological

The Disability Strategy

Our Strategy is written in four different themes: Launched in May 2023, our Strategy highlights four different themes that came from engagement with adults across Essex on what was important to them, and it built on past transformation programmes such as Meaningful Lives Matters.



Good relationships

Because people told us that they want to grow and keep good relationships with people they get on with.



Staying healthy, safe and well

Because people told us looking after health and being able to get help with being unwell are important.



Being Active

Because people told us they like to do things that are important, people told us they want to feel part of something.



A place to feel at home

Because people told us that where they live is important, it needs to feel safe and feel like home.

Disability Strategy to Date

Good Relationships
Achievements

- Stronger transitions delivery and a joined-up programme between adults and Children's and Families
- Delivery of relationship focussed training and support to help practitioners and providers gain confidence having conversations around relationships, breaking down barriers and stigma
- Delivering the Promote the Vote Campaign to help people exercise their democratic right to vote with support to register to vote and attend the polling station on election day
- Increased coproduction and engagement routes with people, families and providers including the disability strategy reference group and Essex Cares Network
- Delivery of two learning disabilities community festivals in 2026, adding to the west festival of previous years

Challenges

- It can be more difficult for people with disabilities to engage in community activities where their disability can be a barrier. We continue to influence for spaces to be inclusive and welcoming both in environment and culture

Staying Healthy, Safe and Well
Achievements

- Autism Navigator service and the stronger representative voice of autistic people within the programme – 1000+ people supported to date and it is expanding the peer support offer
- New sensory contract has reached more people and streamlined the provision helping people get support more swiftly with rehab and IAG
- Delivered pilots to explore opportunities for prevention support leading to increased service offers through major contracts such as requirements to support befriending and annual health checks.

Challenges

- Slower diagnostic pathways can often mean that people are waiting longer for the right support. Preventative pathways remain a focus to ensure people do not reach crisis point before seeking help

Disability Strategy Updates

Being Active

Achievements

- Local Linked Support evolving into the MH wellbeing team
- Employment has been a huge success with LIVE, Get Set and Small Business grants leading to almost 800 adults with learning disabilities and autism supported into paid jobs
- Significant work is taking place to connect all employment opportunities, working across transitions, education, Anchor programmes, Connect To Work, etc.
- Ageing Well Projects – launch of the shaping my future guide and new aging well toolkit supporting adults, providers and families with information, training and planning tools
- HRS contracts recommissioned to minimise need for additional community support and help people maintain independence
- Strategy aligns with preparing for adulthood, helping young people enter adult support fully prepared

Challenges

- It can be more challenging for people with disabilities to connect with physical activity and social sport opportunities – continue to explore how disabilities can be considered as part of the wider Essex offer
- Continue to support employers to hire people with disabilities and understand the benefits this can bring to their workforce

A Place to Feel at Home

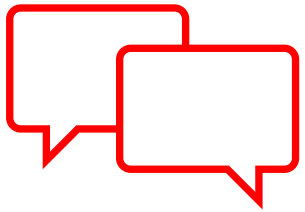
Achievements

- Scheme reviews as a structured assessment of a service's support arrangements, including staffing, the environment, and how well it meets residents' needs. It ensures support remains safe, person-centred, effective, and aligned with assessed needs and best practice
- Accommodation Hub provides effective oversight of supported living schemes across Essex. Its Move On Workers proactively support adults to move into more suitable settings, with a focus on increasing independence, for example from Residential Care to Supported Living which creates better outcomes for the adults and savings for adult social care.
- Supported Living framework recommissioned with improved outcomes, reinforcing the accommodation standards
- Disabilities focus in Live at Home (domiciliary care) tender for improved outcomes
- Exploration of residential placements have helped us understand opportunities for development and savings

Challenges

- It can be difficult to establish access to property in certain areas of the county where property is more expensive or in higher demand – we continue to work with the provider market to develop this

Peoples Voices



Collaborate Essex

- Collaborate Essex delivers a quarterly forum for people with lived experience of disability and their carers. This is delivered by Healthwatch Essex and SUMMIT.
- The forum enables engagement and insight and operates with a task-and-finish approach to co-production work
- It increases visibility, embeds lived experience, shares decision making and strengthens relationships between people with lived experience and decision makers.

Disability Strategy Reference Group

The Disability Strategy Reference Group brings together people with lived experience of disability and carers. At the launch of the Disability Strategy, we acknowledged the role people have played in shaping the Disability Strategy and pledged to have an ongoing collaboration with lived experience people to shape the implementation of the strategy.

What does the group do?

- The group meets quarterly
- Gives people with disabilities and carers a chance to share their views on various service offers based on the Disability Strategy
- Helps Essex County Council understand what is working well and what needs to improve
- Influences services, priorities, and ways of working so they reflect real lived experience

Impact:

Member(s) from the Reference Group represent at the Disability Strategy Board to feedback from the Reference Group and help influence shaping the delivery of the strategy.

Priorities Going Forward

- We have recently reopened the Supported Living Framework to increase access to suitable placements, and we have set market rates. Moving people into these Schemes continues to be a focus.
- We are currently reviewing our Sensory Services provision continuing to have good value local provision and quick response times.
- To ensure that people receive Annual Health Checks, have an appropriate action plan and that this can be understood and enacted by the person with appropriate support
- We continue to work with the C&F service, both for Young People with Disabilities and for Care Leavers to ensure that people are Preparing for Adulthood effectively
- We continue to grow inclusive employment opportunities that best support people with disabilities to access sustainable, paid employment
- We are currently engaging with people with disabilities and autistic people to refresh our strategies. We will continue to support people of Essex to live ambitious and independent lives
- We are very interested in self support for people with disabilities, for example with the development of digital and care tech options.

Disability Strategy Discussion Points

1. Strategy Themes
    - Do you think that the themes remain correct for the people you support?
    - Is anything missing?

2. Have you or the people you support noticed a change from the disability strategy launch? Is it relevant for them?

3. What new themes or areas do you think we need to focus on in future
    - What could we do differently?
    - Can you identify any gaps?