

Toolkit for place-based strategies for housing for autistic adults and adults with a learning disability



Background

“Everyone should be able to access housing that is accessible, meets their needs, supports their engagement and participation in the community, and is safe, affordable and provides security and stability to build life upon...”

...Failure to grasp this challenge will see more people with a learning disability left without housing options for the future, experiencing homelessness, or languishing in hospitals, and a new generation of young people unable to realise their aspirations to be part of society and make their way in life.”

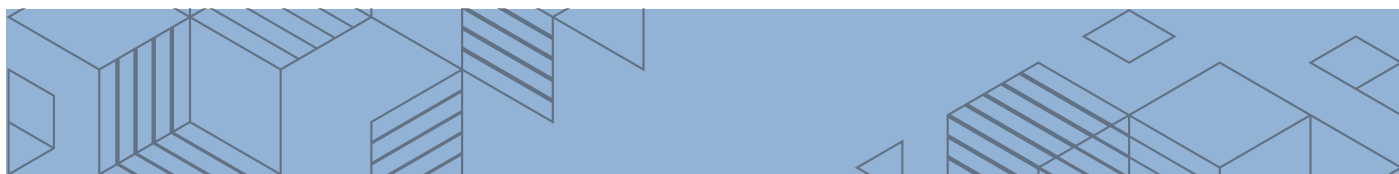
Jon Sparkes OBE, Chief Executive, Royal Mencap Society
([National Housing Federation blog](#), 2024)

Where people live should be their choice, and this is equally so for autistic adults and adults with a learning disability. However, the [Housing LIN](#) (Learning and Improvement Network) estimate a shortfall of between 27,000 to 34,500 units of supported housing for autistic people and people with a learning disability by 2037, or around 1,800 to 2,200 units of accommodation per annum.

While there has been a focus on the national housing strategy, and the Government's ambition to build 1.5 million new homes, at a local level there is an opportunity to plan for and deliver more accessible general and supported housing options as a part of that wider strategy.

Local strategies for housing for autistic adults and adults with a learning disability can help local areas to better understand where they are now in relation to housing options, where they would like to be, and identify their next steps and priorities in order to get there. They are essential for medium- and longer-term planning, focussing on a five to 20-year horizon as well as considering the current needs.

This toolkit is funded by DHSC and is designed to support local areas, strategically and methodically, in thinking about and creating their housing strategies for autistic adults and adults with a learning disability. It may additionally support local authorities to meet the anticipated requirements of the [Supported Housing \(Regulatory Oversight\) Act 2023](#).





Considering the diversity of preferences and needs of autistic adults and adults with a learning disability

Autistic adults and adults with a learning disability are as diverse as any other group. When thinking about housing it is essential to understand people's daily lives, goals and preferences as well as any support needs they may have, including a need for specialised design or adapted housing. In relation to the provision of housing options as well as care and support, there are differences in terms of funding streams, and in the housing options likely to be most suitable. As such, in this toolkit we will at times refer to the level of care or support needs of autistic adults and adults with a learning disability.

High needs

This group have a need for a high level of support and may be hospital inpatients or at risk of hospital inpatient admission.

The NHS is more likely to be involved with housing and support and NHS funding such as Continuing Healthcare (CHC) may be available.

High or moderate needs

This group have care and support needs that are eligible for support under the Care Act (2014) and so the local authority may provide this unless the person is a self-funder.

Moderate or low needs

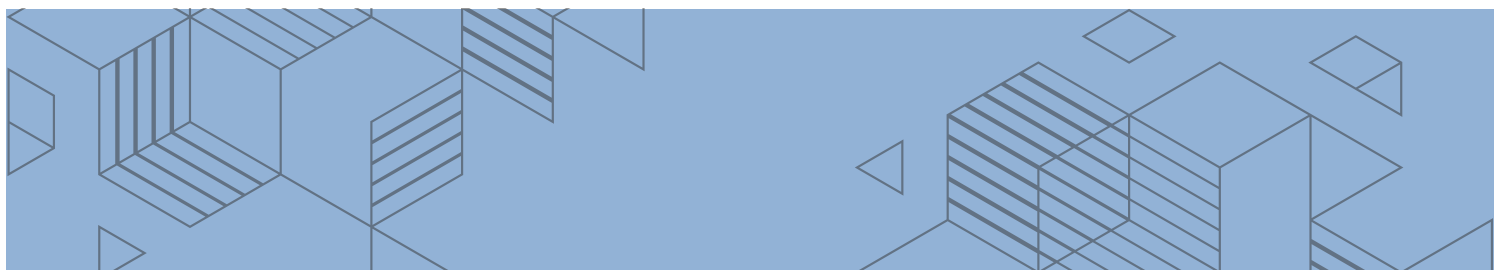
This group does not have care and support needs that meet the criteria for local authority support under the Care Act (2014). While most autistic adults and adults with a learning disability are in this group, they may still benefit from suitable housing options that are difficult to find in the general housing market.



There's no 'one size fits all'

To develop housing options that people want and will choose to live in, housing options cannot only be about people's support needs and the types of housing adaptations that relate to those support needs. Rather, an understanding of the whole person in terms of their preferences, strengths, community, aspirations, family and the potential impact of what may be a significant transition.

A set of housing options are given below, with the ambition being that a range of options are available to meet preferences and needs, to support individuals, families and communities.





Housing options for autistic adults and adults with a learning disability

This section summarises the main models of housing with support for autistic adults and adults with a learning disability. These definitions are based on those outlined by LGA and ADASS in their [housing pipeline resource](#). While these definitions describe a range of typical models that may be developed, in practice features may vary or overlap depending on individuals and the nature of the local area. Options may also be new build or adapted from existing buildings depending on the circumstance. There is more information in relation to design standards in step 6 – Drawing on best practice.

General housing: The majority of autistic adults and adults with a learning disability live in general housing, often with family. This housing may have some adaptations or be accessible. People may need to be supported in relation to accessing appropriate rental agreements, mortgages, shared ownership, etc.

Specialist bespoke supported accommodation: Accommodation built to higher accessibility standards, including considering the design needs of autistic people. Accommodation is either provided as single occupancy bungalows or clustered flats. Normally no shared areas are provided and there are staff facilities on site. New developments may be built to accessibility standards. On-site care is provided 24 hours a day with the number of carers to support each person varying to meet individual needs.

Bespoke single occupancy property: The property may need to be fitted with sound proofing and other design features to support the person living there. The location of the property may need to meet a range of requirements. They are normally a one bed property with another room/space for carers and can be a new build or renovation. On-site care is provided 24 hours a day with the number of carers to support each person varying to meet individual needs.

Purpose built supported accommodation - clustered flats: Mainly provided as single occupancy flats clustered together with some communal areas. The property would normally be built to robust standards and meet accessibility standards. They can be new build or renovation. The level of care and support can vary, with most providing on-site background support 24 hours a day, with the number of carers to support each person varying to meet individual needs.

Purpose built supported accommodation - hub and spoke: The 'hub' is usually long-term accommodation that provides on-site background support. On-site care is provided 24 hours a day with the number of carers to support each person varying to meet individual needs. The 'spoke' refers to dispersed one bedroom accommodation which would receive background support from the hub for those people with lower needs. The spoke may also provide some small, shared units. This accommodation can be new build or renovation.

Designated general needs housing with support - clustered flats: A cluster of designated general needs housing with support flats. Normally this would be a new build development but could involve existing general needs units let outside the normal lettings process. There may only be background support, or it could be combined with one-to-one support.



Community living networks in dispersed housing: This involves support being provided by a combination of paid workers and volunteers to a number of dispersed properties. Dispersed general needs social housing is allocated through the normal council processes, with private rented sector lettings also accessed. Dispersed accommodation can include shared ownership units.

Extra care housing - generic: Extra care housing that is for a mixture of needs and ages. Often it is mainly older people that live there, but also younger adults with disabilities, including people with a learning disability with lower needs. 24-hour background support is provided to all, with individual care based on an assessment of need. These are purpose-built developments that meet accessibility standards. Rental, shared ownership and leasehold may be available.

Extra care housing - older people (also known as integrated retirement communities): Extra care housing for people aged 55 and over. These developments can include older people with a variety of needs, including people with a learning disability who require low-level support. 24-hour background support is provided to all, with individual care based on an assessment of need. These are purpose-built developments that meet accessibility standards. Rental, shared ownership and leasehold may be available.

Shared Lives: Offers people who require care and support the opportunity to live independently in the community and can be an alternative to living in supported housing. The Shared Lives scheme matches people with an approved carer. The carer shares their family and community life. Some people live with their Shared Lives carer, while others are regular day-time visitors. Some people combine day-time visits with overnight stays.



How to use the toolkit

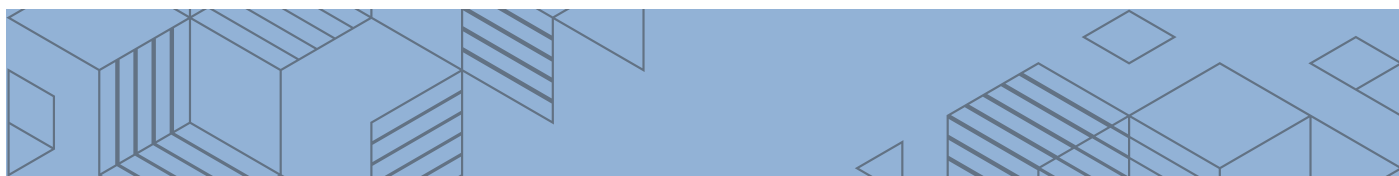
This toolkit is designed to be flexible around the needs, context and existing strategies, policies and structures within a local area. It can be taken as a whole, or different steps can be used to guide individual activities. We have suggested an order for each activity or 'step', but this too can be flexible.

Population or housing types

Local areas should decide which population they will focus on. While the main intention for the toolkit is for it to be inclusive of all autistic adults and adults with a learning disability in a local area, it could be used to focus on those who draw on care and support or a sub-group within that. The toolkit should be used for the groups and housing types that are most helpful to that area and the process and steps are also appropriate to other groups such as physically disabled people.

Steps

The steps outlined are those identified as needed to create an outward facing strategy for a local area. As outlined in the following sections on leadership and vision and co-production principles, these should be grounded in strong partnership working and co-production with autistic adults and adults with a learning disability and their families. This will enable organisations and funders



to understand the key needs and attributes of a local area in relation to housing for autistic adults and adults with a learning disability and what the priorities and expectations are of that local authority. An outward facing strategy can encourage greater engagement with organisations and funders and provide them with the information they need to guide decisions about potential investment. We highlight which steps relate to which section of a strategy and vice versa.

It may be that a fully detailed strategy is not yet achievable, but a combination of steps will still provide helpful insights to guide and prioritise local activities. Local areas should dip into the toolkit as they find helpful, using the steps to build on what they already have, or as a way of getting started.

Related strategies and reports

Local authorities, as well as other organisations may already have other related or relevant reports and strategies, either relating specifically to autistic adults and adults with a learning disability or to wider housing, health, social care and community. The aim is not to try and encompass them all in one plan, but to build on, signpost and make all those involved in a local plan for housing for autistic adults and adults with a learning disability aware of the range of activities that may be happening across groups and departments.

In the future, one such related activity within local authorities relates to the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023 which gained royal ascent on 29 August 2023 with formal consultation on the draft regulations running from February to May, 2025. The Act relates to supported exempt accommodation (supported housing that is exempt from the usual caps of housing benefit level), some of which is housing for autistic adults and adults with a learning disability. The Act includes obligations on local authorities to develop strategic supported housing plans quantifying existing supply and local need.

From strategy to delivery

This toolkit supports the creation of a strategy and is not a guide for the delivery of that plan. However, by bringing together a housing partnership and developing a strategy, issues in relation to the delivery of that plan will certainly arise. There is an opportunity to be discussing and moving forward with changes within local planning policy and within local health and social care planning that would better support the delivery of the strategy. That will be more likely if the relevant partners have been involved in the development of the strategy from the outset.



Getting started – vision and leadership

Housing for autistic adults and adults with a learning disability



Introduction

Developing a strategy for housing for autistic adults and adults with a learning disability, is not something one department can do on its own. Many examples of housing options for autistic people and people with a learning disability involve multiple organisations and fundings streams as well as people and their families. Therefore, a strategy also needs to reflect the essential role of partnership working and the range of expertise, experience, and perspectives it can bring. Ideally, any strategy should be shaped by what we are referring to as a 'housing partnership'.

A housing partnership can:

- Ensure the right people are in the room with the range of expertise needed to develop a robust housing plan.
- Support co-production and shared decision-making with autistic adults and adults with a learning disability, their families, and the wider community.
- Help identify local data and information held by different partners to avoid duplicating effort.
- Ensure buy-in of any plan, greatly enabling the delivery of that plan.
- Ensure that people's housing rights and rights under the Care Act (2014) are understood and prioritised across teams and organisations.





Who could be part of a housing partnership?

Every local area is different, but some of the key groups that should be involved in the various stages of local plans for housing for autistic adults and adults with a learning disability are:

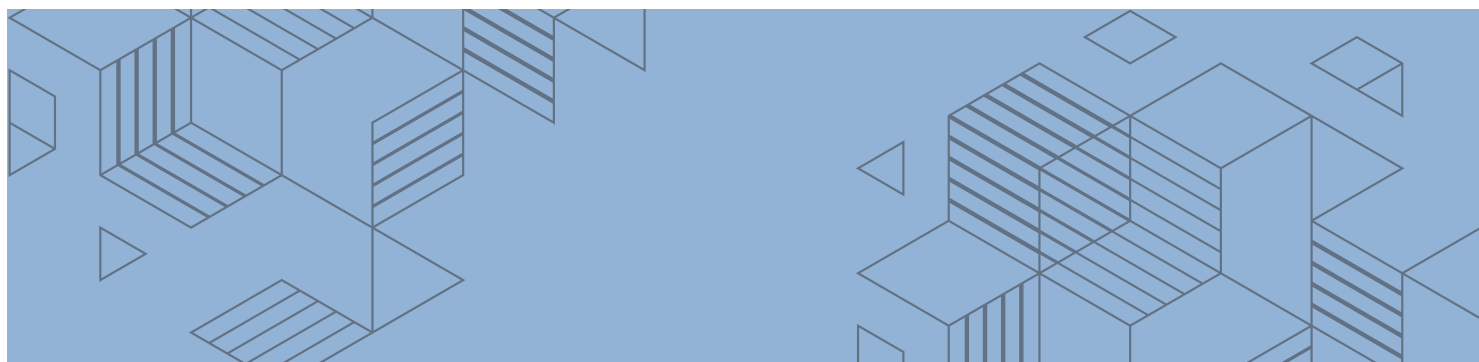
- Autistic adults and adults with a learning disability, family carers, representative groups, charities, user-led and community groups
- Senior local authority leaders and executives focussed on housing, social care, autistic adults and adults with a learning disability
- Local authority social services, occupational therapists, social workers, community workers and older adults teams
- Local authority housing and planning departments, housing benefits lead, disabled facilities grant lead, as well as finance/corporate resources that relates to housing and/or autistic adults and adults with a learning disability
- Senior NHS leaders, including those focussed on autistic adults and adults with a learning disability
- Local authority and NHS commissioners (covering all ages, including mental health, specialist learning disability and autism commissioners)
- NHS discharge teams, community health and occupational therapists and multiagency teams
- Elected members: County, Borough Parish or Town councillors
- Builders, planners and architects
- Social care providers
- Registered and unregistered social housing providers
- Property developers and property investors.



General advice and signposting

There are organisations that may be relevant locally that would be useful to speak to for general advice and signposting to key information, but who may not join a local housing partnership. These include:

- The Care Quality Commission (CQC)
- NHS England's learning disability and autism regional senior housing manager
- Mayoral Combined Authority housing strategy team.





Getting the right people in the room

Bringing together a local housing partnership can be difficult, both to initiate and to sustain. Local areas will already have some joint working and partnerships in place, but these can often be for specific delivery activities rather than wider prioritisation and planning.

To bring an initial group together requires leadership and time to be set aside for relationship building. Joint priorities should be established early so that everyone can see the overall aims and where they or their organisation fits in. Attention should be paid to the language being used, including acronyms and jargon. Try to ensure all conversations are as accessible as possible to all groups. Responsibilities and areas of expertise should be established so everyone can see how they can contribute to the strategy and what responsibility they will have.

Developing a long-term vision for the area can mean stepping away from day-to-day delivery pressures. Having a mixed perspective in the room can support people to think creatively about a housing future for the area.



LEADERSHIP

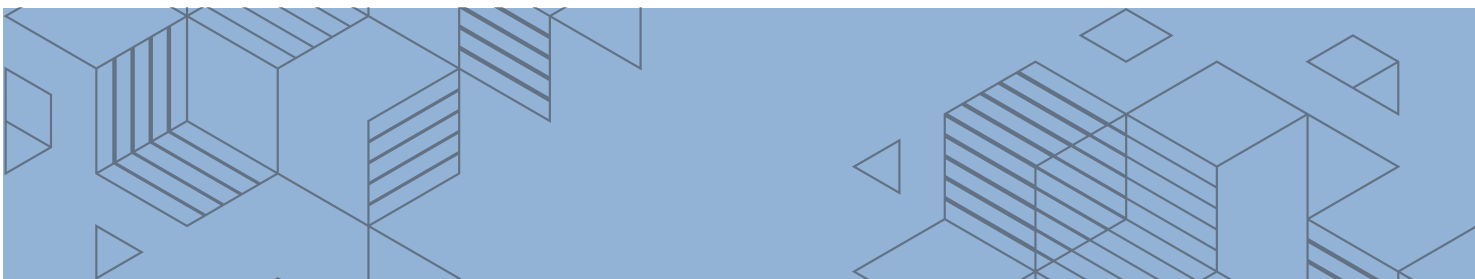
While a local housing partnership is pivotal in developing a housing plan for autistic adults and adults with a learning disability that meets the needs of the area, leadership is needed to ensure there is support and buy-in at a senior level, including the local authority and the Integrated Care Partnership.

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) could support the setting out of next steps at a senior level and to demonstrate the ambition of any plan and the development of that plan.



Funding and resource to develop a strategy

Additional resource and/or funding is likely to be needed to develop an inclusive and implementable strategy. Local authorities that have undertaken or are in the process of undertaking these activities have applied for funding for a post to support or lead on this work. The toolkit can be a useful way to outline the activities that need to be undertaken and why they are important.





CASE STUDY: THE 'SERIOUS GAME' FOR BUILDING A HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

As part of the Greater Manchester (GM) adult social care transformation programme, the complex needs project brings together commissioners, support providers and housing providers to develop the right support solutions for people. The project is led by the GM Directors of Adult Social Services.

The overall aim of the project is to enable people to have the right support in the right place at the right time, and to live gloriously ordinary lives.

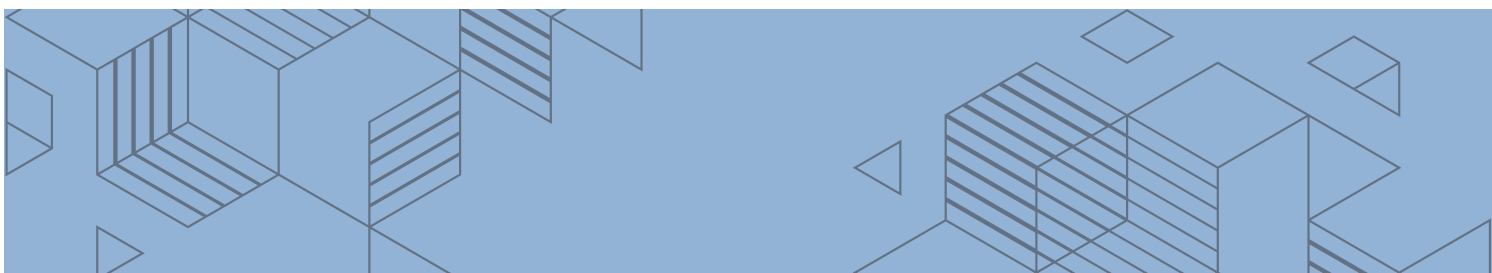
The foundations of the Greater Manchester complex needs project were extensively co-produced with people and families who have lived experience of learning disability, autism, and of using mental health services. This approach is embedded within the ongoing project.

Since June 2022, the project has supported 18 people with learning disabilities, autism and mental health needs to resettlement from long-term hospital placements from across England, into nine newly created supported living properties in Greater Manchester. A further 14 people will move into new homes during 2025. Two small apartment schemes for autistic young people are being created in Manchester, which will open in 2026 and 2027.

Every new project starts with an understanding of where people aspire to live and with whom, their sensory and environmental considerations for housing, their health goals and support preferences. This person-centred approach keeps people at the heart of the project – and has led to more successful and sustained outcomes after people are discharged from hospital.

The overall approach is supported by a number of enablers:

- A Greater Manchester complex needs framework of nine great support providers, each appointed with different specialisms. People requiring different forms of support can be best matched to the most appropriate provider for them.
- A Greater Manchester housing provider agreement. This includes seven registered housing providers who have committed to developing the best kinds of supported housing for people being discharged through the complex needs project.
- A memorandum of understanding (MOU). The purpose of this agreement is to have clear, reciprocal arrangements across Greater Manchester local authorities and NHS Greater Manchester, for whenever support arrangements are commissioned through the complex needs project. The MOU clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the placing authority and host authorities. A copy of the MOU can be found [here](#).



The fourth 'enabler' is the maturity and breadth of the relationships and leadership.

The project benefits from the unwavering support and leadership of the 10 Directors of Adult Social Services in Greater Manchester. It is hosted by an established Adult Social Care Transformation Team, led by Director Jo Chilton.

This quality of vision and leadership has been pivotal for the project leads to drive financially committed supported housing programmes with registered housing provider partners, which are choosing to develop great homes, in high quality areas where people want to live. It has also enabled project leads to negotiate supportive conversations with commissioners across Greater Manchester, on behalf of people seeking discharge so they can begin living in homes and places tailored to their preferences.

For further information:

Fiona Charnock, Senior Project Manager – Learning Disabilities, Autism and Complex Needs. Fiona.chnock@nhs.net

Debbie Simister, Senior Programme Manager – Learning Disabilities and Autism. Deborah.simister@nhs.net



Co-producing a place-based strategy for housing for autistic adults and adults with a learning disability



Introduction

Co-producing a strategy will help to ensure that decisions about housing for autistic adults and adults with a learning disability, priorities and investment opportunities are in line with the needs of the local community. Co-production will benefit the strategy case by helping the partnership with:

- A better understanding of people's vision, aspirations, and housing needs.
- Understanding new unmet needs previously not identified.
- Increasing the level of buy-in and uptake of the strategy, in particular the housing with care and support options proposed, thereby facilitating implementation and upscaling.
- Developing a collaborative relationship between partners, customers, and stakeholders that will be key for delivering housing options for autistic adults and adults with a learning disability.

As well as the benefits outlined above, co-production will help the partnership navigate the different steps of the toolkit. The guidance supports co-production for each step of the toolkit, and the strategy as a whole, and is rooted in SCIE's principles for co-production, presented below.

It is not assumed that those involved in a housing partnership would already be experienced in co-production and so they may need support and skills development. Similarly, autistic adults and adults with a learning disability and others in the community who participate in co-production may benefit from additional support with some activities and opportunities to gain skills for them to fully engage and contribute. It may help to view it as a joint journey where no one starts off with all the answers, but everyone is willing to learn.

The co-production approach for this toolkit was developed in partnership with members of the [Pro-Active Community](#) co-production group. We thank all members for their invaluable involvement.



Principles of co-production

Equality

One of the key benefits of co-producing a business case is to gain insights from and share decision-making power with people who are experts in their own housing, care and support needs. Their views are key to the successful delivery of housing options for autistic adults and adults with a learning disability and their input should have equal weight in deciding the development priorities proposed in the business plan.

Diversity

It is key to ensure that the co-production process is inclusive and that all key groups are represented. All groups should also be able to confidently express their views and the decision-making process should reflect an accurate representation of local people's needs.

Accessibility

It is fundamental to maximise people's involvement and to ensure that individuals feel confident and motivated to fully engage in discussions and decision-making. This means ensuring that individuals have the same conditions and opportunities to take part in the process and that barriers are removed. It includes creating a friendly environment, and adapting ways of information sharing and discussion to meet the needs of different groups, thereby facilitating their involvement.

Reciprocity

This is a key concept in co-production and has been defined as ensuring that people benefit from their contributions and everyone 'receives something back from putting something in'. The idea has been linked to 'mutuality' and all parties involved having responsibilities and expectations. Putting reciprocity into practice can help to create a sense of togetherness. There is no doubt that people with lived experience can offer invaluable expertise, and it is important to consider offering payment for their contribution and time.



'I' AND 'WE' STATEMENTS

To support the development of the business case for housing for autistic adults and adults with a learning disability, we have outlined a set of statements to highlight the types of co-production outcomes associated with each of the steps. Please note that these statements are illustrative, and we encourage housing partnerships to adapt them as they see fit to best reflect their local context. The statements are divided in 'I' statements that suggest key outcomes for individuals co-producing the step, and 'We' statements that suggest actions and outcomes to be delivered by the partnership facilitating the development of the strategy. This approach is based on TLAP's (Think Local, Act Personal) 'Making it Real' framework that aims to facilitate the personalisation of care and support. The framework has been applied in different areas of social care including in [Care Quality Commission Assessment Framework](#) and on people's tenancy agreement in different local authorities. Further information can be found [here](#).

SCIE and TLAP have developed guidance on how to effectively plan and run co-production. This guidance can be helpful to support the co-production of the business case and give insights on how to effectively include people with lived experience in the decision-making process. More details can be found on ['Co-production: what it is and how to do it'](#) and summary along with practice examples can be found [here](#).



What is important for me – views of people with lived experience

SCIE spoke to a group of adults with learning disabilities, some of whom are also autistic

scie social care institute for excellence

“What is important to you when thinking about where you would like to live?”

Accessibility and security

 Access to a garden

Adjustable worktops in the kitchen



Door security buzzers that let me see who's outside



Some prefer to share, others prefer having their own property



Whether sharing or living alone, people like to have some space to themselves

Some people like the social aspects of sharing

Some people would find sharing 'a nightmare'

Location



We want to choose who and what we live near to

Close to the shops

Close to family, partners and friends



Near public transport such as trains and buses

Near to green spaces for walking and seeing nature



It is good to have a range of options so people can choose



USEFUL LINKS

- [Where I Want to Live – Where I want to live toolkit](#)
- [The Challenging Behaviour Foundation – Co-production best practice](#)
- [Housing LIN TAPPI – Co-production guide](#)
- [Housing LIN CollaborAGE – Co-production and community approaches](#)
- [Brain in Hand – Step-by-step practical guide to co-producing with autistic people](#)
- [SCIE – Tackling inequalities in care for people with learning disabilities and autistic people](#)
- [SCIE – Supporting co-production](#)
- [Think Local Act Personal \(TLAP\) – Co-production resources](#)
- [Think Local Act Personal \(TLAP\) – Make it Real Framework](#)



First published in Great Britain in March 2025 by the Social Care Institute for Excellence

© SCIE All rights reserved

www.scie.org.uk

Updated in March 2025

Toolkit available at: <https://www.scie.org.uk/housing/toolkit-for-place-based-strategies-for-housing-for-autistic-adults-and-adults-with-a-learning-disability/>

