

JSNA Health and Wellbeing Profile 2025/26

Learning Disabilities and Autism

Summary points

- There are around 9,970 adults (18+) predicted to have some level of learning disability in Bristol in 2025, forecast to increase to 10,470 in 2030.
- 4,100 adults (18+) are predicted to have some level of autistic spectrum condition in 2025, forecast to increase to 4,325 in 2030.
- Approximately 2,630 pupils are recorded as having a learning disability in Bristol schools and over 1,860 pupils are recorded as having some level of autistic spectrum condition¹
- There are approximately 3,550 pupils in Bristol schools with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan - Autism spectrum condition is cited as the primary need for a third of pupils.

Adults with Learning Disabilities

Data from GP patient registers² in 2024/25 indicates there are around 3,165 people (all ages, including children) recorded as having a Learning Disability (LD) in Bristol. This will focus mainly on those with moderate to severe LD who are more likely to require support. This represents 0.54% of the GP patient population, which is slightly lower than the England average (0.59%). NHS England have published guidance for General Practice: [‘Improving identification of people with a learning disability’](#) which cites reasons for low identification experienced in Core Cities such as Bristol, which includes barriers to accessing healthcare services, language and cultural differences, diagnostic inconsistencies and accuracy of GP coding on systems.

Additional data for the same period shows that 1,200 adults (18+) with a learning disability are getting long-term support from Bristol City Council, equivalent to a rate of 3.0 per 1,000 population. This is lower than the England average of 3.2 per 1,000 population and the Core City average of 3.2 per 1,000 population (Figure 1).

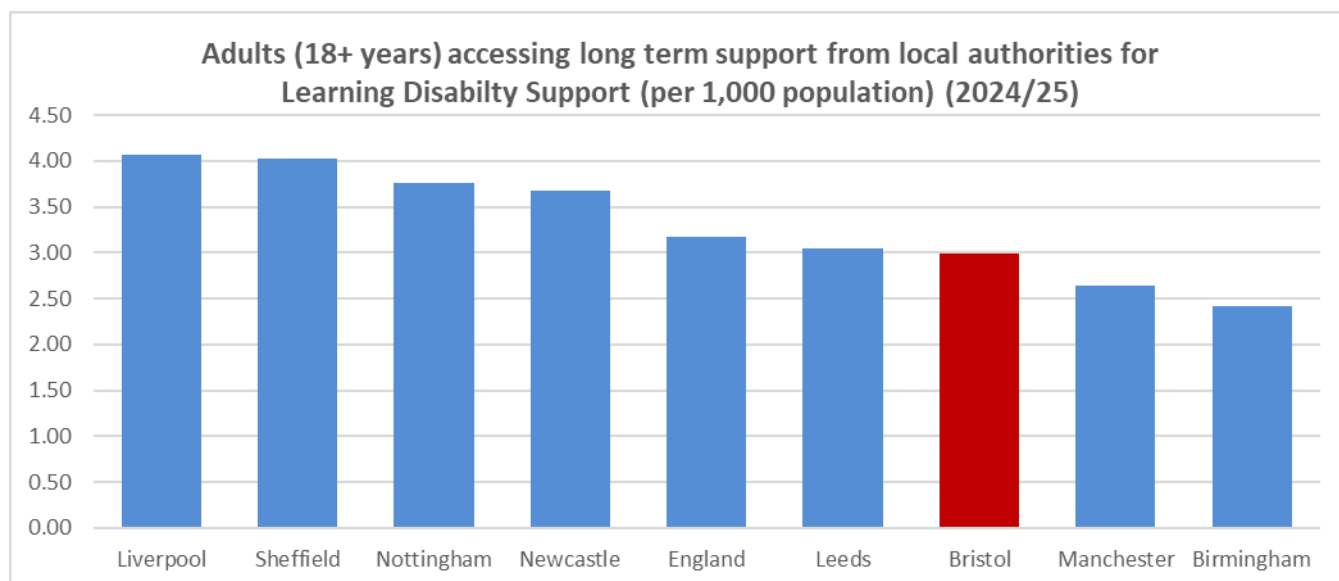


Fig 1: Adults with learning disability getting long-term support from local authorities (per 1,000 population – Core Cities using 2024 MYE population data from ONS) Source: NHS Digital: Adult Social Care Activity and Finance Report, England 2024/25.

¹ School Census – January 2025

² NHS Quality Outcomes Framework, QOF, 2024/25.

Data from the Institute of Public Care³ estimates that there are around 9,970 adults (18+) predicted to have some level of learning disability in Bristol in 2025. Of these, around 2,155 adults are estimated to have a moderate or severe learning disability. This is predicted to rise to 10,470 adults with some level of learning disability and 2,260 adults with a moderate or severe learning disability in 2030.

BCC Adult Social Care data for 2024/25 shows approximately⁴:

- 275 adults with a LD are in care homes
- 766 adults with a LD (aged 18+) receive a community support service
- 131 adults with a LD receive a direct payment to support their needs
- 53 adults with a LD receive domestic care
- 36 adults with a LD receive extra care housing

Figure 2 below shows a 21% increase in demand for the community support service over the past ten years, highlighting an increase in people with LD being supported to live in the community. The number of adults over the age of 65 receiving a community support service has more than doubled over this period from approximately 58 in 2015/16 to over 120 in 2024/25, highlighting an increasing trajectory in this age group.

In line with the [social model of disability](#), Bristol City Council will seek to support people with an LD living in the community because of the benefits this offers for the person at the centre and their communities, including improved wellbeing, enhanced life skills and improved physical health. If supported to be in employment, the benefits are amplified.

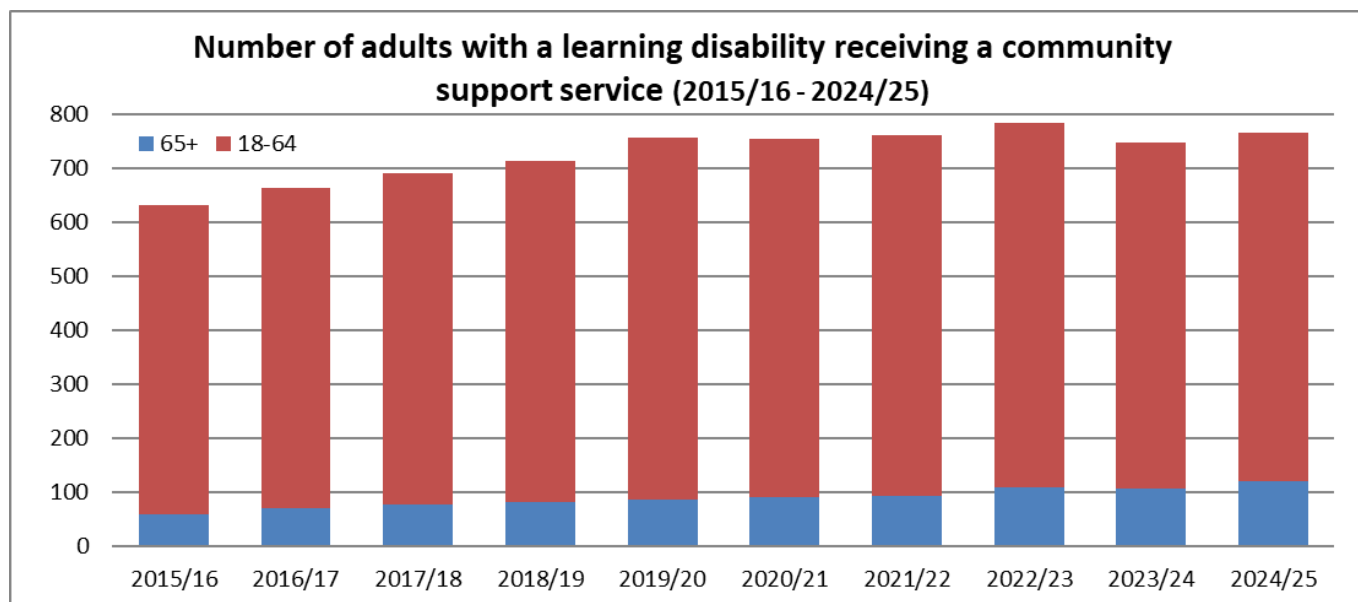


Figure 2: Number of adults with an LD who receive a community based service by age group: Source: BCC ASC Power BI, February 2026

Equalities data: Of these adults with LD in the community, 645 (82%) were aged 18 – 64 and 121 (16%) were aged 65 and over. 38% (292) of adults were female and 62% (474) were male.

³ Institute of Public Care provides projection data for older people ([POPPI](#)) and adults ([PANSI](#)).

⁴ A small number of clients may utilise more than 1 service

By ethnicity 81.1% of adults were White, 6.8% were of Black / African / Caribbean / Black British ethnicity, 4.3% were of Asian / Asian British ethnicity and 4% were of Mixed / Multiple ethnicity.

Children with Learning Difficulties

According to the School Census (January 2025) there were around 2,630 pupils recorded as having a Learning Difficulty in Bristol schools, including 1,450 children with a specific learning difficulty, 955 children with a moderate learning difficulty, around 140 with a severe learning difficulty and 85 with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

There are approximately 3,550 pupils in Bristol schools with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan, which is just over 5% of school pupils. The most common need type for an EHC plan is Autism Spectrum Disorder which accounts for nearly a third of plans. Educational outcomes are significantly lower for children with an EHC plan.

The proportion of pupils with an EHC plan has been increasing year on year highlighting increasing demand for support and to ensure wellbeing but impacts upon schools through additional pressure on staff resources, funding and availability of school places.

Further information is available in the JSNA section '[Special Educational Needs and Disability \(SEND\)](#)'.

People with Learning Difficulties: health inequalities

People with learning disabilities have poorer health than the general population. Difficulties in getting effective healthcare when it is needed can prevent people who have a learning disability from remaining well and independent⁵. National research⁶ from a few years ago has shown that men with learning disabilities die an average 13 years sooner than the wider population and women die 20 years sooner, and that there are increased rates of health conditions for people with learning disabilities, including epilepsy, mental health and heart disease.

Improving health inequalities requires combined approaches from health and social care agencies, including integrated care models and a focus on community and asset based support. Employment status is a key determinant of health with unemployment and poor-quality work contributing significantly to health inequalities. '[We work for everyone](#)' is an example of an initiative supporting people with an LD into paid employment', and Bristol City Council work with employment navigators to increase the numbers of people referred in to the service, including young people with an LD.

Autistic Spectrum Conditions

According to The National Autistic Society "Autism is a lifelong developmental disability which affects how people communicate and interact with the world. One in 100 people are on the autism spectrum and there are around 700,000 autistic adults and children in the UK".

⁵ Statement from Public Health England [Learning Disability Profiles](#)

⁶ "Confidential Inquiry into premature deaths of people with learning disabilities"; University of Bristol, 2013; www.bristol.ac.uk/cipold

www.bristol.gov.uk/jsna

In terms of overall population prevalence⁷, there are estimated to be 4,100 adults (18+) in Bristol with some level of autistic spectrum condition in 2025. These numbers are predicted to increase to 4,325 by 2030.

Equalities data: By age group, there are estimated to be 590 older people (aged 65+) and 3,510 people aged 18-64 with some level of autistic spectrum condition. The growth of people aged 65+ with some level of autistic spectrum is forecast to increase by 6.3% by 2030 compared to an increase of 5.3% in the 18 to 64 age group. There is a significant gender gap between adults with some level of autistic spectrum condition with males accounting for 90% of all adults and females accounting for 10% of all adults.

BCC Adult Social Care data shows that 147 adults aged 18-64 received support for autism during 2023/24, including 140 adults who received a community support service of which 45 received a direct payment to support their personal needs.

For children, more detailed information is available through Special Educational Needs data. The School Census shows there were approximately 1,860 pupils recorded with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder in Bristol schools in January 2025.

Further data / links / consultations:

- **Learning Disability Profiles** - a range of data about people with learning disabilities at Local Authority level
- [The national strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- [Adult Social Care Activity and Finance Report, England, 2022-24 - NHS Digital](#)

Support links:

- Bristol City Council services: [Help for people with learning difficulties](#)
- Bristol City Council services: [Support for parents of children with autism](#)
- Bristol City Council services: [Support for autistic people](#)
- [BASS Autism Services for Adults](#)

Covid-19 impact:

Research by the London School of Economics and by autism charities [Left stranded](#) report found that the pandemic has had a significant impact on autistic people and have exacerbated many of the inequalities autistic people already faced like loneliness, anxiety and exclusion from public spaces, as well as creating new challenges. The government have used these findings and refreshed their 'national strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026', aiming to improve the lives of autistic people, their families and carers.

Date updated: February 2026

Date of next update: February 2027

⁷ Projecting Adult Needs and Service Information (PANSI) and Projecting Older People Population Information System (POPPI)