

Sensory Impairment Strategic Plan

2024 to 2034

Table of Contents

National Picture	1
Introduction: A Community of Ingenuity	1
1.Summary	2
2.Data and information	4
Hearing loss and deafness explained	4
Visual Impairment and Blindness explained	4
The Current Picture	5
Visual Impairment Registrations	7
Impairment Causes	7
Kirklees Impairment Statistics	8
Current Living in Kirklees (CLiK) Report findings	8
Additional challenges for individuals with Impairments	8
People’s experiences	9
3.General understanding of types of support available	9
4. Kirklees Promise: People with sensory impairment will be involved in the design and delivery of activities, support, and services relevant to them ...	10
5. What matters most to people and what’s working well	11
What matters most to people – Seven Themes	11
What’s already working well	12
6.What matter most: Shared goals	13

National Picture

The Number of people living with sight loss will have doubled by 2050.

- www.rnib.org.uk/ [Royal National Institute for Blind People](#)

Hearing loss affects one in three adults

- <https://rnid.org.uk/> [Royal National Institute for Deaf People](#)

Historic legal recognition of BSL language is in place since the BSL act 2022

This strategic plan is part of the vision for Adult Social Care in Kirklees. It emphasises building on individual strengths, leveraging assistive technology, and working with key partners and individuals to support adults in maintaining or regaining independence. While the plan focuses on adults with sensory impairments or loss, it does not exclude provisions for children with impairments.

- [Adult social care strategy](#)

People who are blind, partially sighted, deaf, hard of hearing, or living with both hearing and sight loss contributed to the development of this plan.

This strategic plan is intended for anyone interested in or affected by sensory impairment and the inclusion of people in shaping public services. This includes residents, volunteers, professionals in public services or the third sector, academics, researchers, and policymakers. Please share it widely with teams, groups, and managers.

Introduction: A Community of Ingenuity

People with sight and/or hearing loss in Kirklees have a proud history of competence, self-reliance, creativity, and national recognition. Chief Executive Officers, volunteers, carers, and technology experts all contribute to building thriving, inclusive, and resilient communities across the area. Kirklees offers a wide range of support and services:

- **Huddersfield Deaf Centre**
 - Organises and facilitates workshops, training, social events, and information sessions. Members have self-organised into a reference group to help provide strategic direction to districtwide planning. Connects members to events in West Yorkshire.
- [Tandem Trekkers](#)

- Based in Huddersfield. Started with 3 members and has grown to over 80. Take their fundraising efforts, promotion and awareness raising across the North of England.

- **Huddersfield Macular Society**

- A self-help organisation run by people who are partially sighted or blind. Organise social events and information sessions. Involved in befriending, advocacy, coaching and buddying schemes and raising awareness of Macular conditions.

- **Outlookers**

- A member led organisation that runs support services throughout Kirklees for people with visual impairments. Our aim is to enhance the lives of visually impaired people through promoting the benefits of peer support and the use of technology to aid independence.

- [Community Directory](#)

- Online events, support, and services available.

- Local voluntary and community groups

- Providing expert training and shared knowledge.

- [National organisations that support the sensory community go to chapter 3 \(page 12 and 13\).](#)

Sensory loss or impairment can significantly impact a person's quality of life, often causing fear and confusion. People may need additional support to adapt, enabling them to remain connected with loved ones, participate in their communities, and have a voice in their care.

Those with sight or hearing impairments—or both—may require extra assistance to stay engaged in daily life. Communities also face ongoing challenges, including the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the current cost-of-living crisis.

1. Summary

Our approach to this work has been collaborative, connecting with the sensory community to share knowledge and define common goals. This process has revealed clear messages and seven key themes for action:

- **Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic:**
The pandemic continues to limit social connections. Nearly half of people with hearing loss feel partially or completely isolated, while those with visual impairments describe going out as a “sheer act of bravery.” Peer support and

social opportunities are highly valued, reflecting the shared sentiment: *“There’s more to life than services.”*

- **Access to Technology and Communication:**
Young people want access to innovative technology, while all groups stressed the need for diverse and accessible communication methods tailored to individual needs.
- **Registration for Visual Impairments:**
Increasing registrations, such as issuing Certificates of Visual Impairment for those who are partially sighted or blind, remains a priority.
- **Networking Opportunities for the Deaf Community:**
Greater opportunities for connection and networking within the deaf community are needed.
- **Amplifying Voices and Co-Production:**
Many expressed a strong desire to have a greater voice in shaping services, encapsulated by the statement:
“I am actively involved and encouraged to co-produce activities that affect the place where I live and the services I use.”
- **Key Touchpoints for Engagement:**
Opportunities to connect with the sensory community include:
 - During hospital discharge.
 - In the places where people live and work.
 - Through voluntary and community activities.
 - Within education services.
- **Ageing Well and Sensory Health:**
The council and its partners prioritise ageing well, a strategy that strongly aligns with the needs of the sensory community. For example, individuals with moderate hearing loss are three times more likely to develop dementia.
- **British Sign Language (BSL) Services:**
BSL provision must be bespoke, local, and consistent across health, education, and social care. Clear feedback channels should be established to improve quality and availability. Services like Text Direct and Sign Live are highly valued.
- **Consistency in Technical Solutions:**
Tools like Sign Live are helpful but inconsistently applied. Contracts and technical solutions should be standardized to ensure equal access.
- **Accessible Buildings:**
Some buildings are already equipped with technology to support those with hearing loss or deafness. These facilities should be utilised wherever possible.

- **One-Stop Resource Hub in Kirklees:**

A one stop shop experience for professionals and individuals with sensory impairments is a valued idea. It could:

- Showcase new technology with a "try before you buy" approach.
- Support collaboration between professionals and the sensory community, including ongoing support for the deaf community.
- Raise awareness among professionals, such as social workers and GPs.

2.Data and information

The data and insights in this report provide an overview of the sensory impaired community in the UK and Kirklees.

We hope it fosters understanding of the challenges faced by this community, highlights their importance, and raises awareness. By working together, we can build a more supportive and inclusive community for everyone.

Hearing loss and deafness explained

A person with hearing loss has a hearing threshold of 20 dB or worse in one or both ears. Hearing loss can range from mild to profound and may make it difficult to hear normal speech or loud sounds.

People who are "deaf" typically have profound hearing loss, meaning they have little to no hearing and often use sign language for communication.

Source: [World Health Organisation fact sheet Blindness and visual impairment](#)

Visual Impairment and Blindness explained

The International Classification of Diseases (2018) classifies vision impairment into two types: distance and near vision impairment.

Visual acuity, measured using an eye chart, indicates the sharpness of vision. The top number shows your distance from the chart, while the bottom number indicates the distance at which someone with normal vision could read the same line.

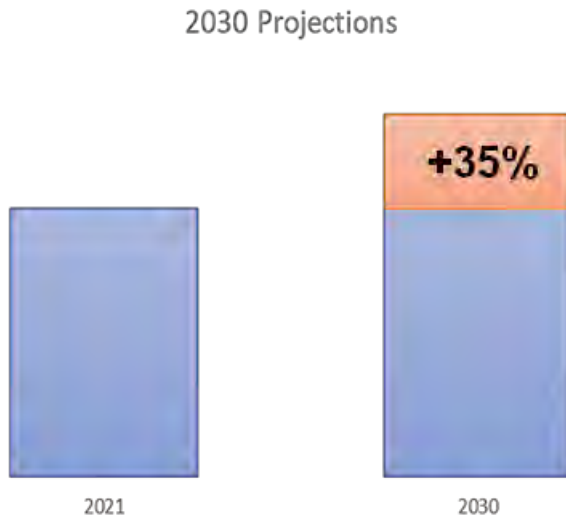
For example, 6/18 vision means that at six feet, you can read what most people can see from 18 feet. A person with blindness may only see an object from three feet away or not at all, while most people can see it from 60 feet away.

Source: [American Academy of Ophthalmology. What does 20 / 20 vision mean?](#)

The Current Picture

Sight loss currently affects around two million people in the UK. Projections indicate that this number will rise by a third, reaching over 2.7 million by 2030.

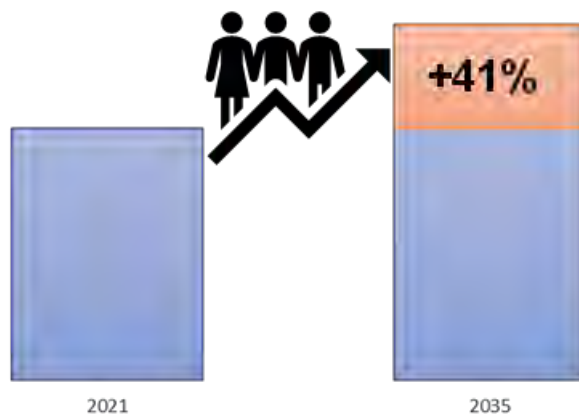
Graph 1 Sight loss 2030 projections



The graph above shows a projected 35% increase in the number of people living with sight loss by 2030.

The graph below estimates that approximately 11 million people in the UK currently have hearing loss, making it the second most common disability. By 2035, this number is expected to rise to around 15.6 million, a 41% increase.

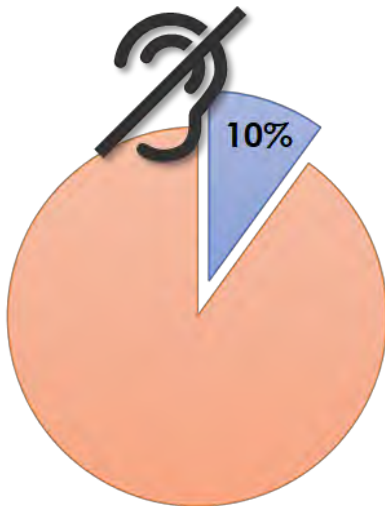
Graph 2 Population increases for hearing loss by 2030



In Kirklees, 11,800 people live with sight loss, including 1,790 with blindness. By 2030, the number of people with sight loss is expected to rise to 17,350, a 27% increase from 2021.

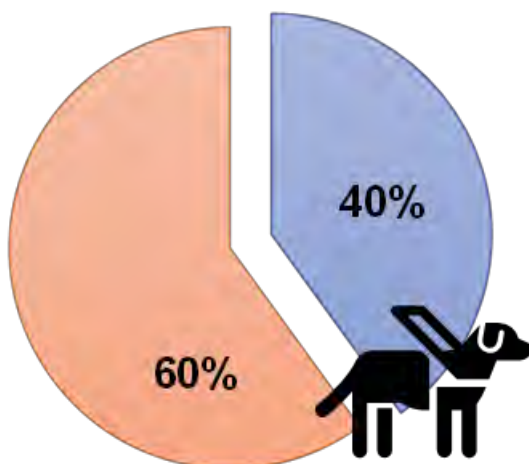
The graph below estimates that 44,000 people in Kirklees have moderate or severe hearing impairment, and 950 have profound hearing impairment, making up 10% of the local population.

Pie chart 1 Percentage living with a hearing impairment



The following graph shows that people with sight loss are more than twice as likely to experience unhappiness or depression compared to the UK average. Over 40% of blind and partially sighted individuals report feeling moderately or completely isolated from those around them.

Pie chart 2 People living with blindness and partial sight who are experiencing depression or unhappiness



Every day, 250 people in the UK begin to lose their sight, with only one in four remaining in employment.

Nearly 74% of respondents reported that their hearing loss limits their employment opportunities.

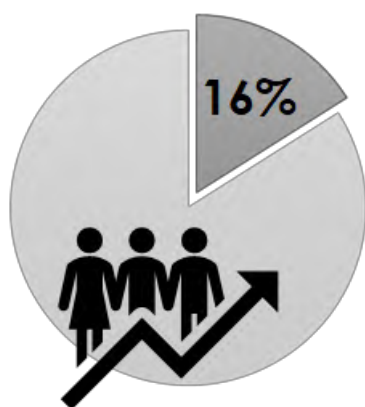
In Kirklees, an estimated 2,630 people are living with some degree of dual sensory loss, including around 1,000 with severe dual sensory loss.

Visual Impairment Registrations

The graph below shows that in Kirklees, only 2,180 (16%) of the 13,590 people with sight loss are registered as blind or partially sighted.

Registration as visually impaired or severely visually impaired is voluntary and confidential, but it provides access to additional support. The council maintains a register and is committed to working with individuals to raise awareness of its benefits and assist with the registration process.

Pie chart 3 People registered as blind or partially sighted



Impairment Causes

The main causes of sight impairment in adults include:

- Age-related macular degeneration
- Glaucoma
- Cataracts
- Genetics

The most common causes of hearing loss include:

- Ageing
- Noise exposure
- Head trauma
- Virus or disease

- Genetics

Kirklees Impairment Statistics

- An estimated 27,057 people aged 18-64 in Kirklees have hearing loss.
- An estimated 53,228 people aged 65 and over in Kirklees have hearing loss.
- An estimated 2,810 people aged 18-64 in Kirklees have sight loss.
- An estimated 10,780 people aged 65 and over in Kirklees have sight loss.

Current Living in Kirklees (CLiK) Report findings

This summary report presents key findings from the Current Living in Kirklees (CLiK) Survey 2021. The survey gathered responses from 6,208 Kirklees residents, both through paper and online formats.

Half of the respondents with a reported health condition indicated they had hearing loss. Many expressed that even mild to moderate hearing loss negatively impacts their daily life.

Only 144 individuals with a health condition self-reported sight loss, which is significantly lower than the actual figures.

This indicates a low participation rate, with people who have sight loss highlighting that access to information and opportunities to participate need significant improvement.

Additional challenges for individuals with Impairments

Disabled individuals are more likely to experience crime than non-disabled people. A report from the Equality and Human Rights Commission found that disabled people are more likely to feel unsafe walking alone in their local area during the day and more likely to worry about physical attacks and acquisitive crime.

The 2017 London Assembly Health Committee report found that disabled and deaf individuals are more prone to depression, with deaf people being twice as likely to experience it.

Adults with disabilities face additional barriers, including:

- More challenges in finding employment, often due to a lack of qualifications and unfair treatment at work.
- Difficulty accessing transport.
- Higher likelihood of being victims of crime.
- Greater risk of living in deprivation with poor-quality or unsuitable housing.

- Increased loneliness and unhappiness.

People with hearing loss face reduced job prospects and, on average, earn less than the general population. By 2030, adult-onset hearing loss is projected to be among the top ten disease burdens in the UK, surpassing conditions like cataracts and diabetes in terms of disability-adjusted life years.

People's experiences

- “Going into town is a sheer act of bravery”
- “Everyday interactions knock your confidence”
- Going out feels like an obstacle course
- “We feel deprived as changes are made without our input” for example, bicycle lanes, bus routes, road closures
- “The statistics for individuals with depression seem lower than I expected.
- “Having to retire early due to a hearing impairment”
- “I was unable to have an interpreter in the delivery room when I was having my baby. My mum tried to help but it was not a good experience”
- “My hearing children are relied upon to translate for me, including my cancer diagnosis. It is just not appropriate”
- “There are no positive role models for deaf children”
- “It is incredibly isolating not having access to information or be able to communicate with others. I feel so lonely”
- “BSL is a lot of deaf peoples first language. It means that if you are stressed or tired, reading English can be harder no matter how well educated you are”

3. General understanding of types of support available

Typically, individuals can find support and independent information in the following places:

- Hospitals and clinics
- Kirklees Council Social Work and Assistive Technology teams (including daily living support and technology)
- Local voluntary and peer to peer groups
- Local libraries (check for community events or search online)

- Kirklees Council Communities Teams
- Your local GP
- Local opticians
- Community hearing tests (e.g., at Specsavers)

Technology plays a vital role in providing support and guidance. If you're unable to access or use technology, please contact the Kirklees Council Adult Social Care team for assistance.

National organisations such as:

- www.rnib.org.uk/ [Royal National Institute for Blind People](http://www.rnib.org.uk/)
- <https://rnid.org.uk/> [Royal National Institute for Deaf People](https://rnid.org.uk/)
- [Deafblind UK | Supporting Deafblindness in the UK](http://www.deafblinduk.org.uk/)

[Kinetic](#) have a good section on local advice and support resources on their webpage

[Kinetic resources and advice](#)

Alternatively.

[Disability rights UK](#)

4. Kirklees Promise: People with sensory impairment will be involved in the design and delivery of activities, support, and services relevant to them

At the heart of this Sensory Impairment strategy is collaboration—not doing to or for people, but working alongside them and with our partners, reflecting the diverse communities across Kirklees. We are committed to transparency and fairness, always striving to co-produce solutions that prioritise what matters most to individuals.

Our priorities to achieve this include:

- Equal collaboration at all levels—individual, family, peer support, formal support, policy, and strategy.
- Ensuring governance and partnership structures are open to feedback and capable of making necessary changes.
- Creating person-centred, outcomes-focused plans at the individual level.

We promise to:

- Have paid membership with groups and organizations that can lead effective engagement opportunities.
- Reach out to self-advocacy groups for leadership and consultation on key issues, opportunities, and collaborative actions.
- Employ individuals with lived experience to co-lead projects.
- Attend groups and forums to build relationships and foster trust for meaningful engagement.
- Maintain a database of Voluntary Community Sector groups for sharing engagement opportunities.

This strategy aims to make key health and care services in Kirklees accessible to those with hearing or sight loss.

We will ensure that people, decision-makers, service users, carers, and service providers work together to create decisions and services that benefit everyone. The process will be realistic, value-driven, and based on the principle that those who use services are best placed to design, evaluate, and influence them.

As with all co-produced work, there will be a need to learn and adapt as we go, share power, let go of control, and take risks.

5. What matters most to people and what's working well

What matters most to people – Seven Themes

1. **Communication**

I can easily access information and advice in my preferred format (e.g., BSL, captioned videos). Services and support are relevant to me, with training and awareness-raising ensuring people know how to communicate with me. It is checked regularly to make sure it's right.

2. **Representation**

I am encouraged to be involved, as people who use services are best placed to design, evaluate, and influence them.

3. **Joined-up Services**

Services work together and build on what's already working well.

4. Individualised Support

Services and support are tailored to meet my needs, including training, culture change, and awareness-raising.

5. Equal Access to Society

I want to enjoy my private life, participate fully in society, build relationships, and succeed at work.

6. Housing and Employment

My living situation is suitable for my needs, and I receive the right support to access education and employment.

7. Supporting Families from Birth to Death

Comprehensive support is available to families across all stages of life.

8. Independence and Access to Technology

I know how to maintain my independence, use my skills, and access technology solutions and public health information.

What's already working well

1. Some training and opportunities that are relevant to my needs e.g., Cane training
2. On hospital discharge a person to talk to e.g., Eye Clinic Liaison Officers who give easy to access information, advice, and guidance.
3. Transcription service
4. Knowing what's on in some areas that matter to me via audio newspapers in libraries service.
5. Where it exists, peer to peer social group activities
6. Where it exists, opportunities to influence service and support available for me e.g., CHISWICK group works well.
7. Some public buildings are already tech enabled and accessible for deaf people
8. Consistent BSL interpreter. Being able to book the same person.
9. Text live.
10. Online BSL interpretation on a big screen in Cleckheaton Health Centre

6. What matter most: Shared goals

People in Kirklees have shared what matters most to the community living with sensory impairments. As a provider or commissioner of services, it's essential to consider this feedback in all that you do.

By working together, we can not only meet our statutory duties but also make Kirklees a great place for everyone to live.

1. Communication - Between Council and stakeholders

- I can easily access information and advice in my preferred format, ensuring I understand what services and support are available and relevant to me.
- I am supported by knowledgeable staff who are up-to-date on sight and/or hearing loss.
- Frontline staff collaborate creatively with me to meet my needs.
- I can easily access content in BSL.
- I can access the "What's On" guide, and the content is fully accessible.
- I am actively encouraged to participate as an equal in the design, evaluation, and influence of services.
- I have opportunities to contribute to public awareness campaigns.
- I am supported in developing skills, including using technology, to communicate effectively.
- I am represented equally alongside other groups.
- I am always encouraged to be involved.
- I can see that the NHS and council's adult services plan and work together, with a clear, joined-up approach.

2. Person Centred care

- I can easily access information and advice in my preferred format, ensuring I understand what services and support are available and relevant to me.
- I am supported by knowledgeable staff who are up-to-date on sight and/or hearing loss.
- Frontline staff collaborate creatively with me to meet my needs.
- I can easily access content in BSL.
- I can access the "What's On" guide, and the content is fully accessible.

- I am actively encouraged to participate as an equal in the design, evaluation, and influence of services.
- I have opportunities to contribute to public awareness campaigns.
- I am supported in developing skills, including using technology, to communicate effectively.
- I am represented equally alongside other groups.
- I am always encouraged to be involved.
- I can see that the NHS and council's adult services plan and work together, with a clear, joined-up approach.

3. My right to be connected and have equal access to services and support

- My rights are understood, and there is a strong commitment to helping me achieve them.
- It is easy for me to register my visual or hearing impairment with the council.
- I receive the right help (if needed) to navigate my home and travel outside.
- I have access to the right information to look after myself, my health, my home, and my family.
- I can make the best use of my sight with the help of technology.
- Health improvement services, such as smoking cessation, health checks, and support for maintaining a healthy weight and staying active, are accessible and tailored to my needs.
- Transport for voluntary sector social activities is available and accessible to me.
- Assistive technology and telecare (AT&T) are included in my support package.

4. Housing & employment

- If I need social or supported housing, I am offered appropriate options, including small-scale supported living, especially when transitioning from children's services or being discharged from hospital.
- I have access to family housing for adults with children.

- I receive opportunities for supported employment, particularly for adults with learning disabilities, both when entering and during employment.

5. Supporting families and carers from birth to death

- It is easy for me to transition between learning, training providers, and work.
- Consistent support is available throughout my entire education journey, ensuring equal access to education, volunteering, and employment.

6. Early intervention, prevention, and independence

- Training and upskilling to help me be independent are readily available.
- I receive ample support, advice, and guidance to access and use technology solutions.

Our 10 year goals;

Together in Kirklees we will;

- Simplify our processes, bringing together people and services whenever possible and avoiding referrals and handoffs.
- Ensure technological advancements are widely known and accessible.
- Involve people with sensory impairments in the development of our services and contracts.
- Prioritise peer-to-peer support and opportunities for socialising.
- Share good practices and build upon them wherever possible.
- Work in collaboration and partnership to promote joined up services.
- All contribute to professional networks set up and led by network individuals
- Be able to demonstrate that people value and want what is on offer and that they are involved in shaping services provided in a continuous methodology
- Acknowledge people living with sensory impairment as major assets themselves.
- Work towards an adherence to the West Yorkshire accessible information standards.
- Offer practical support offered at every touch point, ie; helping people to understand the Kirklees Vision Connect living and waiting well.
- Support opportunities for deaf peer to peer support

- Prioritise access to services and will respond to socioeconomic disadvantage
- Work to ensure all services and support makes the most of advances in tech and equipment

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