



West Sussex Autism Partnership Board (APB)

Meeting: 28 July 2026, 11am – 1pm (Microsoft Teams)

Attendees:

James Ironside – Information and Involvement Service Manager (WSCC) Chair

Paige Maughan – Data and Information Officer (WSCC) Minutes

Gary Capelin – Peer Support Co-Ordinator (WSCC)

Katie Green – Aldingbourne

Katie Low – Venture People

Jane Blackwell – Principal Librarian, SEND (WSCC)

Jayne Simpson – Parent carer

Tom Elsam – Lifelong Services Service Manager (WSCC)

Martin Ford – Aldingbourne LIMA Service

Josh Puglia – Grace Ayre / Co-chair East Sussex APB

Mike Howard – Cares Sussex West Sussex

Paul Courney – ASSA

Graham Sargent – ASSA

Danny Gregory – Aspective

Jess Dare – NHS Sussex Talking Therapies

Carol Edmunds – Aspective

Jessica Bubb – Children, Young People and Learning (WSCC)

Welcome and Introductions

James welcomed members to the meeting and introductions were made, including welcoming new members.

Last meeting notes

Agreed, no corrections. These will be uploaded to the website.

Action updates:

- Lifelong Services Transformation Programme update remains ongoing. Members will receive a further update at a future meeting.
- All other actions were completed.

1. Local Elections and Cabinet Updates

James provided members with an overview of the recent local election outcomes and changes to council leadership.

Key points:

- Following the local elections, West Sussex County Council moved from Conservative control for the first time since 1997.
- No single party achieved overall control of the council.
- The Liberal Democrats, Green Party, Labour Party and Independent Alliance formed the West Sussex Alliance to jointly lead the council.
- Councillor Jay Mercer was appointed as Leader of the Council.
- A new Cabinet has been established comprising Liberal Democrat and Green Party members.
- Richard Bates has been appointed as Cabinet Member for Adults' Services.

Discussion points:

- Members asked whether Richard Bates could attend a future APB meeting.
- **Action:** James agreed to explore this possibility and share Richard Bates' introductory information with members once available.

2. Board Chair Discussion

James introduced a discussion regarding proposals for a lived experience Board Chair role.

Key points:

- The Chair role was previously undertaken by Diana Bernhardt.
- The proposed role would be a paid position, recognising time spent preparing for and attending meetings.
- Officers would provide support to the Chair as required.
- Members were asked whether they were comfortable exploring the proposal further at a future meeting.

Discussion points:

- Some members expressed reservations about a co-chair arrangement, noting concerns that it could unintentionally place greater emphasis on the views of one individual.
- Members felt any appointment process should be transparent and based on consensus.
- Questions were raised regarding how a co-chair could actively contribute to discussions whilst maintaining responsibility for chairing the meeting.
- Officers confirmed that arrangements could be flexible and tailored to the needs of the individual appointed.
- Several members felt that a lived experience chair would strengthen the Board and help ensure meetings remain focused on the experiences of autistic people and families.
- The Learning Disability Partnership Board's co-chair model was highlighted as a positive example.
- Members suggested developing clear role descriptions and guidance to support the position.
- **Action:** James/Gary to develop a proposal and supporting information for discussion at the next meeting.

3. All Age Autism Strategy

James provided an update on the All Age Autism Strategy.

Key points:

- Progress has been delayed due to changes following the local elections.
- The strategy has not yet been formally adopted by the new administration.
- A new autism lead is being confirmed following organisational changes.
- Work is ongoing to identify an appropriate route for formal approval and implementation.
- The strategy remains a priority.
- Members were informed that the Children's Services Cabinet Member had committed support to the All Age Autism Strategy and that Adults' Services approval would also be required before formal adoption.

Discussion points:

- Members expressed disappointment regarding the delay.
- It was suggested that APB representation should be included when the strategy is presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

- James confirmed this request would be taken forward as part of future planning.

4. All age board discussion

Members discussed options for ensuring the APB effectively reflects people of all ages.

Discussion points:

- Members suggested developing themes or age-specific working groups that would report into the main APB.
- Young people participating in groups may require support from trusted adults.
- Questions were raised regarding practical arrangements, particularly as Board meetings take place during school hours.
- Consideration was given to safeguarding requirements and whether DBS checks would be required.
- Members proposed sharing APB agendas with existing young people's groups, enabling discussions to take place separately before feedback is brought back through nominated representatives.
- It was noted that similar proposals had been discussed previously and members suggested reviewing earlier minutes.
- Members highlighted the need to consider meeting frequency and structure if the Board's remit expands further.
- There was support for establishing workstreams linked to the All Age Autism Strategy that could report back into the Board.
- **Action:** James to review previous meeting discussions regarding all age arrangements.

5. Bringing this altogether and next steps

James summarised the meeting and next steps:

- Continue progressing the formal adoption of the All Age Autism Strategy.
- Review previous discussions regarding all age Board arrangements.
- Develop proposals regarding the lived experience Chair role.
- Bring updates back to future APB meetings.

6. AOB

Membership and representation

Members discussed Board membership and future attendance arrangements.

Key discussion points:

- Members considered how to balance broad representation whilst keeping meetings manageable.
- Previous discussions had suggestion a maximum attendance of approximately 20 members.
- It was recognised that a rigid cap may unintentionally reduce representation and information sharing.
- Members agreed attendance numbers should be viewed flexibly and reviewed where necessary.
- Representation from across West Sussex was considered important.
- Clarification was requested regarding processes for reviewing and approving new membership requests.
- Members discussed the potential use of a shorter expression of interest form to help understand new members experience and representation while remaining accessible.

Day opportunities and Future Engagement

- Members highlighted concerns regarding day opportunities for autistic adults and the importance of ensuring autism specific needs are represented.
- It was suggested that future workstreams linked to the Autism Strategy could provide a route for progressing these discussions.
- Members also considered whether some organisations may attend specific meetings where agenda topics are particularly relevant.
- Increased engagement from Children's Services was welcomed, with additional service managers expected to attend future meetings.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- Members were asked whether they would be interested in contributing views of AI within Adults' Services.
- The Board agreed this would be a useful area for future discussion.

Actions agreed:

Action	Who by	Timescale
Publish March minutes to WSCC website	Meeting Administrator Paige Maughan	August 26

Develop proposal and supporting information regarding a lived experience Chair role	James Ironside/Gary Capelin	Before next APB
Review previous discussions and proposals relating to all age Board arrangements	James Ironside	Before next APB
Provide update on formal adoption of the All Age Autism Strategy	James Ironside	Next APB
Explore attendance of Richard Bates at a future APB meeting and share introductory information	James Ironside	Future APB
Lifelong Services Transformation Programme – return with future updates	Leadership team	Future APB

Date of next meeting:

22 September, 11am – 1pm (online, Microsoft Teams)

Microsoft Teams link will be circulated 2 weeks prior.