



West Sussex Autism Partnership Board (APB)

Meeting: 11 December 2025, 11am – 1pm (zoom)

Attendees:

Diana Bernhardt – Commissioning Service Manager (WSSC) Chair
Simona Giunta – Commissioning and Contracts Officer (WSSC) Minutes
Maxine Court-Kelly, parent carer
Martin Ford, Aldingbourne LIMA service
Jess Dare - Deputy Clinical Lead Talking Therapies SCFT
Jayne Simpson – Parent carer
Katie Green – Access All Areas
Sheryl Bunting – West Sussex Carer Support
Carol Edmunds – NHS, Lived Experience Advisory Panel
Dan Gregory – Aspective
Victoria Littlejohn, ASSA
Graham Sargent, ASSA
Andrew Cole, Neurodevelopmental Service, NHS
Katie Low, Provider Representative.

Apologies:

Gary Capelin, WSSC
Jessica Bubb, WSSC Children, Young People and Learning
Tony Meadows, WSSC, Assistant Director - Commissioning
Mark Dodson, WSSC Lifelong Services Manager
Catherine Pritchard, Integrated Care Board
Lydia Taylor, WSSC Liaison Officer, Policy and Involvement

Guests:

Jo Baldwin, WSSC Commissioning lead, Lifelong Services

Last meeting notes

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

1. Matters arising

- To contact Board members to invite members to arrange testing of Microsoft Teams – **Gary**
- Sam Rodgers – Invite Tom Elsam to next Providers Forum. **Action:** Diana will provide Katie Low with Catherine Pritchard’s email to facilitate this. **Complete**
- Contact to Carol Edmunds re issues using Microsoft Teams – **Gary**

2. Autism Strategy update

Diana presented the slides. This included an outline of the next steps for the strategy (slide 4) and a proposal for a World Autism Day awareness event (slide 5).

Some points of discussion were:

- Members heard that the strategy was being presented to the WSCC Executive Leadership Team today. Noted a request for a person with Lived Experience to be involved in presenting the strategy as it goes through the approval process. **Action:** Diana to request whether this is possible.
- Noted ASSA, and other members expressed interest in planning for the World Autism Day awareness event. Members acknowledged that there is not much time before the proposed March date. After discussion, members agreed April would be a more viable timeframe, to align with the National Autism Society’s Autism month celebration. Graham, Vicky and Katie said that they would be interested in being involved in planning the event. **Action** Diana to set up an initial planning meeting in January.
- Agreed that event content and activities should be widely representative to include carers, adults, children’s and organisations for people with learning disabilities and autism.
- Noted a member’s concern that they do not agree with Autism Affirming Practice and how they felt this caters for high functioning autistic people. The member stated that 8/10 autistic people cannot work or live independently and that those people with autism who are high functioning are generally over-represented.

3. Terms of Reference (ToR) review

Diana presented the latest ToR draft. Points of discussion were:

- After discussion, members agreed to use a variety of terms throughout the ToR document to capture individual preferences with regards nomenclature e.g. people with autism; autistic people etc. **Action:** Diana to update the terms of reference.
- Core membership heading: agreed that the All Age APB is understood to be an inclusive forum of anybody who identifies as autistic, without the need to try to name all different categories of people within this heading.

- New membership heading: agreed to include a ToR addendum naming organisations and self-advocacy groups who have historically been members of the APB. **Action:** Diana to add.
- Agreed that self-advocacy groups have the right to substitute elected representatives to attend the APB as other groups do. **Action:** include in ToR
- Agreed to include maximum attendance of 25 in ToR document.
- Agreed a week's notice for any new membership request to be circulated to existing members for comment/concerns. **Action:** Diana to update.
- Agreed that consistency in any group's elected/attending representatives is of paramount importance. This will ensure that all the activities that are core to the values and purposes of the APB can be carried out effectively.
- As there is insufficient time to complete discussions re the ToR, item will be carried forward to the next session. (Pages 1-4 discussed at the meeting).
- Noted ASSA expressed some concerns about having a co-chair with Lived Experience. **Action:** ASSA will contact the Chair outside of the meeting.

4. Day Opportunities, employment, volunteering and prevention services update

Jo Balwin (WSCC Commissioning Lead), Martin Ford and Katie Green (Aldingbourne Access All Areas) presented the slides. Some highlights and members comments:

- Some members wanted to find out how they could access the Connect To Work scheme. Contact details for this are in the slide pack.
- Member asked about support regarding in-work retention as a theme for carers. Jo confirmed the service can support carers to maintain current place of work.
- Presenters asked if members could think of any other groups that commissioners and provider should reach out to. **Action:** ASSA agreed to find out and will and get back to Jo.
- ASSA and Access All Areas offered their group meetings as mechanisms to involve customers.
- Noted that early involvement from APB members/feedback would be beneficial for the scheme
- Members also offered to provide feedback and updates via mailing list circulations.

5. AOB

Attendance requests

Requests to join the Board were discussed and approved.

- Willian Norman, new ASSA rep.
- Helen Coole, parent carer

- Rebecca Turner, Children’s Dept SEND Commissioning Lead
- Jane Blackwell, WSCC SEND Library Service

Action: Diana will arrange an informal online session for newly accepted members to meet established members of the Board

Future agenda suggestions

- MH Services/ICB update - other councils are pausing autism assessments and there is worry among carers about this potentially happening in WSCC. **Action:** Andrew Cole to provide an update
- New Mental Health Neighbourhood Teams offer
- Update on Right To Choose – some councils are capping funding for this. **Action:** Diana will ask Catherine Pritchard to give update at next APB

6. Bringing this together

- Day Ops/Connect To Work – plan for agenda item when work to commence on developing the new contract.
- Next meeting will switch to Teams. **Action:** Gary to arrange a practice run with a members who need this.
- APB Day change proposal: discussed this to allow new key members who do not work on Thursdays to attend the Board. **Action:** A poll will be circulated to find the best available date for the APB. Agreed to plan for meetings on a Tuesday instead of a Thursday.

Some existing members have regular items that clash with Board meeting times on first, second and third Tuesday of the month.

Actions agreed:

Action	Who by	Timescale
Publish October minutes to WSCC website	Meeting Administrator Gary Capelin	Jan 26
Re-circulate email regarding the Questionnaire to Vicky Littlejohn	Diana Bernhardt	Dec 25
Arrange informal session for new members to meet some APB existing members ahead of net APB.	Diana Bernhardt	Feb 26

Inform Jo Baldwin of any other group/forums that would benefit from hearing about Connect to Work/Day Ops information and updates.	ASSA/All	Feb 26
Arrange online introductory session for new members/existing members	Diana Bernhardt	Before next APB
Circulate poll about next preferred APB date. Confirm date of next meeting to members.	Simona Giunta	Jan 26
Arrange next APB update segments: MH/ICB – A. Cole Right To choose – C. Pritchard	Diana Bernhardt	Feb 26
Check with SPFT re ongoing attendance at APB	Diana Bernhardt	Jan 26
ToR Actions as per section above	Diana Bernhardt	Feb 26
Arrange Teams practice run with a few members ahead of next APB	Gary Capelin	Before next APB

Date of next meeting:

24 March 2026 - 11am - 1pm (online, Teams)