



Minutes of the West Sussex Autism Partnership Board (APB)

Meeting: May 15th 2025 11am – 1pm (zoom)

Attendees:

Diana Bernhardt – Commissioning Service Manager (WSCC) Chair

Gary Capelin – Peer Support Co-Ordinator (WSCC)

Rhiannon Jacomb - Business Administrator and minute taker (WSCC)

Andrew Cole - General Manager Learning Disability and
Neurodevelopmental Service (SPFT)

Jess Dare - Deputy Clinical Lead Talking Therapies SCFT

Katie Low – Venture People

Jayne Simpson – Parent carer

Maxine Harcourt-Kelly - Parent carer

Sheryl Bunting – West Sussex Carer Support

Maggie – Aspective

Dan Gregory – Aspective

Carol Edmonds - Aspective

Katie Green – Access All Areas

Sam Rogers - Deputy Head of Mental Health and Children and Young
People's Commissioning and Transformation

Guests:

Jessica Bubb - SEND and Inclusion Adviser (WSCC and member of
strategy steering group)

Jane Holland - (EbE with SPFT and member of strategy steering group)

Lauren Boal - Voice and Participation Officer SEND (WSCC and member of
strategy steering group)

Kathy Lockyear Lead for Specialist Advisory Teaching Service (WSCC)

Tony Meadows – Interim Assistant Director of Commissioning Adults and Health (WSCC)

Apologies: None received

Welcome and Introductions

Diana welcomed Carol from Aspective to the Board and introduced guests at the meeting.

Last meeting notes

February 2025 notes agreed. Action: Simona to upload to the website

Actions from the previous meeting completed. Diana confirmed that there will be an item at the next meeting in July on the autism diagnostic service and the neurodevelopmental pathway programme.

1. Draft All Age Autism Strategy

Diana introduced the item and explained the draft strategy is being presented by members of the strategy steering group via Powerpoint slides for feedback from the Board. Each of the slides will be considered in turn for the Board's feedback. Members will also be invited at the end of the meeting to comment on the draft strategy document that has also been circulated.

Draft vision

Q: Is this strategy only for people with a diagnosis of autism?

Our aim is for this to be inclusive, which will include those on the pathway to diagnosis.

Q. There is no mention of paid/ unpaid carers in the draft vision?

Although there is a lot within the strategy itself about carers, Diana thought it would be clearer to add some wording to the draft vision.

ACTION: Add wording for family/unpaid carers and people awaiting diagnosis to the vision.

Redevelop the APB into an all-age partnership board

Q Will the co-chair be paid?

Diana confirmed that the co-chair will be paid in line with the council's current policy.

Q: Do we have representatives from orgs that cater for 70+ aged people?

Acknowledged that we don't currently have representation and are considered as part of the re-development of the board membership

Q: Concerns with managing meetings with additional participants. Can be overwhelming with lots of people. How would this be managed?

Board needs to discuss how we get this right for members, looking for feedback for how to make this work so people feel comfortable to continue coming. There will be subgroups looking at areas of the strategy which gives opportunity for smaller groups.

Q: Are there plans to reduce any SAG places on the board?

There are no plans to reduce members although acknowledging the point made above that the numbers attending need to be right.

Diana proposed that the proposal regarding would be discussed at the next meeting and will meet with self advocacy groups (SAGs) and experts by experience to plan for the changes.

ACTION: Diana to meet with SAGs and Experts by Experience prior to next meeting to plan for the presentation to the next meeting.

Building on existing work

Comments from the chat:

It's difficult to build on existing programs when the council removed the funding for the self advocacy groups.

Wait time for diagnosis is lengthy and there should be focus on pre-diagnosis.

Older people can lack groups or support following diagnosis.

People turn to private diagnosis because of waiting times.

Support to be put in place before crisis point

Some autistic people don't know the adaptations they need to be able to request them.

Encouraging existing organisations to create social spaces whilst there is a lack of funding will be beneficial.

Lack of support for diagnosis pathway

Concerns about the unification of authorities and impact on members/services

Jess Dare shared the adaptations her service makes to therapies following a member's concern around accessing talking therapies.

I think it's really important that we look at strengthening employment and volunteering support given all the changes coming about around the benefit system and getting people into employment. It's very unsettling for autistic people.

Q: Support while people are waiting for diagnosis, is this included in the current work? Yes, pre and post diagnostic support is part of the programme of work.

Diana thanked members for their feedback. Feedback on the neurodevelopmental service can be discussed in more detail as this is an agenda item at the July meeting. The Board can also schedule a focussed discussion on mental health services at a later meeting.

Q: Is the mental health feedback from adults or children's perspective?

Sam Rogers explained that the work on children's mental health services sits outside of the neurodevelopmental program.

ACTION: Sam will send Diana suggested wording to add to the strategy to reflect this.

Co Production- Would these roles be paid?

Diana clarified that some roles may be paid in accordance with the councils policy a copy of which has been shared with the Board.

Q Where there are references to building upon/expanding existing services, would it be possible to include consideration to ensuring that Autistic people with other support needs or disabilities, whether that be Mental health and/or physical health conditions and disabilities, are still included in and able to be supported?

Yes, this is included.

Transitions

Comment: Change wording of 'children with mental health' to children with mental health needs

ACTION: Diana to update wording in the strategy to reflect this.

Q-Has there been any work with early years practitioners transition to formal education?

This type of transition hasn't been included in the wording as yet.

ACTION: Jess will send Diana suggested wording to add.

Q-How will you get representatives from various providers to attend?

We will talk to the organisations to make this work for the board.

Q How can we know that the Council won't cut funding down the line and not be consulted on the changes.

The needs to work within the existing resources, there isn't any additional money and as we all know there is a tough financial climate. It's about making the best use of resources.

Q Will there be reassurance from a more senior level that this work will be valued?

This strategy is being presented to the adult and children's leadership teams. Unfortunately, Tony Meadows has attended but had to leave the meeting to take an urgent telephone call. Tony Meadows will also be invited to next meeting

2. Pulling this together and next steps

Diana explained that feedback from today's meeting would be incorporated into the draft and an updated version would be sent to APB members so that members could confirm that all their feedback has been incorporated.

Members can also add any comments regarding the document to the 'chat' function in zoom so that these can be considered.

Timescales for agreeing the strategy:

- Updated draft strategy end of May/early June 2025
- Draft strategy presented to WSCC Leadership teams Children and Adults in July 2025 for their approval and to decide next steps regarding approval.
- Review of the West Sussex Autism Partnership Board to create an All Age Autism Partnership Board July to September 2025

- Set up Working groups for 3 big All Age Challenges areas by December 2025
- Develop 25-26 delivery plan by October 2025
- Develop 26-27 delivery plan by March 2026

3. AOB

Diana asked members if the date of the meeting could be changed to 10th July so that she could be available to chair the meeting which was agreed.

ACTION: Update meeting invite to reflect change of date.

Actions agreed:

Action	Who by	Timescale
Share updated slides of draft strategy	Diana Bernhardt	Shared on 28 th May

Date of next meeting:

10 July 2025 11am - 1pm (online, Zoom)

Zoom link will be circulated 2 weeks prior.