

Cheshire West & Chester Council

Minutes



ALL-AGE AUTISM AND NEURODIVERGENCE PARTNERSHIP BOARD

DATED 7 MAY 2025

ATTENDANCE:

Alistair Jeffs, (Head of Policy, Performance & Partnerships SC Joint Strategic Commissioning)
Cheshire West and Chester Council – Champion)

Oliver Downing - (Commissioning Lead for Learning Disability and Autism), Cheshire West
and Chester Council) - Co-Facilitator

Tony McLinden – (Person with Lived Experience) - Co-Facilitator

Ashiq Ashraf - Note taker

Along with representatives from:

- Strategic Commissioning Team – Learning Disability and Autism, Cheshire West and Chester Council (Ruth Robinson)
- Strategic Commissioning Team – Mental Health, Cheshire West and Chester Council (Carla Preston)
- Strategic Commissioning Team – Children and Families, Cheshire West and Chester Council - (Steve Arnold)
- Strategic Commissioning - Co-Production (Katy Ellison)
- Prevention and Wellbeing, Cheshire West and Chester Council (Kate Salvoni)
- Disabled Childrens Service (Sarah Banks)
- Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS
- Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board (Sean Donnelly)
- Mid Cheshire Trust (Clare Smith)
- Cheshire Autism Practical Support (Chloe Carter)
- People's Choice Group
- Active Cheshire
- Ellesmere Port Catholic High School
- Adult Safeguarding, Leighton Hospital
- Parent Carer Forum
- Parent/Carers
- People with Lived Experience

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

Alistair welcomed everyone to the meeting. It was shared that that Tony will co-chair today's meeting.

New Ground Internship

The meeting discussed the Support Internship Program, a full-time study program for young people aged 16-24 with special education needs, aiming for paid employment. The program, funded by the Department for Education, runs from September to June, with placements starting in October and lasting up to six months. New Grant Service Council offers bespoke support, including personalised job placements and training. The program achieved a gold award in Skills Builder in 2020. Feedback highlighted the need for more flexible and inclusive internships, especially for those over 24 and with neurodiversity.

Action Items

- Karina to Share the updated New Grant presentation with Oliver.
- Explore potential partnerships with Everybody Leisure, as they are known to be supportive of employing individuals with neurodiversity.
- Provide more information on the additional employment support projects that are available within the wider Skills Employment Service.

Oliver McGowan Training

The meeting discussed the challenges and improvements needed for neurodiversity training, emphasizing the need for flexible, high-quality training that goes beyond the Oliver McGowan standard. Key points included the *practical difficulties of face-to-face training*, the importance of addressing a broad range of neurodiverse conditions, and the potential benefits of online training for wider reach and cost-effectiveness.

The conversation highlighted the need for cultural change post-training and the importance of ensuring training is effectively implemented.

The discussion also touched on the need for ongoing audits and the potential for smaller, more specialised providers to offer better-fit training.

Action Items

- Oliver to Explore the possibility of developing an online training program that can be more flexible and accessible for staff.
- Investigate the costs involved in developing the online training option.
- Implement a system to audit and ensure the training is being properly delivered and applied in practice, such as using "mystery clients" or other methods.
- Oliver to Follow up on the discussion and continue to work on improving the training and its implementation.
- Involve people with lived experience in the development and delivery of the training to ensure it is effective and meaningful.

Sub-Groups

• Lived Experience , Service Mapping

The meeting discussed various initiatives aimed at improving services for Autistic people and other needs. Key points included the involvement of 10 members in projects related to training, reasonable adjustments, and customer experience. The

"Just Ask" campaign and the "Your Safe Here" scheme were highlighted, with the latter currently on hold. The importance of face-to-face training over online methods was debated, emphasising the need for human connection.

- **Autism /Neurodivergence Strategy**

The Strategy Group's draft strategy, focusing on health, social support, education, governance, and planning, was reviewed. The urgency of responding to the House of Lords' consultation on the Autism Act by June 2nd was stressed, with a call for an extraordinary meeting to ensure adult voices are heard.

Action Items

- Oliver to Share the autism strategy document with additional organisations and individuals to promote wider engagement.
- Organise an extraordinary meeting or event to gather input for the House of Lords review of the Autism Act.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Meeting date	Items for discussion
July	Strategy update; short breaks/respite focus on need and demand
September	Strategy update; membership – consistency and expansion of representation; housing requirement for under 55s/housing prospectus
November	Action planning, TBD
March 2026	AGM (during ND Celebration Week)

DATES OF NEXT PARTNERSHIP BOARD MEETINGS

Wednesday, 2 July 2025

Wednesday, 3 September 2025

DATES OF NEXT SUB-GROUPS MEETINGS

Autism/Neurodivergence Strategy

Wednesday, 25 June 2025

Wednesday, 27 August 2025

Lived Experience

Dates to be confirmed

Service Mapping

Friday, 13 June 2025

Friday, 15 August 2025