

Notes from the Autism Norfolk Forum

Held on: Tuesday 20/01/2026 13:00-14:30

Venue: Zoom Meeting

Please note: These notes represent an overview summary of this meeting rather than a verbatim transcript.

Meeting Notes

Agenda Item	Welcome & Introduction	Action and Due Date
1.1	Welcome and introductions made. Communication prompts posted to the Zoom Chat window, and their use explained. No reasonable adjustments were requested. Meeting rules were explained	
Agenda Item	Norfolk Autism Partnership Board Update	Action and Due Date
2.1	<p><u>Progress Since Previous Forum</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five new members have joined the Working Groups and Partnership Board. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Full membership has been confirmed for the Support Pathways Working Group / Norfolk Autism Strategy Oversight Group. • Delivered 8 Tier two Understanding Autism Training (104 Delegates) • The Norfolk Autism Strategy Oversight Group (NASOG) has begun preparing the Year 1 “You Said, We Did” documents. • Initial work has started with Community Mental Health Teams (CMHT) and secondary care teams to explore mental health services for autistic people, including identifying barriers to access. • The Partnership attended and Spoke at the UEA Disability Week to staff and students 	
2.2	<p><u>House of Lords Autism Act Committee Report</u></p> <p><u>Background</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A House of Lords Select Committee has reviewed the effectiveness of the Autism Act 2009, the autism strategy, and statutory guidance. • The review informs the development of the next national autism strategy, due in July 2026. 	



- The Autism Act duties focus on adult autism strategy + statutory guidance for NHS & local authorities
- While the national strategy was expanded to include children and young people (2021–2026), statutory guidance has not been updated since 2015.

Key Findings

- The Autism Act has improved recognition of autism and access to diagnosis; however, outcomes for autistic people have not significantly improved.
- Assessment pathways are under severe pressure, with many individuals waiting years and receiving limited or no support following diagnosis.
- The 2021–2026 strategy set out ambitions but lacked a funded, deliverable implementation plan and clear accountability beyond the first year.
- Persistent inequalities remain across health, education, employment, and the criminal justice system.
 - Committee highlights scale including over 200,000 people waiting for autism assessment and low employment rates.

Headline Recommendations

- A new national autism strategy should be in place by July 2026, with:
 - Clearly defined priority outcomes
 - A fully costed delivery plan
 - Named accountability for delivery
- Co-production should be embedded throughout, with autistic people and those who support them involved at every stage of design, delivery, and review.
- A shift is needed from crisis-driven responses to stepped, lifelong support, including:
 - Investment in assessment capacity
 - Expansion of low-level, preventative, community-based support

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strengthened local delivery and accountability through updated statutory guidance 	
2.3	<p><u>What the Norfolk Autism Partnership is already doing:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-production remains central to the Partnership’s approach, with autistic people and families actively shaping priorities, delivery, and review. • Diagnosis and support are now addressed as separate strategic priorities, with two dedicated working groups established to improve focus, pace, and accountability: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Diagnosis Working Group – focusing on pathway flow, waiting list pressures, quality and consistency. ○ Support Working Group – stepped support, post-diagnostic provision, and community and preventative support. • Work is ongoing to promote autism-informed support at any stage, ensuring services are accessible and appropriate regardless of diagnostic status, including for individuals currently on waiting lists. 	

Agenda Item	Progress of the Norfolk All-Age Autism Strategy 2024–2029	Action and Due Date
3.1	<p><u>Year One Update: “You Said, We Did”</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norfolk All-Age Autism Strategy 2024–2029 • Year One Delivery Period: 1 June 2024 – 31 July 2025 • Three Priority Areas for Improvement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Information and resources ○ Training ○ Support 	
3.2	<p><u>Information and Resources: What People Told Us</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need for improved access to autism-specific information. 	



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear guidance is required for professionals and families.• Help navigating everyday life.• Resources should be co-produced and reflect lived experience.• Inclusive practice should be strengthened across education, health, and social care. <p><u>Information and Resources: What We Did</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promoted autism alert cards through events and quick reference guides.• Added autism resources to home education support.• Supported greater independence in travel through Titan Travel Training and accessibility tools.• Shared a demand avoidance statement to improve understanding.• Talking Therapies: positive practice guides and neurodiversity champions.• Published co-produced social care assessment guides.• Created “10 Tips for Inclusion,” young people co-creating a jingle• Added supported living information pages, including video content.	
3.3	<p><u>Training: What People Told Us</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More autism-specific training across public services.• Training should include lived experience and practical strategies.• There should be opportunities to celebrate autistic identity and creativity.• More opportunities are needed for people to be involved in shaping services and resources. <p><u>Training: What We Did</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1,446 visitors accessed free autism awareness e-learning.• Delivered seven Tier Two Understanding Autism training courses, exceeding the target of five.• Autism Education Training was accessed by 298 education settings (61% coverage).	



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training reached over 7,000 staff, co-delivered by 20 autistic experts.• Introduced a new course: “Reasonable Adjustments Are Our Statutory Duty.”• Expanded specialist training offers, including for AMHPs, probation and participation training.• Celebrated autistic creativity through That’s What I Call Autism 2025.• Co-production: 29 opportunities shared + interest form launched	
3.4	<p><u>Support: What People Told Us</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More support is needed to help gain and sustain employment.• Services need a better understanding of autistic needs.• Improved crisis response and mental health support is required.• More inclusive community spaces and activities are needed.• Support should be better joined up across health, social care, and justice services.• Families and carers, including siblings and young carers, require additional support. <p><u>Support: What We Did</u></p> <p><u>Employment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local Supported Employment services supported 77 autistic adults into paid employment, exceeded target.• Reverse jobs fairs and creation of innovative job roles and work experience opportunities. <p><u>Crisis and Mental Health</u></p>	



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Launched an Autism Intensive Support Team pilot, supporting up to 15 individuals.• NHS 111 MH call handler training to better support autistic people <p><u>Community</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Established 32 library-based social and support groups across Norfolk.• Adult autism diagnosis and navigation service launched, including alignment of referral dates for ADHD and autism waiting lists. <p><u>Families and Carers</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expanded Short Breaks to support whole-family use, including siblings, and improved website accessibility.• Rolled out Parent Carer Needs Assessments.• Expanded Autism Central peer support provision across Norfolk.• Improved EHCP timeliness from 43% to 57%, exceeding the national average of 46%. <p><u>Adult Social Care and Justice</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adult Support Service coaching up to 12 weeks of support.• Implemented screening for communication needs within Youth Justice services, alongside the use of communication passports.• Expanded the use of one-page profiles in prisons and introduced RECONNECT support for up to 6 months post-release. <p><u>Direction of Travel (Norfolk)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Co-production remains at the core• Diagnosis and Support are now being progressed through separate dedicated working groups.	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing work with partner organisations is ensuring support is autism-informed at any stage. <p><u>How you Can Help</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep the Directory and local offers up to date, highlighting what works and where gaps remain. Share examples of reasonable adjustments that make a meaningful difference. Take part in involvement and co-production opportunities as they arise. Provide feedback on remaining gaps, particularly around transition points and post-diagnostic support. 	
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Agenda Item	Break	Action and Due Date
4.1	A fifteen-minute break was held	

Agenda Item	Norfolk Autism Strategy Year Two Plan	Action and Due Date
5.1	<p><u>Norfolk Autism Strategy – Year Two Plan</u></p> <p><u>Norfolk Autism Strategy Oversight Group (NASOG)</u></p> <p><u>Membership</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 autistic people and/or parent representatives 2 Norfolk County Council officers Norfolk Autism Partnership Board (NAPB) Co-ordinator <p><u>Role and Responsibilities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-produce annual delivery plans with partner organisations in line with the Strategy’s priorities. 	



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor progress against agreed actions and report updates to the Norfolk Autism Partnership Board. • Identify and highlight areas of strong progress as well as any areas of concern. • Co-produce the annual “You Said, We Did” update to share progress 	
5.2	<p><u>Year Two Plan (1 August 2025 – 31 July 2026)</u></p> <p><u>Purpose of the Plan</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sets out the actions organisations across Norfolk will take during Year Two to deliver against the Norfolk Autism Strategy. <p><u>Priority Areas</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Year Two Plan is structured around 6 priority areas, aligned with the Strategy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improving understanding and inclusion of autism ○ Improve access to education and support transitions into adulthood ○ Support adults into employment ○ Tackle health inequalities for autistic people ○ Build the right support in the community ○ Improve support within the criminal justice system 	
5.3	<p><u>Organisations Contributing to the Year Two Plan</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norfolk Autism Partnership Board • Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board – health and diagnostic services (adults and children) • Norfolk County Council Adult Social Services – social care, public health, and employment support 	



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norfolk County Council Children’s Services – education, social care, and youth offending • Norfolk and Suffolk Foundation Trust (NSFT) – mental health services • Norfolk Constabulary – policing • Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner • Norfolk Prisons 	
<p>5.4</p>	<p><u>Norfolk Autism Strategy – Year Two Plan</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The full Year Two Plan is available to read online via the Norfolk Autism Partnership website under The Norfolk All-Age Autism Strategy. • The Norfolk All- Age Autism Strategy - Norfolk Autism Partnership. <p><u>Information and Resources – Planned Actions (Selected Examples)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Norfolk Autism Partnership Board (NAPB) will plan and deliver a celebration event for Autism Week 2026. • ABL Health, provider of the adult autism assessment service, will co-produce autism-specific resources for their website. • Norfolk County Council Adult Social Services will develop Autism Handbooks. • The NAPB will work with the Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board to ensure safeguarding campaign materials are autism-friendly. • Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board will work with NHS Talking Therapies to co-produce positive practice guides for working with autistic people. <p><u>Training – Planned Actions (Selected Examples)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The NAPB will continue promoting autism awareness e-learning and the one-day <i>Understanding Autism</i> course. 	



- Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board will continue the rollout of Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on learning disabilities and autism across health and care services.
- Norfolk and Suffolk Foundation Trust will roll out the National Autism Trainer Programme to all clinical staff.
- Norfolk County Council will update Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training to ensure neurodiversity is fully embedded for all staff.
- Norfolk Police will promote autism training and share the National Autistic Society's autism guide for police officers.
- Norfolk Prisons will pilot a new training package, "The Box," to support staff working with autistic people.

Support – Planned Actions (Selected Examples)

- The Titan+ travel training service will work with bus companies to improve support for autistic travellers.
- Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board will work with acute hospitals to review the provision of quiet spaces.
- Norfolk County Council will work with colleges to share good practice in supporting young people with SEND.
- Norfolk County Council will expand employment support for autistic adults through the government's Connect to Work programme.
- Norwich Prison will work to improve employment outcomes for autistic prisoners.
- Norfolk Youth Justice Service will expand its education team to include a post-16 specialist, supporting neurodivergent young people to access apprenticeships and employment.

Agenda Item	Open Floor	Action and Due Date
6.1	Comments from this section: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention instead of crisis control, once someone hits a crisis it is too late. Support should be provided earlier. It is easier and cheaper to deliver and does less damage on a person's Mental Health and wellbeing. • The current Year 2 action plan seems to focus on young people and young adults; there appears to be a lack of actions and support in place for older autistic people. 	

Agenda Item	Now That's What I Call Autism 2026	Action and Due Date
7.1	LG announce that Now that's what I call Autism will be on the 23 rd April 2026 and that applications for the various areas will be open on 22 nd January 2026 at 10:00 am.	

Agenda Item	Close of meeting	Action and Due Date
8.1	The NAPB Co-Ordinator thanked everyone for coming along and closed the Meeting	

Future Meeting Dates		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuesday 21st April 2026 13:00-14:30 • Tuesday 7th July 2026 13:00-14:30 		