Surrey Adult Autism Partnership Board

Reference Group Terms of Reference

1. What is the Surrey Adult Autism Partnership Board Reference Group?

- The Reference Group exists to ensure that the voices, lived experiences, and expertise of autistic people directly inform the design, delivery, and evaluation of outcomes and deliverables of the Adult Autism Partnership Board and its implementation of the Surrey All-Age Autism Strategy.
- The Reference Group is an advisory body and does not have decision-making powers. Its purpose is to influence policy, strategy, and implementation through recommendations to the Adult Autism Partnership Board.

2. What are the aims of the Reference Group?

The Reference Group will:

- provide insight and challenge to the Adult Autism Partnership Board. Everything going to the Adult Autism Partnership Board should first be seen by this reference group, so autistic views can be fed in early
- use the work programme of the Surrey All Age Autism Strategy to plan discussions
- inform delivery of the Surrey All-Age Autism Strategy
- ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty
- promote inclusive, accessible, and equitable outcomes for autistic adult residents

3. Scope of Work

The Reference Group will:

- review and comment on draft policies, strategies, and service designs
- identify potential barriers to access and inclusion

- suggest practical solutions and innovations
- monitor the programme's progress against equality and inclusion objectives
- act as a sounding board for communications, engagement, and consultation materials

4. Who will be members of the Reference Group?

a) Composition

Members of the Reference Group will be autistic adults who live, work, or access services in Surrey who are able to participate.

Members will have diverse lived experiences (including varied physical, sensory, learning, and mental health co-occurring conditions).

Membership will aim to be representative of different age groups, ethnic backgrounds, genders, and socio-economic circumstances.

Members may be autistic individuals or autistic representatives of local autistic organisations.

b) Recruitment

Open call via accessible channels; selection based on diversity, skills, and lived experience

A membership form must be completed.

c) Remuneration

Members will be reimbursed where possible for reasonable expenses by previous agreement in line with council policy.

5. Chairs

The Reference Group will be co-chaired by a representative of Surrey County Council Adult Social Care Commissioning, and an autistic person who is a member of the group.

The autistic Co-Chair will be elected every 2 years.

6. Administration

The Reference Group will be supported by the Surrey County Council Learning Disability and Autism Engagement Team.

Members who cannot attend should send their apologies by email.

7. Roles & Responsibilities

a) The Reference Group as a whole

- act collectively in the interests of all autistic adult residents, not solely personal or organisational interests
- maintain confidentiality where required
- engage constructively and respectfully in discussions
- attend and prepare for meetings
- declare any conflicts of interest

b) Chair / Co-Chairs

- facilitate meetings and ensure all voices are heard
- liaise with the Programme / Project Manager and Surrey Adult Autism Partnership Board Chair
- communicate information from the Reference Group to the Adult Autism Partnership Board
- represent the Reference Group at governance meetings
- approve agendas and meeting notes

c) Members

- share lived experience and expertise
- review documents and proposals in advance
- participate in workshops, focus groups or project groups as needed and where possible
- provide feedback in accessible formats
- the Co-Chairs and Engagement and Partnership Officer will review the membership at least every 2 years to ensure adequate representation

d) Council Officers (support role)

- provide secretariat support (agendas, minutes, action tracking)

- ensure accessible meeting arrangements (venues, online platforms, materials)
- provide timely information and updates to the group
- support members with reasonable adjustments

8. Format of Meetings

a) Administration

- meetings will be held 8 times a year on a Thursday, in the month prior to the Adult Autism Partnership Board, unless otherwise notified
- meetings will be held online
- group members are encouraged to contribute by raising a virtual hand or commenting in the chat. Members are also welcome to contribute by email
- Reference Group members can raise issues they would like to be added to the agenda of the group and the Adult Autism Partnership Board with the Co-Chairs or the Engagement and Partnership Officer
- the meeting will alternate one during the day and one in the evening
- papers will be provided at least 7 working days in advance in accessible formats
- presentations should provide an overview of the topic and be accessible, using plain English without jargon or abbreviations
- decisions will be made by consensus where possible; differing views will be recorded
- the group may establish task and project subgroups for specific topics
- notes will be taken of the meeting and circulated within 15 working days
- the notes will be sent to the group members or can be requested by email

b) Structure

Part 1:

- Check In
- Welcome and actions agreed at last meeting.
- Feedback from the Adult Autism Partnership Board
- Topic Presentation/ Discussion Break

Part 2:

- Topic Presentations/ Discussion
- Any Other Business
- Check Out

c) Requests to observe the meeting

- requests to observe the meeting should be made to the Co-Chairs
- observers will be limited to 4 per meeting

9. Accessibility Provision and Assurance

Wherever and whenever reasonable adjustments to the Reference Group's working practices are identified or requested, the Co-Chairs will endeavour to accommodate and implement those adjustments wherever possible where they do not significantly impact the functionality and purpose of the Reference Group

There will be a 10-minute check in and check out facilitated by the Co-Chair and Engagement and Partnership Officer for autistic members of the group for every meeting.

As part of their introduction's members will be invited to share their pronouns.

Information and views should be shared in the format most accessible to members.

There will be **a** break in every meeting.

Language will be kept simple – not using jargon or initials.

When anyone struggled to get their views across in the meeting, they will be welcome to share views with the group through email, phone,

advocates, or other ways of passing messages to the board members outside the meeting.

People can bring somebody else to the meeting if that will help them to participate.

If any group member wants to discuss any of the issues after a meeting, this will be supported by the Co-Chair and Engagement and Partnership Officer.

Any suggestions of other ways that we could arrange the meetings to be more accessible should be made to the Engagement and Partnership Officer and will be accommodated where possible.

10. Concerns for Autistic Group Members

Our meetings aim to discuss issues that are important for autistic people. Sometimes the content of a meeting or subject matter may trigger distress. This will be acknowledged at the beginning of every meeting and following points will be explained.

Members can remove themselves for parts of the agenda if they are concerned, sending a message to the Co-Chairs to indicate this if possible.

The Engagement and Partnership Officer will contact group members where it is evident that they are distressed because of the work of the group.

Members of the group will be made aware that they can contact the Engagement and Partnership Officer should they experience distress because of their work in the group.

The Engagement and Partnership Officer and Autism Commissioning Lead will seek to identify appropriate support with the individual concerned.

The Co-Chairs will stop the meeting for a break if necessary to allow people time to de-stress or de-compress.

11. Contact Details for the Reference Group

Email: disabilitycomms@surreycc.gov.uk

Phone/Text: 07929 863 582