# Surrey Adults Autism Partnership Board – Minutes

Meeting held on 16 July 2026 on Teams

## Welcome and introductions

After the check-in, Marnie welcomed attendees and introduced herself as the new lead for autism following Tom's retirement. Marnie is a Senior Commissioning Manager in the Disability Commissioning Team.

Matt Holton introduced himself as the new co-chair, he is an autistic person with lived experience.

Amanda Aldridge explained that autistic members had a short pre-meeting check-in before the full board meeting began.

## Actions from Last Meeting

- **Mike was asked to share the prison neurodivergent support plan with Amanda** which has been completed
- **Mike was asked to provide a slide or QR code for Oliver McGowan training slides to Camilla** – Camilla advised that she had not received the slide so Amanda will follow up with Mike
- **Members were encouraged to complete the Inclusive Cinema survey** - Matt reported that survey findings have been used to create a directory of Surrey cinemas and theatres showing autism-friendly and relaxed screening arrangements. The resource is available on the Autism Friendly Surrey website. A key finding was that venues define "relaxed screenings" very differently, making it important to clearly explain what adjustments are offered at each venue
- **Members were asked to complete the Draft Short Breaks Policy consultation by 8 March 2026** – the consultation is now closed

## Housing update

Presented by Rivka Stringer

### Key points

The Housing Workstream continues to focus on developing supported independent living accommodation, working with district and borough councils and producing accessible, autism-friendly tenant information and housing guides.

There are now 3 new independent living units. Kings Road, Horley had an opening ceremony in October 2025, with support provided by Active Prospects. Magdalen Crescent, Byfleet opened in March 2026. There are currently 2 residents, and support

is provided by SeeAbility. Anyards Road, Cobham building work is now complete and residents are currently being identified. Support will be provided by SeeAbility.

Autism-friendly tenants handbooks have been developed in partnership with Autism by Experience and housing authorities in Waverley and Runnymede. The aim is to make housing information easier for autistic people to understand and access. The handbooks cover:

- Book 1: The Housing Register
- Book 2: The Housing Register application form
- Book 3: Bidding for a property
- Book 4: Moving into your new home

Rivka also updated on the new Renters Rights Act, which applies to all tenants and introduces new rights and responsibilities. Landlords must provide information about these changes to tenants.

The main changes include no fixed-term tenancies, rent increases limited to once a year with 2 months' notice, rent increases cannot exceed market rates, section 21 ("no fault") evictions are ending, tenants can give 2 months' notice to end a tenancy and tenants have the right to ask to keep a pet.

Housing services will transfer from district and borough councils to the new East and West Surrey unitary authorities from April 2027. Changes to the processes that people are accessing will not happen immediately. All the different policies and requirements need to be rewritten so it is the same for everyone.

Rivka is part of this workstream and will highlight the importance of ensuring that autism-friendly resources and improvements are not lost during this transition.

## Discussion

Simon shared that he had visited Magdalen Crescent in Byfleet and that he was really impressed by the quality of the housing, and the standard of the build. He added that it had been a really positive experience for the individuals who had moved in.

Marnie asked if changes to housing policies must be made within the first year of LGR. Rivka said that it is within the legislation that oversees LGR. She believes they have 2 years to completely rewrite the policies.

Amanda shared feedback from the Autism Reference Group saying that housing information can be difficult to find and application processes remain complex and inconsistent. There is limited support available to help people complete housing

applications and advocacy support is often unavailable for autistic people who are not eligible for Adult Social Care.

Haywood raised concerns about autistic people who are not eligible for PIP or social care support and may struggle to afford housing.

Marnie said that from previous experience there seems to be a significant gap in support available to help people complete housing application forms. She asked about the support available for completing housing applications for autistic people living on benefits or low incomes.

Rivka acknowledged the concerns and stated that housing departments should be providing support, including face-to-face and telephone assistance where needed. She also noted that Autism by Experience gave some training to Waverley, Guildford and Runnymede, who said it was useful but that there is an inconsistency in other parts of Surrey. Rivka will ask to meet with the heads of housing, as she has done before, to raise these issues with them again.

Rivka is part of the advocacy working group, re-writing the advocacy contract specification. She will speak to her colleague and see if they would like to come to one of these meetings to explain further.

Marnie asked if the advocacy service is for people with adult social care needs. Rivka confirmed that people who do not have adult social care needs would not be able to access the service.

Emma highlighted additional support is available through the Surrey Welfare Rights Unit and the Moving into Adulthood Project for younger people.

Rivka shared a link for a specialist mental health Citizens Advice in Surrey for people using mental health services. Referrals need to go through a professional.

**BREAK**

## Employment update

Presented by Christina Earl and Martin Woodward.

**Key points**

The Get Britain Working programme aims to help more people into work, particularly disabled people, people with health conditions and young people, through better employment, skills and training support.

There are concerns that autistic people may face barriers including limited autism awareness, recruitment challenges, workplace barriers, benefits-related anxiety and pressure to take unsuitable jobs.

Connect to Work launched in Surrey in 2025 and offers up to 12 months of employment support to autistic jobseekers, regardless of Adult Social Care eligibility.

Surrey Choices EmployAbility continues to provide specialist employment support, including career planning, job coaching and in-work support for people eligible for Adult Social Care. The service works with over 600 employers in Surrey.

The Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) helps address skills shortages in areas such as digital technology, AI, engineering, health and social care, construction and work-readiness skills, while encouraging employers to recruit from a more diverse workforce.

Source in Surrey supports local businesses and job creation, and STEP Surrey is a website providing information on jobs, training and careers.

People can access a range of support, including supported internships, vocational training, employment programmes, Disability Employment Adviser support and grants to help overcome barriers to work.

A pilot programme for young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) has achieved positive outcomes, with 100% engagement and 47% progressing into paid employment. The programme will continue into its 3rd year from September 2026.

The Employment Workstream will continue to focus on increasing opportunities for autistic and neurodivergent people, reducing barriers to employment and promoting good practice and successful outcomes.

## Discussion

Amanda gave feedback from the Reference Group. She said that key themes included highly qualified autistic people continuing to struggle to secure employment,

recruitment processes often focus on social skills and "fitting in" rather than knowledge and ability and some autistic people feel pressure to mask their autistic traits during interviews and recruitment.

Matt shared that interviews can be overwhelming and often fail to accurately assess an autistic person's skills as they may require quick responses and social interaction which may not reflect their abilities.

Martin noted that many workplace adjustments, such as sharing interview questions in advance or providing quiet spaces, can benefit all employees and not just autistic people.

Emma explained that all Surrey Job Centres now have Disability Employment Advisers and can offer reasonable adjustments and financial support through the Flexible Support Fund. She also highlighted that the fund offers help with interview clothes or travel costs. Specialist support is also available with CVs and career guidance.

Emma shared guidance from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) about employing disabled people and people with health conditions. She also shared government information about disability rights in relation to employment.

Rebecca reported that Macro, which provides facilities management services for Surrey County Council, had delivered a 2-week work experience programme for 5 young people. 2 participants have since progressed into employment opportunities through Macro's supply chain and received strong support throughout the process.

It was agreed that meaningful work experience opportunities help overcome many barriers associated with traditional recruitment processes.

## Service updates

Marnie asked Simon to give an update on LGR.

Simon advised that Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) remains on track and Surrey County Council is slightly ahead of schedule. Work continues behind the scenes with the aim of minimising disruption for residents, providers and partners. He added that information can be found on the Future Surrey website.

Marnie said that that All-Age-Autism Strategy Team is waiting for further government direction regarding future autism strategies and is undertaking a review of achievements to date.

## Summary of Actions

- Amanda to follow up with Mike Leat regarding Oliver McGowan training information for Camilla

- Rivka to raise housing application support concerns with Surrey housing leaders and report back
- Rivka to speak to the advocacy lead about attending a future board meeting to explain advocacy service changes

## Next meeting date

Thursday 15 October at 10am

## Attendees

**Chair**

- Marnie Cotterill - Senior Commissioning Manager, Surrey County Council

**Co-chair**

- Matt Holton – Expert by experience

**Board members**

- Amanda Aldridge – Engagement and Partnership Officer, Surrey County Council
- Debbie Overton – Information & Engagement Team, Surrey County Council (notes)
- Haywood Drake – Co-chair of Autism Reference Group
- Yasmin Broome – Involvement Lead, Surrey Coalition of Disabled People
- Michael Fullerton – Achieve Together
- Sam Ashall - Mencap
- Simon McGurk - Assistant Director - Disability, Neurodiversity & Transitions, Surrey County Council
- Chris Lane, Avenues
- Southey Leigh DWP Woking JCP
- Sara Truman – National Autistic Society
- Camilla Ford – Surrey and Sussex ICB
- Emma Langdon - DWP Disability Employment Advisor
- Rebecca King - DWP Disability Employer Advisor Lead Surrey
- Taj Gilligan – Parent carer
- Christine Malik – National Autistic Society
- Joanna Grudzinska-Dmowska – The Grange

**Presenters**

- Marnie Cotterill, Senior Commissioning Manager, Surrey County Council
- Rivka Stringer – Commissioning Manager, Surrey County Council

- Christina Earl – Head of Innovation and Business Development, Surrey Choices
- Martin Woodward – Surrey Choices Employability Team