



Surrey Autism Partnership Board

23 January 2025 on Teams

Introduction

Tom welcomed people to the meeting, and everyone introduced themselves.

Notes of the last meeting / matters arising

Completed Actions

Update on when the Suicide Prevention Project is starting- Narmadha has followed up with Nanu we do not yet have a date. To review at next meeting.

NK

Healthwatch Report on Outpatients Services – Julie Callin

Healthwatch carried out a survey in July, to investigate neurodivergent outpatients' experiences in Surrey hospitals.

- There were 34 self-reports, 36 on behalf of others, 28 neurodivergent people, 28 parent and carers and 14 people waiting for diagnosis.
- Detailed themes and recommendations are included in the slide pack.
- The recommendations have been shared with hospitals.
- Hospitals are expected to provide specific action plans responding to the recommendations.
- It is likely that not all recommendations can be met. Some issues identified may not be easily fixed. However, hospitals should be able to show they are taking action to make improvements. Healthwatch will follow-up with hospitals in a few months to ensure changes are made.
- While pleased with the 70 responses, Healthwatch recognise it is not enough.

Feedback from reference group and discussion

The reference group raised similar issues with outpatient services to those in the report, including resourcing and reasonable adjustments.

The video shown by Julie didn't have subtitles. - Having subtitles would make things easier for an autistic person to read and understand.

Camilla mentioned using a helpful sensory checklist from the National Autistic Society while working in schools. She suggested creating a similar Environmental Audit for health settings, which could be widely used and contribute to consistent improvements.

Natalia expressed concern about the lack of funding in hospitals, specifically mentioning Epsom and St. Helier Hospital. Will there be any funding to implement Julie's suggestions? Or can improvements be made without additional money, perhaps focusing on educating clinical teams?

Julie said she understood that some issues might be easy to fix, while others would need more work, but accessibility is already a requirement for services.

Fi raised the idea of having autistic people make recommendations for improvements. She mentioned a past project in Hampshire where volunteers helped make GP surgeries more autism friendly. Fi asked if Surrey has plans to involve autistic individuals in similar projects today.

Julie explained that Healthwatch have the right to visit health and social care services, by arrangement in advance. They recently did projects at Ashford St. Peters and St. Catherine's Hospice. The main challenge is having enough staff and funding to cover all the visits they would like to. Julie would like to discuss this further with Surrey Heartlands.

Tom mentioned that there is some short-term funding available through the All-Age Autism Strategy, from the Better Care Fund. If an organisation wanted to support autistic people to audit services in the way Fi had described, they could potentially bid for a grant to do this. Grants are time-limited, so it would be important to think about the sustainability and long-term impact of any work funded. Anyone can contact Disability Comms for more details of this process.

Julie said the project will continue, and asked whether people would want to get involved in phase two of the project.

Action: If you would like to be involved, please contact: julie.callin@healthwatchesurrey.co.uk.

All

Disability comms will send out the survey by email.

Break

Autism Friendly Communities

Anna discussed changes in Autism Friendly Communities. There are 5 groups working to make Surrey more inclusive, raise autism awareness and empower autistic people. Last year, they held events and set up groups across Surrey. Feedback was mostly positive but did say that big events can be overwhelming for autistic people. In planning future developments, we want to take the feedback into account.

Anna's role is changing, and although she will still be involved in the Autism Friendly Communities work, she won't have as much time for it. The project needs more support to be successful.

The goal is to make communities more autism-friendly, not just through services but by influencing the wider community to be inclusive. This needs to be about co-production, with autistic people and communities leading and directing the change. Big events help with publicity, but smaller,

more frequent actions might be more effective. Peer support is important, and the groups want to help autistic people set up their own support networks.

Tom and Anna want to hear ideas from the group on making Surrey more autism friendly and welcome suggestions on organisations that would be helpful to connect with.

Discussion

Wendy finds peer support helpful but sees differences between facilitated and unfacilitated groups. Facilitated groups can be too formal, while unfacilitated ones can be dominated by one person. She asks if the new groups will have a facilitator to ensure everyone is included or if they will be more informal.

Tom acknowledged the issue. There is space for different types of groups – some structured, some just about a social meet-up. We are looking for the Autism Friendly Community groups to define what they need and what opportunities there are in their local area, and support delivering that. Each area's approach can be unique and flexible.

Haywood suggested that groups could be facilitated by autistic people themselves. He mentioned about the Andy's Man Club he attends. The facilitators are just like other members but with a bit more responsibility. He thinks this approach could work well.

Kai raised the importance of being flexible because autistic people have different needs. Social situations can be challenging, so some structure might help. Each group might need different levels of support, and it's important to adapt to those needs. He agreed there should be less of a divide between facilitators and group members, looking for a balance between structure and open communication. He emphasised the need for working together and honest, back-and-forth communication, rather than a top-down approach.

Anna said autism friendly community groups are looking for ways to make the community more accessible – involving services and businesses too. Peer support should help people approach those issues and be empowered to deal with them.

Jo suggested having a platform to communicate about groups being set up. She mentioned that some use Meetup, but it's limited. She asked if there's a website where people can advertise their groups for broader access. All agreed we should look at this as part of the development of Autism Friendly Communities.

Camilla stressed the importance of the voluntary sector for community development, because charities and community interest companies often have strong local connections. We should use our resources to support voluntary organisations, as they are good at delivering outcomes effectively. Limited funds can often achieve more in the voluntary sector than in the statutory sector.

Anna mentioned that trust is still an issue. Even though everyone involved is committed to making the community more autism-friendly, her role with Surrey County Council can create a barrier. Having autistic people leading the process should make others trust and engage more. We hope that the new way of delivering Autism Friendly work will be a step towards true co-production, with Anna taking more of a back seat.

Tom highlighted a challenge – we are now in the fourth year of a five-year strategy. Whatever we set up, we need to try to find ways for it to be stable and lasting.

Kai emphasised the importance of clear communication when setting up networks and groups. He noted that information can often be lost or misinterpreted in a time of change. He stressed the

need to consider how everything is communicated and organised during the change to autistic people taking the lead.

Christine mentioned NAS Surrey Branch are involved in autism-friendly communities and excited about it. She noted that the voluntary sector is important but faces challenges with both funding and finding volunteers. They have parent support groups, but setting up peer support groups was found to be too difficult. She also mentioned that the National Autistic Society (NAS) runs Aspire social groups in some areas. She suggested using their model to expand to other areas. She said it was important to build on existing resources but understood it can be challenging.

Anna said they want to build on existing resources and make them stronger. They need to advertise better and link people to good local resources. They aim to reach more autistic adults and teenagers. The goal is to make the community more accessible and ensure changes last beyond the current strategy. They plan to support the community rather than lead everything themselves.

Service Updates/ Any Other Business

Amanda reminded everyone about the NHS 10-year plan workshop for this group and the autism reference group. She invited everyone to join.

NHS are gathering this feedback nationally. Fi added that after the workshop next week, she will continue collecting information to focus on local actions. They want to ensure plans are put into practice and accountability is taken within Surrey. The conversation will continue until summer, with updates on local progress.

Summary of Actions

Ongoing Action- Nanu to share finalised details of the project once signed off. Narmadha to follow up with Nanu on when this is starting and let members know.

NK

Anyone who wants to get involved in phase 2 of the Healthwatch work on Neurodivergent People's experience of Outpatient Services to contact Julie Callin julie.callin@healthwatchesurrey.co.uk.

All

Next Meeting

Our next meeting is Thursday 10 April at 10am to 12pm



Attendance

Co-Chairs:

- Tom Moore – Senior Commissioning Manager Surrey County Council
- Kai Worgan

Board Members:

- Amanda Aldridge- Engagement and Partnership Officer, Surrey County Council
- Anna Attah- Commissioning Manager Surrey County Council
- Haywood Drake
- Narmadha Kothandapani- Surrey County Council Engagement and Partnership Senior Business Support Assistant, MinuteTaker.
- Jane Gupta- All Age Autism Strategy, Surrey County Council
- Kim Collen- All Age Autism Strategy Manager, Surrey County Council
- Jackie Vass- Occupational Therapist, Surrey County Council
- Sara Truman- National Autistic Society
- Joy Bagshaw- Farnham Road Hospital
- Camilla Ford- NHS Surrey Heartlands
- Emma Langdon- Disability and Employment Advisor, DWP
- Helen Tindall- Senior Commissioning Manager TECH Team, Surrey County Council
- Parvin Ahmed- Mary Frances Trust
- Christine Malik- National Autistic Society
- Lauren Bowler- Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS
- Fi Bovino- NHS Surrey Heartlands ICB
- Rachel Higginson- BSL/English Interpreter for Fi Bovino
- Carrier Moorhouse- BSL/English Interpreter for Fi Bovino
- Julie Callin- Healthwatch
- Natalia Konieczna – Waythrough mental health employment support
- Vanessa Clark- All Age Autism Strategy
- Luke Simmons- Surrey Borders and Partnership Trust
- Chris Knight- Strada Care
- Christina Earl- Surrey Choices