

Report title: Norfolk Autism Partnership Board Update, Autumn 2021

Date of meeting: 29 September 2021

Sponsor

(HWB member): James Bullion, Executive Director Adult Social Services

Reason for the Report

The Autism Partnership Board was created in response to Autism Act. As per recommendations and previous agreements, the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) acts as governing body for reviewing the Board's activities and achievements.

Report summary

The report sets out the activities undertaken by the Norfolk Autism Partnership Board (NAPB) and its working group's over last 12 months and the outcomes achieved. In its governing body role, the HWB are asked for support and feedback.

Recommendations

The HWB is asked to:

- a) Continue to signpost organisations to the Autism eLearning on the NAPB website to work towards a more inclusive Norfolk.
- b) Support in the wider engagement activities of the NAPB by offering resource, time or links to relevant parties.

1. Methodology

1.1 The Autism Partnership has reported to the Board on 10 July 2019 by Tracey Walton.

2. Autism Partnership Report, September 2021

2.1 The NAPB was created in response to the Autism Act 2009. Over the last several years it has matured and expanded, playing a key role in developing and coproducing the Local Autism Strategy *My Autism, Our Lives, Our Norfolk*, responding to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and developing a stronger independent identity outside of the statutory organisations who are members.

2.2 As part of the ongoing development of the NAPB, a new Partnership Transformation Manager was appointed on 2 November 2020. Tom Bassett now has oversight of both the Autism and Learning Disability Partnerships and is working to make further improvements.

2.3 With the release of the national autism strategy on 21 July 2021¹, the NAPB will focus on combining its recommendations with that of the local strategy.

2.4 **Outreach and Engagement:** Over the last year, representatives of Norfolk County Council (NCC), voluntary organisations and autistic people worked together through the Board and it's Working Groups to coordinate a number of activities:

¹ 'National strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026', HM Government (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-strategy-for-autistic-children-young-people-and-adults-2021-to-2026>, accessed 26/08/21)

- Developed and distributed a questionnaire on autism in Norfolk and the unique challenges presented by the pandemic. Results were used by commissioners to steer work.
- Coproduced new, more accessible Partnership documents, including Codes of Conduct for members and application forms.
- Led on creation of an independent website for the Partnership. The new website is regularly updated with new information, has blog post features for newsletters, allows membership signup and hosts the partnership's coproduced autism eLearning (see below for more detail).
- Hosted a weeklong virtual event, Autism Awareness Week 2021, through the website which included blog posts, newsletter, fundraising campaigns and videos. Around 900 visits to the event's webpage were recorded during the week, the videos were watched more than 400 times.

2.4.1 The regular public engagement events put on by the Partnership, the Autism Norfolk Forums (ANF), were paused for much of the pandemic. A combined virtual and in-person hybrid ANF has now been arranged for September 2021 with support from different VSCE organisations. It is hoped that this will be the model for a new series of meetings.

2.4.2 As well as the continued management and facilitation of the ANF and website, the Partnership hopes to continue to expand its membership, regularly produce a newsletter and host more engagement events for a variety of audiences.

2.4.3 The NAP and Learning Disability Partnership (LDP) are now working closely with the library service and are funding the training of autism and learning disability champions across all 47 libraries. These Champions will facilitate monthly meetings with autistic people/people with learning disabilities, family/carers and the voluntary, social enterprise and charity sectors to improve signposting, information and sharing to collect views from the public to inform the work of both partnerships.

2.4.4 A partner will also be procured with expertise in these areas to support the running of the partnerships and increase their capacity. This is in the hopes that, in the future, the partnerships can host a wider array of engagement opportunities and begin to establish a permanent base within Norfolk.

2.5 **Autism Training:** The NAPB Workforce Development Working Group has led work coproduce autism awareness training in Norfolk thanks to the efforts of the NAPB's Workforce Development Working Group. The University of East Anglia has now endorsed both training packages.

2.5.1 As of May 2019, the eLearning is now mandatory for all NCC staff in Adults and Childrens Social Services, while the Understanding Autism 1-Day course is mandatory for all NCC staff in Adult and Children's Social Services, who are likely to have direct contact with autistic people. Following the creation of an independent website, and working with the Engagement Working Group, the eLearning was made available to all for free via the Partnership website. [Go the NAP website to access the eLearning.](#) To date, over 180 visitors have accessed the course. 12 outside organisations have either uploaded the eLearning course to their own Learning Platforms or have directed their staff to the Partnership website to complete it. Five organisations have completed training to enable them to deliver the 1-day course inhouse, with a further two booked to be trained in September and October 2021. Of particular note, the Tiffin School in Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey, has trained eight teachers in the course and plan to train more teachers in the next school year.

- 2.5.2 Both the eLearning and 1-day course will be reviewed every 6 months to make changes based on the feedback we get from evaluation forms or direct messages. The first review meeting for the working group is scheduled for 23 November 2021.
- 2.6 **Autism Diagnosis in adults and children:** Unacceptable waiting times and lack of provision for autism diagnosis were identified as key concerns at ANFs and other Partnership engagement events. These concerns are now being addressed. Representatives of NCC, Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust (NCH&C), the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), and Autism Service Norfolk (ASN), who have responsibilities to address waiting times, regularly participate in Board meetings and working groups.
- 2.6.1 Through the Diagnosis Working Group in particular, partners planned and workshopped responses to issues. There has been increased investment in autism assessment for adults and children and young people. The coronavirus pandemic response has impacted both waiting times and the number of people on waiting lists, to which NCC and the CCG responded with further funding. This will allow the recruitment of more staff on top of those already in post. Recruitment is ongoing and is already showing tangible results.
- 2.6.2 While increased investment in assessment is a positive step, stakeholder forums also identified “better communication and information” and “streamlining of referral processes” as key areas for improvement.
- 2.6.3 The NAPB will continue to monitor progress reducing waiting times over the next 18 months. It will work with commissioners and providers to support improvements in how they communicate with people who use their services and improve the information available.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 Moving forward, the NAPB plans to build on its successes and strengthen its relationships with other Partnership Boards and organisations in Norfolk. The Partnership Board Manager’s oversight of the Learning Disability Partnership provides one obvious starting point; another is the work done by Autism Partnership Co-Chair Trevor Key.
- 3.2 The NAPB are taking steps to widen membership, views and engagement opportunities by using a network of ‘Library Champions’ to disseminate information and facilitate informal meetings.
- 3.3 Following an approach by the Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board, members of both Boards were asked to work together as part of a safeguarding adult review. The NAPB co-chair is now actively supporting the effort to shape system response. The co-chair is also actively participating in a reference group on the future of social care charging. He looks forward to reaching out to other partnerships in the near future. The NAPB hopes that our next report to the Board shows even greater impact.

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper please get in touch with:

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