



Gloucestershire's Autism (and Neurodivergence) Partnership Board Minutes

Tuesday 3rd December 2025
10.00am to 12.30pm; Zoom

Name	Organisation
Andrew Cotterill (AC)	Lived Experience Co-chair
Caroline Sutcliffe	Strategic Commissioning - Long Term Support: Mental Health & Neurodiversity – Gloucestershire County Council
Suzanne Hanratty	The Spring Centre
Rachel Hodges-Cox	Social prescribing – Churchdown Surgery
Lee Holder	Music Works
Lidia Bojczuk (LB)	Connector: Barnwood Trust
Pippa Baker-Walsh	Independence Trust
Courtney Joynes	Inclusion Gloucestershire / Access Social Care
Jacky Martel	Access Social Care
Kay Whittaker	Criminal Justice & Victim Lead: Office for Police & Crime Commissioner (OPCC)
Sam James	D-NET
Mar Plowman	Active Impact
Jane Roberts	Youth ND Project
Chris	Expert by Experience
Sam Smith	Expert by Experience
Jackie Shoul	Inclusion Gloucestershire
Judith Bell	Chief Clinical Officer: Let's Talk Well
Harry Russel	Healthwatch Gloucestershire
Ida Poschel	Active Gloucestershire
Jan Marriott	Independent Chair, Mental Health & Wellbeing Partnership Board; MEAM Network
Beth Foster	Healthwatch Gloucestershire
Lisa Walker	Glos Carers Hub
Josh Jones	Learning Manager: Barnwood Trust
Jo Sutherland	Principal Social Worker: Adult Social Care: Gloucestershire County Council
Ethan Easton	Beezee by Maximus
Faroq Ismail	Gloucestershire Hospitals Trust
Jane	ND Project
Zaphira Cormack	ND Hub Gloucestershire
Dominica-Lipska Rosecka	Partnership team: GHC
Sophie Ayres	Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board (ICB)
Mel Brzonkalik	National Star
Ione Sime	Young Gloucestershire
Mike Youart	National Star




No.	Item	Lead
1.	<p>Welcome / Introductions</p> <p>Introductions were shared in the chat.</p>	Andrew Cotterill
2.	<p>Apologies for absence and any declarations of interest</p> <p>Apologies from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jane Blackett (ASC In-house Day Services Operational Manager) • Hayden Price • Emma Whittaker • Wendy McEvoy (Project Manager; Transformation Hub I Improvement and Partnerships Directorate Gloucestershire Health and Care (GHC) NHS Foundation Trust) • Karen Julke (Programme Manager: arlift) • Edward Weir Interim Chief Executive Officer: Gloucestershire Counselling Service • Alice Brixey: NHS Gloucestershire 	Disclosed to the Lead.
3.	<p>Discussion around recent positive developments ‘wins’ along with concerns / challenges that people are experiencing regarding neurodiversity.</p> <p>AC advised that it would be useful to hear from partnership board members around recent positive developments (“wins”) as well as any concerns or challenges that individuals are currently experiencing in relation to neurodiversity.</p> <p>Members shared several recent wins, including the increased number of internal briefings and awareness-raising activities within GCC, as well as positive engagement with general neurodiversity talks and the widening of ND Hub events.</p> <p>Attendance at cultural events was also highlighted as beneficial. One member shared a particularly positive experience at Stroud Minor Injury Unit and the group agreed that the general increase in co-production activity felt encouraging, particularly the opportunity to hear lived experiences and learn from the work of other agencies to help reduce disparities for neurodivergent people.</p> <p>Other positive developments included progress with a SEN pilot project in specialist settings supporting students with health outcomes around healthy eating, along with wider conversations that are ongoing around diagnosis, coping strategies, and the value of peer groups.</p>	AC / ALL




	<p>it was also reported that Disability Employment Advisors are now available in every job centre across the county, and that Cheltenham Jobcentre runs a weekly “Ability Group” for Universal Credit claimants with neurodiversity needs to support peer networks and access to services.</p> <p>The value of ongoing network conferences was noted as helping maintain momentum and members acknowledged the significant collaboration taking place with a wide range of partners.</p> <p>Concerns raised included concerns around the current rhetoric coming from America surrounding neurodiversity and the ongoing inequalities faced by neurodivergent people, particularly in accessing social care and navigating complex systems.</p> <p>Members also discussed how misconceptions and assumptions continue to be a barrier and additional concerns included individuals being referred to social prescribers for anxiety or depression rather than having their neurodiversity needs recognised; the need to raise awareness around additional needs around the menopause for neurodivergent women and also the lack of research into restricted diets for individuals who are neuro-divergent</p> <p>Challenges were also raised around the lack of reasonable adjustments in workplaces and ongoing difficulties accessing “Access to Work” support.</p> <p>AC reflected on the breadth of feedback and advised that the next Partnership Board meeting will focus on employment and reasonable adjustments where these issues can be discussed in more depth.</p>	
<p>4.</p>	<p>Jo Sutherland: Principal Social Worker: Gloucestershire County Council: Adult social care and the new Partnership board post update</p> <p>JS explained that GCC have now successfully recruited to the new co-production lead post, and the new post holder will hopefully be starting in January 2026. JS advised GCC are keen to work closely with the partnership boards on co-production and advised they are hoping to hold a co-production event next year.</p> <p>JS discussed changes within GCC regarding the repatriation of s.75 services such as the mental health social work team and the benefits that this will bring including improved outcomes through early intervention and holistic support, leading to more effective treatment and recovery, stronger community support reducing reliance on intensive social care and promoting independence and a more integrated approach to care.</p> <p>JS advised this will ensure that people have better access to community services, and will drive the recovery and independence model by not wanting to ‘hold’ people in services but rather being strength-based and working with what people can do and supporting where they can’t do.</p>	




	<p>JS explained that the integration of mental health social workers within GCC will further foster strong partnerships and collaboration between the Council, NHS, and voluntary sector, improving coordination and outcomes for service users.</p> <p>This approach strengthens the mental health system and ensures high-quality, person-centred care for those living with mental ill health.</p> <p>If anyone would like further information on the changes or the new co-production post, please reach out to JS to discuss further.</p>	
<p>5.</p>	<p>Faye Thames: Adult Autism Assessment Service Waiting List Project: Improving access for adults on the ASC assessment waiting list (see slides below)</p> <p>  Partnership Board meeting slides - FT - L </p> <p>FT outlined the work of the core project team, which is focused on improving the experience of adults waiting for an autism assessment. There are currently 762 adults on the waiting list, with 80% already post-triage, and waiting times of 2–3 years. Only 40% of those assessed go on to receive a diagnosis, with the largest age group on the list being 26–35 years, many of whom have overlapping conditions.</p> <p>FT highlighted that there is very limited formal support during the waiting period, and many people avoid seeking other help (e.g. mental health support) while waiting for their assessment outcome. For those not diagnosed, the experience can feel disorientating and emotionally difficult.</p> <p>The project aims to improve the post-triage experience using a needs-based approach and to ensure the work is shaped by people with lived experience. Three focus groups have been held: adults currently on the waiting list, adults who have completed the process, and those who have attended post-diagnostic support. These provided valuable insight into the emotional impact of waiting, challenges faced, and coping strategies.</p> <p>Key themes identified include isolation, trauma linked to the long wait, social and emotional impacts, and communication needs. The team is now developing potential change ideas based on these findings. A survey will also be introduced for everyone undergoing assessment, with questions informed by the focus-group themes, and this will be included within assessment invitation letters.</p> <p>If anyone would like to discuss the project further or find out any further information please contact Mazen.almaskati@ghc.nhs.uk / faye.thames@ghc.nhs.uk</p>	



	<p>Zephira Cormack: ND Hub, Cultural SEN fair.</p> <p>ZC outlined the ongoing anti-racist work that is being delivered through the ND Hub which includes a cultural SEN fair which has been held at both the Music Works and The Friendship Café in Gloucester. ZC explained that the venues helped reduce practical access barriers and created more culturally intentional spaces, though it was noted that attendance did not fully reflect the breadth of global majority communities. ZC emphasised that culturally safe engagement requires sustained relationships, trust, and visible representation rather than relying on venue choice alone.</p> <p>ZC explained that these events focused on supporting global majority families, acknowledging that many families face additional barriers when navigating SEN systems which are not designed with diverse communities in mind and advised feedback includes highlighting issues such as misinterpretation of neurodiversity traits, language barriers, and experiences of feeling blamed and advised that participants frequently raised concerns about “box-ticking”; however, ZC stressed that when work is rooted in integrity, respect, accountability, and lived experience, it becomes meaningful rather than tokenistic.</p> <p>ZC led a reflective exercise exploring identity markers and how they shape professional interactions, legitimacy, and perception. This was framed as foundational to reflective practice and understanding differing perspectives, particularly for global majority staff and families.</p> <p>Finally, ZC described the expansion of anti-racist work within short break services, aiming to develop guidance that recognises cultural norms, avoid deficit-based interpretations of behaviour, and challenges racialised expectations. ZC highlighted the need to shift from representation of global majority families to leadership by global majority families, working alongside community and faith leaders to build stronger, more inclusive pathways advising that the county can model anti-racist, intersectional, reflective SEN practice by working collaboratively.</p>	
<p>6.</p>	<p>Dominica-Lipska Rosecka / Sophie Ayres: Big Health Day (see slides below)</p> <p>  17th Big Health Day - report.pptx </p> <p>7.</p> <p>DLP reported that the 17th Big Health Day took place on 13 June 2025 at Oxstalls, Gloucester, attracting 1,600 attendees (an increase of 150 from the previous year). Around half of attendees were members of the public, with the remainder made up of carers, educators, social workers, activity providers, stallholders, and voluntary sector representatives. The event was delivered as a One Gloucestershire collaboration and continues to grow in popularity, particularly among carers.</p>	



	<p>SA advised that over 130 health checks were carried out on the day, including blood pressure, diabetes, height/weight, liver and respiratory checks, specialist screenings, and smoking cessation support. Inclusive physical activities were provided by Active Glos, such as cricket, walking football, boccia, spike ball, cycling, tennis and table tennis. More than 120 stalls and displays were present, representing VCS organisations, GHC, GCC and the NHS Foundation Trust, alongside new partners.</p> <p>The event benefited from strong volunteer support, with 120 volunteers from Hartpury College, Inclusion Glos, and the University of Gloucestershire. Feedback was collected from 145 attendees (up from 32 last year). Positive comments highlighted a welcoming and well-organised atmosphere. Areas for improvement included traffic and crowd flow, provision of quiet/sensory spaces, more activities for younger people, clearer signage and refreshments, and greater involvement of disabled people in planning. It was noted that most attendees were from Gloucester, with lower engagement from Tewkesbury and the Cotswolds. If anyone would like to be involved in planning the next big health day, please reach out to Dominika and Sophie for a discussion.</p>	
<p>8.</p>	<p>Any Other Business (AOB)</p> <p>Let's Talk Well Conference 2026 Theme: Understanding and working with neurodivergence Date: Friday 27th March 2026 Venue: Cheltenham Racecourse Registration link: Children and Young People's Mental Health Conference The event is accredited by CPDUK</p> <p> Let's Talk Well Conference 2026 Post</p> <p>Access Social Care</p> <p>JM from Access Social Care advised if anyone would like to talk about any issues around accessing social care please get in touch with Jackie or Courtney who would be happy to discuss this further.</p>	
<p>9.</p>	<p>Meeting Closes:</p> <p>Next Meeting: 3rd March 2026:10am – 12.30pm on Zoom</p>	



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