

Autism Partnership Boards

The adult autism strategy says it is essential that adults with autism and parents/carers are involved in the development of local services. It therefore recommends the setting up of local Autism Partnership Boards (APBs), or a similar mechanism, that "brings together different organisations, services and stakeholders locally and sets a clear direction for improved services". (6.11-6.13).

What is an Autism Partnership Board?

APBs are an integrated strategic planning forum that is responsible for developing autism provision across health and social care. These multi-agency forums bring together different agencies and stakeholders to identify local commissioning priorities and enable a more strategic approach to developing better outcomes for people with autism.

Across the country, there are a number of these groups already in place, although they are called different things in different areas, including 'autism planning groups', 'autism steering groups' and 'autism services development groups' (ASDGs).

Why are these groups needed?

Other than the obvious reason that the strategy says that such groups are important, there are strong practical arguments for setting them up too.

It is well documented that there is a lack of clarity over whose responsibility it is to provide support for adults with autism. This results in many adults with autism being unable to get the support they need. We need to change from a culture of passing on responsibility to one of sharing responsibility. More effective joint working between health and social care is critical to improving outcomes at a local level.

It is therefore necessary and essential that each local area develops an integrated planning forum that is responsible for developing autism provision across health and social care. Such forums do not require additional funding to set up and they are a key mechanism for addressing the need for a more collaborative approach to public

services, where agencies join up resources, both financial and human, to provide a more coherent response to local needs.

Who might be part of an Autism Partnership Board?

APB members could include:

- a chairperson - a local lead on autism with responsibility for autism (if one has been appointed) or individual with relevant commissioning responsibilities
- commissioners (eg mental health, learning disability, NHS and local authority)
- local clinical leads (if one has been appointed, other local clinicians if not)
- relevant local authority and NHS service managers
- family members/carers
- meaningful representation from people with autism
- voluntary sector representatives
- representatives from local children and young people's services and/or local authority and primary care trust (PCT) representatives with responsibility for transition
- local authority personalisation leads
- heads of training in the local authority
- equality and diversity officers in the local authority
- Supporting People, housing, employment, health (eg occupational therapists) and other agencies as required.

What might be the Terms of Reference for an Autism Partnership Board?

The terms of reference of APBs may include:

- review and consider current guidance and policy at the local and national level relating to autism
- map local needs, resources and identify gaps to inform the joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) and commissioning of future services
- identify local commissioning priorities and develop a local commissioning plan

- oversee the development of a clear pathway to diagnosis, assessment and support following assessment
- improve multi-agency working, with particular attention to boundary management issues
- oversee the development of a multi-tier training framework
- develop an action plan to deliver the strategy
- oversee the development of a long-term strategy to improve local support services for adults with autism
- link with and feed into regional plans for strategy implementation.

What other forums should the Autism Partnership Boards link in with?

- learning disability partnership boards
- carers partnership boards
- children and young peoples partnership boards
- mental health joint commissioning boards
- health and wellbeing boards
- transitions boards.

Examples of structures for local Autism Partnership Boards

Four examples of structures for local autism partnership boards that have made a significant difference to the services available in their areas can be found in the Department of Health's [Towards 'Fulfilling and rewarding lives': The first year delivery plan for adults with autism in England \(2010\)](#).

The examples start on page 25 of the report and are for Cornwall Autism Partnership, Gloucestershire Autism Partnership Board, Greater Manchester Autism Consortium (and Autism Services Development Groups) and North East Autism Consortium.

While the structures are different, the principles are the same: they bring together representatives from local authorities, primary care trusts and providers, along with adults with autism and their carers, to help develop services locally.

