



<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Safer Communities Board</b>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	20 <sup>th</sup> January 2023
<b>Report Title:</b>	Autism and the Criminal Justice System (CJS)
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<b>Executive Summary:</b>	ATJ Meeting – update
<b>Decision/Action:</b>	
<b>Attachments:</b>	None
<b>Risks for escalation to the Board:</b>	None

## 1. Introduction

The Access to Justice subgroup reports to the Barnet Safeguarding Adults Board and the Safer Communities Partnership Board. This short report summarises the work that has been done locally to implement Barnet's Autism Strategy and sets out some of the current gaps in being able to do this effectively.

It requests the support of partners to tackle these gaps.

## 2. Autism and the Criminal Justice system in Barnet

The national Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People and Adults was updated on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2021. A key objective is to increase the understanding and acceptance of autism. One of the themes is to improve support for autistic people within the criminal and youth justice systems. This theme is included in Barnet's Autism Action Plan, which has been developed by the ASAP Steering Group.

- a) This Report is to inform the Safer Communities Board of issues faced by autistic people within the criminal justice system, as victims, witnesses, and suspects.

b) It is also outlines what has been done over the past twelve months to achieve the objectives in Barnet's multi-agency Autism Plan. These include:

- To improve the outcomes for autistic people and to make sure they have a better experience within the CJS.
- To improve the understanding of autism by CJS professionals and for them to better support autistic people.
- For the police to make reasonable adjustments to standard police practice for autistic people
- To increase the alternatives to prosecution and custody, and out of court disposals

There are a number of challenges locally, and these include:

- Identifying autistic people within the system, those known to be autistic, and those who are not yet diagnosed as autistic
3. An Update on the Autism Strategy Action Plan (ASAP) – what has been done

3.1 There has been progress in the following areas:

- a) Through the Access to Justice Sub-group and the ASAP Steering Group, partners have identified the key contacts in local services, and met to map out the issues they face in achieving the objectives in the strategy. The groups have heard how practitioners could identify autistic people with Autism Alert Cards and the work of staff taking the initial calls to the police.
- b) We have identified staff in the police who can organize training and briefings on autism.
- c) We have liaised with Met Detention, to look again at how to adapt the arrest processes and environment in custody and police stations, so that they are more appropriate for autistic adults and young people.
- d) We have identified some good practice with autistic adults, where the police have worked with service providers and the Barnet Learning disability Service, and with the Schools' Police.
- e) Youth justice. Teams work closely with autistic young people.
- f) Autism and Learning disability awareness training has been provided for twenty-seven staff in the Probation service, and ten staff with Victim support.

- 3.2 There are some gaps in the picture established by the Access to Justice sub-group:
- a) It has been hard to obtain any data on the number of autistic young people and adults in contact with the CJS.
  - b) It is not clear what the police and the Diversion and Liaison Service is doing to increase the use of alternatives to prosecution and custody.
  - c) The pathways are not clear to us about the ongoing support for autistic victims of crime.
  - d) The Autism Alert card is a well-established mechanism for identifying autistic people, but its use locally is unclear and it can be quite problematic.
4. What support is needed from partners on the Safer Communities Partnership Board to tackle these gaps
- a) Data. Are there data sets available that would provide an accurate picture of the number of autistic people in contact with the CJS – the police and Probation service, and an indication of the specific issues they face in Barnet?
  - b) Engagement. What opportunities are there to capture the views and experiences of autistic people and the ways to use this to improve services?
  - c) Autism Alert cards. Can the police in Barnet follow up the pilot project in Waltham Forest, which identified autistic people through an electronic autism alert card system?
  - d) Training. Training is available. How can it be better coordinated across the CJS, so that frontline staff get the training they need and have a better understanding of autism?
  - e) Health and Care support is available from the statutory, and voluntary and community sectors, for autistic people who are in contact with the CJS. What is required to develop the pathways and make sure they are used effectively to support autistic people?

## 5. Conclusion

Improving the outcomes and the experience for autistic people in the CJS can only be achieved through a strong multi-agency approach. A range of partners need to contribute, and work together, across a complex system, covering people of different ages, and organisations with a huge number of responsibilities.

The Autism Steering Group is the main forum for overseeing the implementation of the Action Plan. The Probation service has now joined the group and we are clarifying the best way to involve the police. Members of the Access to Justice Sub-group will continue to focus on the CJS elements of the plan, monitor progress, and in turn, will continue to send reports for review at the Safer Communities Partnership Board and Barnet's Safeguarding Adults Board.