

Working together towards an autism inclusive borough

December 2024

NHS



In October, we launched the Lewisham All-Age Autism Support Service, the first of its kind in the borough. Run by Resources For Autism (RFA), the service supports anyone affected by autism, whether diagnosed, self-identifying, or in a supportive role. Cllr Bell, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care, and Cllr Cunningham introduced the event, highlighting how Lewisham's autism strategy is being implemented. An adult with lived experience also shared insights on the challenges of transitioning from child to adult care.

Throughout the afternoon, attendees visited a marketplace offering advice and information from various borough services supporting autism. Three workshops provided training and interactive discussions led by those with lived experience. One-to-one advice sessions from RFA were fully booked ahead of the event. The event attracted a diverse group of professionals, parent/carers, and local autistic residents.



“Improving lives by adapting to the needs of Autistic people”

Feedback from the discussion workshop

Representatives from the Youth Justice Service, Family Thrive, Resources for Autism, and school Special Educational Needs (SEN) Coordinators shared their efforts to better tailor services to the needs of autistic individuals. We heard inspiring stories of practical changes that offered valuable lessons for all.

Speakers stressed the importance of both flexibility and consistency in support, describing moments when they challenged existing assumptions by asking "why not?" to introduce meaningful changes. They emphasised that the responsibility to support autistic people belongs to everyone, not just specific groups. Finally, they highlighted the need to listen to and believe parents of autistic children, particularly noting the harmful impact of delayed support for young people from Black and minoritized communities.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) assessments waiting list update

Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust is committed to improving access to our Community Children and Young People (CYP) services, with a particular focus on reducing waiting times for initial assessments and autism assessments carried out by our and faster process for accessing our service and provide clear information about our clinics ultimately Community Paediatric Medical Team. We are working closely with children, families, and professionals to co-produce redesign the pathways. The goal is to ensure a smoother making it easier for families to get the support they need.

As part of this initiative, we have partnered with a private provider to help assess 230 children who have been waiting the longest for their assessments. So far, the provider has seen 140 children, and families have shared positive feedback about their experiences. This work is an important step in improving access to care and reducing waiting times for our young patients

Examples of some strategy actions in progress



Lewisham

Partnership for inclusion of neurodiversity In schools (PINS)

The PINS national programme supports the education, health needs, and meaningful inclusion of neurodivergent children, young people (CYP), and families in primary schools. Through project funding, parents, young people, and professionals in education and health have collaborated to implement neuro-affirmative practices by design. Twenty-eight mainstream primary schools in Lewisham are participating in the programme, embracing neurodivergent-friendly teaching, communication, and environments. Working in co-production with parents, they are driving a culture change in our schools.



The project runs for two terms, from September 2024 to April 2025, and we hope it will leave a lasting legacy of neuro-affirmative policy and practice in Lewisham schools.

Lewisham Girls Social Group for Autistic Girls, 12-18 years (no diagnosis necessary), has been running since June 2023 and holds fortnightly groups on Wednesdays. The group has been inspirational for making friends and doing fun activities. For more information contact: info@lewishamparentcarer.org.uk

Oliver McGowan Autism Training has been mandatory for all NHS since late 2023.

Neurodiversity Social Evenings for Adults are held monthly at The Ignition Brewery Sydenham. They have been running for over a year and have proved to be successful. The evenings will move to the **third Wednesday** of the month from January 2025. For more info contact: autismsocial1@gmail.com



Drumbeat Outreach has created and launched a new parenting programme for parents of autistic children. This training and its accompanying resources have been developed in response to the needs of our diverse community and will evolve in response to the shared understanding of the needs of this cohort of neurodivergent young people and families. Drumbeat has also created a course designed to be delivered to parents of autistic teens concurrently with teenagers themselves. This initiative came in response to requests from parents highlighting the need for a programme for their young people when they have accessed a parent group. These courses will hopefully be on offer next year.

You can find more information on our Lewisham All-Age strategy 2023-28 page:

lewisham.gov.uk/AutismStrategy

You can find more information on the Lewisham All-Age Support Service at this webpage.

resourcesforautism.org.uk/lewishamautismhub

Please engage in the Autism Consultation to help inform what impact the strategy is having in Lewisham and the next priorities

lewisham.gov.uk/autism-strategy-consultation