

Newham Autism Action Plan

Let's Talk Autism

YOU SAID, TOGETHER WE DID

Progress Toward the 2025/26 Priorities (April 2026)

Introduction

The purpose of the [Autism Action Plan](#) is to provide meaningful change to make Newham a place where all autistic residents can be independent, achieve their potential and live well. To achieve this, annual actions across six priority areas are co-produced:

1. improve understanding and acceptance of autism within society;
2. improve autistic children and young people's access to education - and support positive transitions into adulthood;
3. support more autistic people into employment;
4. tackle health and care inequalities for autistic people;
5. build the right support in the community and support people in inpatient care; and
6. improve support within the criminal and youth justice systems.

This document provides an overview of the progress made toward the [2025/26 Priorities](#). The status of each is recorded at the top of the page:

- **COMPLETE** - indicates the action has been completed and assumed, where appropriate, into 'business as usual' activity;
- **IN PROGRESS** - indicates the action has been started, but will be completed in 2026/27;
- **NOT STARTED** - indicates the action has not started due to capacity or resource.

Autism Strategic Delivery Board

The multi-disciplinary, multi-organisation Delivery Board continues to operate effectively to:

- oversee the delivery of the Autism Action Plan;
- ensure appropriate resident and stakeholder contribution across the delivery of the Action Plan and annual Priorities;
- identify synergies between the Action Plan and wider programmes across the Council, its partners and the northeast London footprint;
- identify and address obstacles, dependencies and risks to the delivery.

In 2025/26, Christina Pillai continued to sit on the Delivery Board as the resident co-chair. Christina shares...

“As I enter my second year as Co-Chair of the Delivery Board, my motivation for being involved remains deeply personal, shaped by both challenges and moments of pride as an autistic individual and parent raising two autistic sons. I have gained a deeper understanding of the significant work taking place behind the scenes, driven by dedicated professionals, organisations, and partners committed to creating meaningful change. This year also brings an exciting opportunity with the introduction of new £1,000 grants to support autistic residents in establishing peer-to-peer support groups across Newham, helping empower autistic individuals to connect, share experiences, and build supportive networks.”



Working Groups

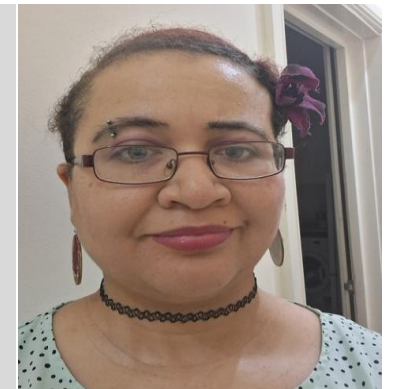
The six working groups, mirroring each priority, continue to operate effectively to support, guide and deliver the annual actions reporting back to the Autism Strategic Delivery Board.

Each group is led by a Council, Health or Police representative and an autistic resident.

Resident representatives are also members of the [Autism Residents Advisory Group \(ARAG\)](#). The ARAG meets quarterly and resident representatives report back on progress made at the Working Group and conversely feedback resident concerns and ideas raised via the ARAG to the Working Groups. This framework ensures resident voices are heard and listened to and that the actions prioritised and delivered are reflective of the needs of the local autistic community.

Natalya Fisher is one of the working group leads. Natalya shares...

“I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with Raj in Children Services in shaping the guidance for autistic young people deciding on the next phase of their lives and being able to discuss with working group members how best to help young autistic people in further education. I value the opportunities to contribute and be involved and think it’s helped me improve my skills in teamwork and collaboration to produce something with lasting impact. I also appreciate the ARAG, this has been useful and helpful, and I would welcome the opportunity for it to happen on a more frequent basis so that the support can reach more people and help draw in new members who need a supportive and inclusive space.”



Get Involved!

The Autism Resident Advisory Group (ARAG) meets quarterly - offering both face-to-face and online engagement; and is an opportunity for residents to shape and influence delivery of the Action Plan and annual Priorities. As of the 31 March 2026, 120 autistic residents have registered as members for the Group.

The Council runs a broadcast WhatsApp Group and produces a [monthly newsletter](#) sharing important local and national information.

To find out more or join, visit: [Newham's Autism Resident Advisory Group](#) or email: Autism.Commissioning@newham.gov.uk

Sarifa Patel is an active ARAG member and newsletter contributor, Sarifa shares...

"I have been an ARAG member since it started three years ago, I am proud to have been on this journey and to see the progress that has been made. The ARAG has been very beneficial for service users' and carers' voices to be heard, and to create change to help break down the barriers autistic people face. I am thankful the ARAG has been created, it gives us recognition and acknowledgement and we feel heard. We are working towards the same outcome – that autistic people have a better quality of life and feel valued. Carry on the good work."



1. Improve understanding and acceptance of autism in Newham

1a: Drop-In Sessions

COMPLETE

Co-design a regular drop-in session for autistic residents to obtain information about Council and Health services that they need.

A monthly drop-in surgery was co-designed with autistic residents in May 2025, with the first surgery taking place in June. The surgery provides a safe, low-pressure, centrally located space for autistic residents to book a half-hour, one-to-one appointment, either in-person or online, with up to two senior professionals from Health, Social Care, or other relevant area / organization.

Attendance is informed by insights gathered through resident engagement platforms, including the ARAG, Peer Support Groups, and feedback from Expert by Experience residents. Senior professional representatives include the SAIL Team Manager, Autism Diagnostic Service, ADHD Service, a Metropolitan Police Superintendent, the Housing Allocations Team, the Head of SEND 0–25, and Hestia Domestic Violence Service.

To date, 60 unique autistic residents have accessed the surgery, with 20% returning for additional sessions. There has been a notably high engagement rate of 23% of autistic male residents, an outcome not reflected across other engagement platforms.

53% of users are not registered with ARAG – having found out about the sessions through the Newsletter, WhatsApp Group and word-of-mouth.

To find out more about the surgeries or book an appointment, email: Autism.Commissioning@newham.gov.uk

1b: Peer Support Groups

Establish self-sufficient Autism Peer Support Groups across the borough.

During 2025/26 several initiatives were introduced to empower and support autistic residents to establish Peer Support Groups that reflect the needs of the local community. These included a:

- survey gathering feedback on local needs and preferences to inform future Groups;
- dedicated [webpage](#) that consolidates all resources to support peer support group development, including the [National Autistic Society Toolkit](#);
- co-designed guidance [video](#) on how to set up a peer support group;
- Small Grants Programme, where residents / groups could apply for up to £1,000 to help launch a peer support group. As a result of this, five new Groups will start in April 2026.

Testimonials from autistic residents attending one or more Peer Support Group can be found [here](#).

The longest serving Group is the Carers of Autistic Adult established by Sue Sinton Smith. Sue shares...

"The Carers Group has found a lovely home at Central Park Café in East Ham. Here a small group of Carers meet each month for a general chat, and members often share useful tips and information about different places to go. Carers find it reassuring to meet up with other Carers, who understand what it's like to care for an autistic person, whose level of support fluctuates.

We have a busy WhatsApp group, around 40 people, where we share useful links and events, as well as asking questions. As Carer representative on the Autism Strategic Delivery Board, I am able to share the concerns and experiences of other Carers and make sure members of the Peer Support Group are kept informed about surveys, events and information."



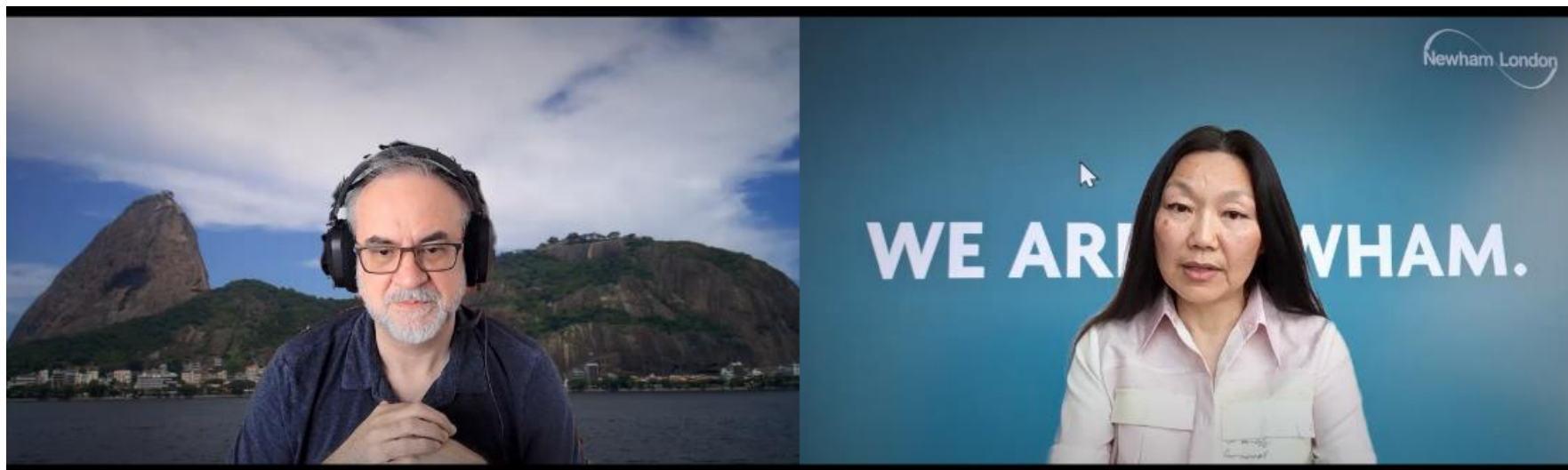
1c: Importance of Language

Co-design a resource that explains the importance of language when speaking with or about autistic residents.

An interview was recorded with Andrew Carpenter, NHSE London Regional Lead for Autism, who was diagnosed as autistic in adulthood. The discussion explores the importance of language when communicating with autistic people, including the value of identify-first language, examples of unhelpful terminology, and common misconceptions about autism.

To watch this video click [here](#).

The video will also be shared with stakeholders across Health and Social Care, provider services and autism and partner newsletters. It will also be added to the Council in-house training offer as well as the [Care Provider Voice](#) training portal and included as part of the Council's staff induction, social work and professionals resource pack.



1d: Westfield Stratford Quiet Room

IN PROGRESS

Co-design a quiet room in Westfield Stratford.

Westfield Stratford offer [sunflower lanyards](#) and [sensory packs](#) to customers, available from the Guest Services desk (terms and conditions apply).

Early discussions with Westfield Stratford show enthusiasm to create a sensory room in partnership with local autistic residents - therefore having a consistent offer across Stratford and Westfield London. However, a current restructure at Westfield has delayed these conversations progressing.

1e: Autism Accessibility Guides

IN PROGRESS

In partnership with [Access Able](#), co-design and include autism accessibility in their Accessibility Guides.

AccessAble has agreed to a test and learn project to explore the inclusion of up to five autism-specific access requirements within its venue assessment survey.

In October 2025, discussions were held with the ARAG to identify their priority venue access requirements, and members were also invited to submit their individual access needs in writing. An ARAG member who is a regular user of AccessAble, has volunteered to work directly with them to shape this development.

The AccessAble contract is currently under review, the test and learn project has been paused until the review is completed.

2. Improve autistic children and young people's access to education and support positive transition into adulthood

2a: Graduated Approach

Promote the [Graduated Approach](#) across all education settings via:

- Continuous Professional Development sessions to Special Educational Needs Coordinators, Inclusion Leads, and Head Teachers;
- inclusion of parent perspectives via co-produced audit tools or parent voice panels;
- the development of a peer-learning model where schools share effective autism inclusive practice.
- embed autism-inclusive practice within Early Years settings, ensuring early identification and tailored support for autistic children.

The Council has strengthened its Graduated Approach through a coordinated programme of inclusion-focused implementation across Education and Health partners. This includes the rollout of PINS (see the next page) across primary settings, embedding autism-informed practice and structured workforce development. All participating schools have access to [Verbo](#) to enhance universal speech, language and communication screening and classroom strategies, strengthening early identification and reducing escalation.

[Autism Education Trust \(AET\) training](#) has been delivered across settings, including Good Autism Practice and Neurodiversity and Leadership modules, alongside sensory-informed learning walks to support environmental adjustments.

Additional Occupational Therapy capacity has been recommissioned to increase sensory integration advice and early intervention within mainstream schools. This is supporting more consistent implementation of adaptive teaching, environmental modification, and regulation strategies for autistic pupils.

2b: PINS

COMPLETE

Scale and embed the [Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools \(PINS\)](#) approach across more schools by:

- recruiting up to nine additional primary schools;
- offering blended support: in-school, online, and termly Communities of Practice;
- linking PINS with local initiatives such as [Verbo](#) rollout, [Early Help](#), and therapeutic teams.
- agree and publish a Local Area position statement outlining consistent approaches to supporting autistic children and young people across education settings.

The PINS programme has continued to scale and embed across 14 schools. All schools now have access to Verbo to strengthen universal speech, language and communication support, with strong engagement across most settings. Approximately 65% of planned interventions have been delivered, with 100% scheduled for completion by the end of March 2026, ensuring full delivery within programme timelines.

Early system-level impact is beginning to emerge:

- growing demand for PINS participation in the second recruitment round;
- school collaboration and sharing of inclusive practice;
- strong uptake of Verbo approaches beyond initial schools;
- monitoring of the wider impact will start in March 2026.

2c: EBSA

COMPLETE

Embed School attendance challenges - [Emotionally Based School Avoidance \(EBSA\)](#) documentation:

Support Pathway:

- continue to monitor the impact of the EBSA guidance with schools;
- implement the 5-stage EBSA process with schools, using the [i-THRIVE model](#);
- train school leaders and staff on early signs of EBSA, trauma-informed practice, and autism-related anxiety;
- embed EBSA considerations into Education, Health and Care Plan reviews and wider special

The Council continues to strengthen its response to attendance challenges through the trauma-informed EBSA pathway. The five-stage process, aligned to the i-THRIVE model, is now embedded across services, ensuring emotional wellbeing, autism-related anxiety and contextual vulnerability are considered early in attendance planning rather than escalated reactively.

Training for schools has focused on understanding the link between neurodiversity, trauma-informed practice, and attendance patterns. Attendance data continues to be monitored alongside SEND and exclusion trends to assess impact. Early indications suggest improved engagement where the pathway is implemented with clarity, particularly where schools combine EBSA guidance with inclusive classroom practice.

2d: Preparing for Adulthood

IN PROGRESS

Co-produce autism-inclusive Preparing for Adulthood pathways by:

- embed autistic voice in transition reviews from Year 9+;
- creating checklists and toolkits that support transitions to Further Education, employment and Adult Social Care services;
- pilot supported internships with wraparound autism-specialist support - including job coaches and peer mentoring;
- track impact on confidence, outcomes, and sustainable employment.

Work is continuing to strengthen autism-inclusive Preparing for Adulthood pathways through co-production with young people, families, and partners. A co-produced Preparing for Adulthood Toolkit has been developed and is available via the Newham Local Offer, offering practical guidance for schools, families, and professionals. The Toolkit has been recognised nationally as good practice through National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) networks and aims to support a more consistent borough-wide approach to transition planning: [Newham Families Advice and Support | Preparing for Adulthood](#)

The Toolkit supports:

- structured transition planning from Year 9+;
- clear pathways into Further Education, employment and Adult Social Care;
- consistency of documentation and review processes.

3. Supporting more autistic people into employment

3a: Our Newham Works Application

COMPLETE

Refresh the Our Newham Works Referral and Application Form to better capture the strengths of autistic jobseekers and clearly document any reasonable adjustments or specific support they may need.

Following a review of the Referral Form and associated processes, the Service found that the existing approach was too complex for both residents and referral partners. To improve accessibility and reduce barriers, the process has been streamlined. Residents or referral partners now simply need to email Our Newham Works with the resident's contact details and any essential information relating to their Health or Social Care needs. Upon receiving the referral, a specialist advisor will complete the resident's registration, and engage with them directly to understand their skills, interests and aspirations. The advisor will then develop a personalised employment support plan. This simplified approach enables the Service to capture residents' strengths and support requirements, including any reasonable adjustments, in a clearer, more supportive, and more efficient manner.

For more information about how Our Newham Work can support you to obtain employment, visit: [Our Newham Work](#) or ring **020 3373 1101**

3b: Our Newham Works Training

COMPLETE

Source training for the Our Newham Works Team in autism awareness and neurodiversity-inclusive practice to ensure interactions with autistic jobseekers are respectful, supportive, and effective.

Autism training was delivered to the Our Newham Works Team in January 2026. The session was co-facilitated by the Council's Autism Strategic Lead Commissioner and the Autism Peer Support Worker from the Autism Diagnostic Service.

The training covered the use of autism-inclusive language, available resources and practical tools, recognising and understanding autistic traits and needs, and the range of support services accessible to autistic residents. Staff fed back that the training helped them to build their confidence in how to better support autistic residents seeking employment, and effectively signpost them, as appropriate, to the various resources and support offered locally in Newham.

3c: Our Newham Works Training



IN PROGRESS

Co-design and deliver regular workshops with employed autistic residents to foster ambition, confidence and support for autistic jobseekers and their families.

Our Newham Works have started delivering workshops for residents with Health and Social Care needs, collaborating with the Priority 3 Expert by Experience Working Group Lead. These follow the 'job club model', a structured, group-based intervention designed to help job seekers find employment through peer support, accountability, and skill-building. It acts as a job-seeking community, often led by trainers, where participants share job leads, practice interviews, and improve resumes to boost confidence and motivation.

Further sessions are planned in 2026/27 involving members of the Work, Autism and Anxiety and the Workplace Coaching Peer Support Groups to help shape and expand them.

To attend contact autism.commissioning@newham.gov.uk

4. Tackle health and care inequalities for autistic people

4a: Enablement Service

COMPLETE

Create an Autism and Learning Disabilities Enablement Service for residents who are Care Act eligible / on the edge of care.

The Team was established and started referrals for Care Act eligible residents who live in their own home or with their family / Carers in January 2025. To date, 30 residents are being supported.

4b: Community Opportunities Framework

NOT STARTED

Establish a Community Opportunities Framework, with an Autism Lot, enabling Care Act eligible Autistic residents to access Autism-specific Community Opportunities.

There has been insufficient Procurement capacity to take this forward this year. The Council's Procurement Team is being strengthened, and this action will be taken forward in 2026/27.

4c: Eating Disorder Service

COMPLETE

In partnership with the [East London Eating Disorder Service](#) and North London Adult Eating Disorder Provider Collaborative, raise awareness of autism and the potential reasons autistic residents may develop an eating disorder, and the how the support provided could be adapted to meet these reasons / needs.

The Autism Diagnostic Service has worked in partnership with the Eating Disorder Service to agree a pathway and support for autistic residents. The Eating Disorder Service covers Newham, Tower Hamlets and the City & Hackney. It accepts self-referrals as well as referrals from professionals.

The Eating Disorders Pack is being refreshed. It aims to raise awareness of the adjustments and strategies that can help make clinical environments more accessible and supportive for autistic individuals.

Training has been provided to explain how sensory differences, routines and structure may play a part in an eating disorder and how treatment and therapies can be adapted to meet specific needs.

For more information visit: [East London Eating Disorder Service \(Adults\)](#) or ring: **020 4583 8000**

5. Build the right support in the community and support people in inpatient care

5a: Suicide Prevention

COMPLETE

In partnership with [Papyrus](#), co-design an Autism and Suicide Prevention training course.

Papyrus has worked with Expert by Experience residents to co-design a training session for all professionals working with autistic residents. To date four sessions have been held, with a total of 157 participants attending. The sessions have been well received, ...

Following the success of working with Experts by Experience, Papyrus has now established its first lived experience engagement group to further strengthen its understanding and delivery of support for autistic people. This has also led to the development of additional resources such as [Understanding Autistic Burnout](#) being developed.

Papyrus operates HOPELINE247, a confidential support and advice service for children and young people under the age of 35 who are experiencing thoughts of suicide. If you're having suicidal thoughts or concerned about a young person who might be, contact HOPELINE247 via email: pat@papyrus-uk.org or ring **0800 068 4141**.

5b: Together Cafe

IN PROGRESS

In partnership with [Newham Together Café](#), co-design a new support service for autistic residents in crisis.

The Council, in partnership with the Integrated Care Board, Newham Autism Diagnostic Service and MIND Tower Hamlets and Newham are progressing the Together Café offer to support autistic residents who may be in crisis.

The Together Café, based at Stratford Advice Arcade, is open to any local resident that is experiencing a mental health crisis. It is open evenings, weekends and bank holidays. For more information, visit [Newham Together Café](#)

Since July 2025, MIND has been running a monthly Autism Community Group for residents that identify as autistic. This Group is flexible and different themes are discussed. There were four sessions in 2025. The Group has been paused since December 2025 due to a revision to MIND's provision and capacity. MIND will update professionals and residents when this is running again. Residents have found these sessions helpful to build a sense of community and provide peer support for each other.

MIND is currently reviewing partnership agreements as well as looking at the way they share the building with other partners to expand the support they offer in the community

6. Improve support within the criminal and youth justice systems

6b: Neurodiverse Practice - Youth Justice

COMPLETE

Embed neurodiversity-informed and accessible practice within the Youth Justice Service - drawing on learning from pilot interventions and national best practice.

The Youth Justice Service operates a Start Right approach: designed to stop young people from entering the justice system or divert them quickly if they do. It focuses on providing support as soon as concerns appear, rather than relying on punishment or court processes. At its core, Start Right is based on a "Child First" principle: young people are seen as children who need help, not offenders to be punished. The approach aims to understand and address what's behind the behaviour (e.g. trauma, mental health, education issues, or family or peer pressures), so that problems don't escalate.

Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) continues to be embedded into service delivery to make resources and service delivery more accessible for neurodivergent children and young people who have communication needs, as does Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) screening and support.

In addition, the Youth Justice Service works closely with the ELFT Youth Justice Liaison and Diversion Team to identify young people with mental health, substance misuse, or vulnerabilities in the justice system. It offers early, tailored support, including for those with out-of-court disposals, to prevent re-offending and improve health and wellbeing. Key programmes include:

- [Turnaround](#) - a Ministry of Justice-funded initiative targeting young people aged 10 to 17 with early or low-level involvement in the justice system. It provides voluntary, tailored support and needs assessments to prevent, or "turn around," at-risk behaviour, focusing on prevention rather than punishment;
- [Re-Route](#) - an 18-week, voluntary intervention for young people involved in or at risk of violence. It offers tailored individual or group support to help them stay safe, addressing exploitation, offending behaviour, and youth violence, often for those receiving "No Further Action" outcomes for serious offences.

6b: Visual Guides and Walkthroughs

Provide tailored assessment and support for neurodivergent young people, including visual guides and walkthroughs.

Supporting children and young people to understand the court process and ensure their participation improves outcomes. Common needs identified among autistic residents includes anxiety, emotional dysregulation, sleep difficulties, and speech, language and communication difficulties.

Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) designed Social Communication Passports which were used to ensure children and young people could understand and can participate in the court process. Visual tools and trauma-responsive preparation are standard.

In 2025/26, the Youth Justice Service supported 46 children through the use of communication passports and specialist assessments. This accounted for almost half of all children supported by the Service.

Other achievements

P1: Togetherness Cafe



In June 2025, the Specialist Education Support Service Group Manager and Autism Peer Support Worker held a session for the Togetherness Café, run by Blossom Group, who hold regular meetings for Newham's global community to discuss various topics. 48 attended this session.

Feedback included: "I just wanted to sincerely thank you both for the beautiful session yesterday. Even today, I'm continuing to receive positive feedback from those who attended - your thoughts, reflections, and the way you led the conversation clearly left a lasting impact. It's sessions like these that remind us how important it is to come together, reflect, and support one another. I truly hope we can make these gatherings more frequent in the future. Thank you again for your time, care, and meaningful contributions."

P3: New Employment Support Webpages



A new [autism employment webpage](#) has been co-designed, linked to the [Our Newham Works webpages](#) and information on DWP support to ensure a cohesive and integrated user experience.

The National Autistic Society has also launched a new [Guide for Colleagues and Employers Toolkit](#) and produced a [Finding Employment](#) e-learning module that unemployed residents may find beneficial to complete. These resources, as well as other helpful checklists, resources and a Newham [employment video](#) has been made available on the employment webpage.

In addition, a new [peer-to-peer support group webpage](#) has been co-designed to support autistic residents in establishing their own peer-to-peer support group in Newham. The webpage lists nine local autistic support groups available in Newham, and a number of resources to help support establishing a peer group. This includes information on a small grants fund, a local autistic [resident survey](#), a [new video](#) on how to set up a peer-to-peer group in Newham and a link to the [National Autistic Society toolkit](#).

[Resident feedback](#) on the groups can also be found on the webpage, including a [video of two residents](#) giving their perspectives on running and attending these groups.

P4: Autism Training

The Autism Diagnostic Service - Psychiatrist, Clinicians and Snr Peer Support Worker and LBN Commissioner - delivered several training sessions in 2025/6 to raise the profile of autism with health, care and other professionals. Training was delivered to six (6) teams in Health, one (1) large group of 100 Metropolitan Police and two (2) Council teams:

Health	Council	Metropolitan Police
Opal Ward Hospital Feb 2025	ASC Team Meeting 09.07.2025	Metropolitan Police 28.01.2026
GP Forum Training 04.11.2025	Our Newham Work 14.01.2026*	
CIMHS South 19.11.2025*		
GP Non-clinical staff 21.02.2026		
CIMHS North 25.02.2026*		
Barts Health NEL (Diversity Inclusion) 20.04.2026*		

*Training delivered jointly by LBN Commissioner & ADS Snr Peer Support Worker/Operational Lead

Training was identified as a key priority to equip organisations with the knowledge and skills needed to support front line staff in working effectively with autistic people. A structured monthly training programme will be developed and delivered by the LBN Commissioner in collaboration with health partners, LCIS professionals and autistic experts.

P5: Autism & Homelessness



A fast-track referral pathway to the Autism Diagnostic Service has been established for people who are rough sleeping. This pilot project aims to provide a rapid and flexible autism diagnostic assessment for individuals experiencing homelessness.

Work began in Newham to develop an approach that improves access to timely and flexible diagnostic assessment for rough sleepers. Meetings were held involving professionals from the Autism Diagnostic Service, commissioned Outreach Team and Commissioners to identify opportunities to streamline the autism assessment referral process.

In Newham, there are 21 individuals who have been rough sleeping for a prolonged period due to multiple and complex disadvantages. This flexible referral pathway supports those with potential undiagnosed autism to access an appropriate diagnostic assessment.

Where an autism diagnosis is identified, this enables practitioners to better understand each individual's needs and to tailor engagement approaches and support pathways, including support to move off the street. The first referral through this fast-track pathway was accepted in March 2026 and the individual is currently undergoing assessment.

P6: Policing with Compassion



Policing with Compassion is an innovative pilot programme that brings together the Police Foundation, the University of East London (UEL), Newham Police, and Newham Council to inform and shape the way police officers and safeguarding professionals connect and support children and young people, particularly those who are neurodivergent. This resource is designed to promote cultural and systemic inclusivity through research, community engagement, and local safeguarding practices..

This resource, alongside the [Policing with Compassion video series](#), will support frontline workers with practical strategies to minimise harm while building trust with children and young people who are neurodivergent – to embed compassionate, relationship-focused practice into their daily work.