Vision Statement & Terms of Reference

Blackpool All-Age Autism Partnership

Vision Statement:

"To create a Blackpool that is an inclusive community and feels enriched by its autistic people* – empowering everyone to reach their full potential."

This vision statement was co-produced by autistic people and their families in Blackpool.

** We recognise that people have different language preferences (e.g., "person with autism"), and we respect each individual's or group's choice. For documentation within the partnership, we use identity-first language ("autistic person") because current research from the National Autistic Society identifies it as the most widely preferred. For more information please see here: How to talk and write about autism guide - June 2025.pdf*

Terms of Reference:

1. **What is the Blackpool Autism Partnership?**

   The Blackpool Autism Partnership (BAP) is a group of people coming together to deliver the statutory guidance (2015) around the Autism Act (2009) with the aim of improving the lives of autistic people and their family/carers in Blackpool. Members of the group lend their time, expertise and resources to the BAP to help it achieve its goals and overarching vision. The partnership is made up of the Board, and the Working Group(s).

2. **Who is on the Board and what do they do?**

   The Board is made up of people from different backgrounds, including professionals from healthcare, social care, education, and autistic people,

family/carers, and many others. The Board meets every three months. The work of the Board is influenced by the voice and experiences of people and professionals within Blackpool, through hearing resident voice. The Board is responsible for listening and feeding back about the work that is being done. They will work with our local community to establish priorities and will be accountable for communicating progress, delays or barriers to the work that is being undertaken.

The Board aims to work towards a common goal of driving Blackpool to be accessible and inclusive to autistic children, young people, adults, and their family/carers.

The work of BAP will be focusing on the six priority areas set out in the National strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026. The six areas are listed below:

- Improving Understanding and Acceptance of Autism in Society
- Improving autistic children and young people's access to education, and supporting positive transitions into adulthood
- Supporting more autistic people into employment
- Tackling health and care inequalities for autistic people
- Support in the community and people in inpatient care
- Improving Support within the criminal and youth justice system

The BAP will also working within the Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board All-Age System Strategy for Autism. This strategy highlights the five ambitions listed below:

- Communities in Lancashire and South Cumbria will have a better understanding of autism and will value autistic people
- The process of autism assessment and potential diagnosis will be supportive and timely

- Ensuring autistic people have access to quality housing, excellent employment opportunities, a good education, and meaningful relationships
- All autism services in Lancashire and South Cumbria will be simple and easy to access
- Organisations will work in partnership to ensure autistic people live long, healthy and happy lives

3. What are the Working Groups?

A Working Group is given an area to focus on by the Board. For example, the Board may want to improve employment opportunities for autistic people and set up an Employment Working Group.

The Working Groups invite members with lived experience, expertise and knowledge or interest from their focus area to join. They may run for a long or short time, depending on the project they are working on.

Working Groups normally meet once per month. When they meet, they will develop work plans and actions. They will also share updates on progress, delays, or barriers.
Members of the Board will run and attend Working Groups. They will also share updates at each Board meeting.

Board priorities are shaped by the needs of our local community, guided by the voices of those with lived experience, and aligned with both local and national strategies to ensure inclusive and informed decision-making.

The members that make up a Working Group, and the number of Working Groups, will change depending on the priorities that the Board is currently focusing on.

4. Hearing Resident Voice

The Blackpool Autism Partnership is committed to ensuring that the voices of autistic people, their families, and the wider community are central to shaping services, priorities, and decision-making.

We gather resident voice through a range of inclusive and creative engagement methods designed to be accessible, flexible, and responsive to the needs of our community. These methods are developed in line with our coproduction principles and aim to create safe and meaningful opportunities for people to share their views, experiences, and ideas.

Resident voice is collected by Co-Chairs and Board members from a variety of sources, including community engagement activities, communications, and ongoing conversations. This feedback is used to inform the priorities of the Blackpool Autism Partnership Board and to ensure that the work of the Partnership reflects the lived experiences of local people.

The Board is responsible for reviewing this feedback, setting priorities, establishing Working Groups, and providing updates on progress, solutions, challenges, and next steps.

4. What are the responsibilities of the BAP?

The Partnership is responsible for:

- Using the principles of coproduction throughout its work.
- To annually review the BAP priorities.
- To set up Working Groups to drive priority work forward. The BAP will identify who will lead the work of each Working Group.
- To monitor and influence the planning and delivery of services for autistic people through Working Groups.

- The Board will listen to recommendations from local residents with lived experience, and relevant reports that inform best practice, and action the Working Groups accordingly.
- To monitor and influence wider partners' contribution to deliver the priorities of the local autism strategy.

5. Who does the BAP report to?

The Partnership reports to:

- The Working Groups report to the Board at each board meeting
- Members of the Partnership report to their own governance structures to ensure their organisations deliver the priorities of the local autism strategy
- The Board also reports to the public through the through the Empowerment Charity website (empowermentcharity.org.uk/autism-partnership-board) and ongoing conversations with our local community and groups

6. Governance Structure

The BAP operates within a clear and transparent governance structure to ensure accountability, inclusivity, and effective decision-making.

Partnership Structure

The Partnership is made up of the following components:

- The Board: The central decision-making body responsible for setting strategic priorities, reviewing progress, and ensuring alignment with national and local autism strategies. The Board meets quarterly and includes professionals, autistic individuals, family/carers, and community representatives.
- Co-Chairs: The Co-Chairs lead the Board and provide oversight across all areas of the Partnership. They facilitate meetings, guide conflict resolution,

review feedback and complaints, and ensure that the voices of autistic people and their families are central to all decisions.

- Working Groups: Task-specific groups established by the Board to focus on priority areas. Each group is led by a designated member and includes individuals with lived experience and relevant expertise. Working Groups report directly to the Board.

Roles and Responsibilities

- Board Members: Contribute to strategic planning, attend quarterly meetings, review feedback, and support Working Groups. Members are expected to represent their sectors and communities, and to report back to their own governance structures where applicable.
- Co-Chairs: Provide leadership and coordination across the Partnership. They are responsible for:
    - Facilitating meetings and discussions
    - Ensuring autistic voices are not only heard but actively shape outcomes, with a strong commitment to equity and inclusion
    - Monitoring progress and evaluating outcomes to ensure the Partnership delivers meaningful change
    - Ensuring transparency and accountability
    - Representing the Partnership externally by being a spokesperson and advocate, building relationships with external partners and influencing broader change
    - Supporting leadership development within the Partnership, fostering future co-chairs and empowering members to take initiative
    - Leading conflict resolution and mediation
- Working Group Leads: Coordinate the activities of their group, ensure progress is tracked, and report updates to the Board.

Decision-Making and Accountability

- Decisions are made collaboratively, with input from all relevant stakeholders.
- Where consensus cannot be reached, the Co-Chairs will make a final decision, guided by the values and priorities of the Partnership.
- The Board is accountable to the public and the wider community through regular updates, published reports, and engagement through the dedicated webpage (Blackpool Autism Partnership) and other communication channels.

This governance structure ensures that the Partnership remains responsive, inclusive, and focused on delivering meaningful change for autistic people and their families in Blackpool.

Collaboration with the Learning Disability and Autism Oversight Board

The Blackpool Autism Partnership actively collaborates with the Learning Disability and Autism Oversight Board, which brings together all learning disability and autism partnerships across Lancashire.

This collaboration enables the Partnership to:

- **Share best practice** across the region, learning from the experiences and innovations of other local areas.
- **Monitor and align priorities** within the county, ensuring that our work complements and contributes to wider strategic goals.
- **Amplify our voice nationally**, advocating for the needs and rights of autistic people and those with learning disabilities at a broader level.

Through this joint working, the Partnership strengthens its ability to influence policy, improve services, and ensure that the lived experiences of autistic people in Blackpool are part of a larger, unified movement for change.

7. Conflict Resolution, Feedback and Complaints

Conflict Resolution

The Blackpool Autism Partnership is committed to fostering a collaborative and respectful environment where all voices are heard and valued. In the event of disagreements or conflicts arising within the Board or Working Groups, the following steps will be taken:

1. **Open Dialogue**: All parties involved will be encouraged to engage in open and honest conversation, facilitated by the Co-Chairs or a neutral member of the Board, to understand differing perspectives and seek common ground.
2. **Mediation**: If issues remain unresolved, a mediation process will be initiated, led by the Co-Chairs or a neutral member of the Board. This may involve structured discussions, reflection, and agreed actions to move forward.
3. **Decision and Action**: Where resolution cannot be reached through dialogue or mediation, the Co-Chairs will make a final decision on appropriate action, ensuring it aligns with the values and priorities of the Partnership.

This process is designed to be fair, transparent, and supportive, with the aim of maintaining trust and collaboration across all areas of the Partnership's work.

Feedback and Complaints

The Blackpool Autism Partnership welcomes feedback, concerns, and complaints from anyone engaging with its work. We are committed to listening, learning, and improving through the voices of our community.

- Feedback and complaints can be submitted via email: blackpoolapb@empowermentcharity.org.uk
- All submissions will be reviewed by the Co-Chairs and, where appropriate, brought to the attention of the Board for consideration and response.

- Responses will be timely, respectful, and aimed at resolving concerns constructively.
- Feedback will also be used to inform future priorities, improve processes, and strengthen our commitment to coproduction and accountability.

We encourage all members of our community to share their experiences, ideas, and concerns to help shape a better future for autistic people in Blackpool.

Co-Production Principles

Co-production ensures that views from the people who will be affected most by decisions are
included right from the start. This is something we strive for in Blackpool, we want to make sure that when a big decision is being made, such as new residential housing being built, people who may use it can share their views and influence decisions. We follow 4 co-production principles in everything we do, which are:

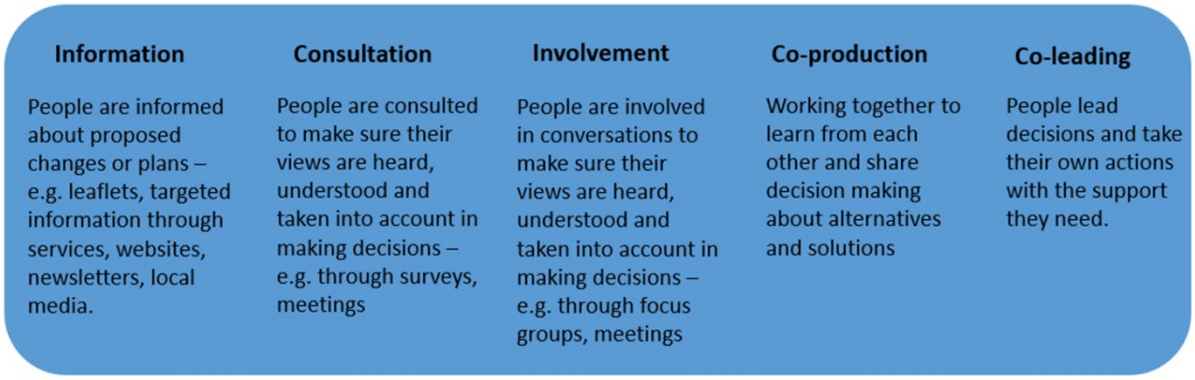
Togetherness: Togetherness means that as a part of our Partnership, we all work closely and support each other to achieve our common goals.

Sharing: Sharing involves openly exchanging information, ideas, and resources within the Partnership so that everyone can contribute and benefit from each other's knowledge and expertise.

People: People are at the heart of our Partnership; each member's unique skills and perspectives are valued and play a crucial role in our success.

Change: Change is about working together to make meaningful improvements in our community through our collective efforts and shared vision.

We will strive to involve and engage using the methods below:



Please note: co-production is not always possible for every piece of work. However, we will be explicit in how we engage and will always strive to involve using our four co-production principles.