

Norfolk Care Association Subgroup Meeting (Learning Disability, Autism, Mental Health & Physical Disabilities)

22nd July 2026, 10:00am – 11:30am

Chair: Mary Pritchard – Chair, Norfolk Care Association

Facilitated by: Norfolk Care Association

Speakers:

- Rosie Jewers – Legal Director, HCR Law
- Paul Ridout – HCR Law
- Roan Dyson – Commissioning Officer (Working Age Adults), Norfolk County Council

Summary of discussion

The meeting focused on recent legal developments affecting Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS), forthcoming commissioning changes for working-age adult services, and current operational challenges facing providers. Members also discussed the implications of local government reorganisation, shared examples of positive practice from across the sector, and contributed feedback to help shape future collaborative learning between providers and Norfolk County Council.

Discussion topics

Moments that Matter

Providers shared positive examples of innovation and good practice from across the sector.

Discussion included:

- A new recruitment initiative introducing pre-start buddy phone calls to help reduce anxiety for new employees, particularly those with autism, and improve staff retention.
- The opening of a new Skills and Activity Centre in Great Yarmouth, designed with people using the service to promote independence and develop daily living skills.

- The value of sharing practical ideas and successes across the provider network to support continuous improvement.

DoLS Legal Update

Rosie Jewers from HCR Law provided an overview of the recent Supreme Court **Agnew** judgment and its implications for Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards.

Discussion included:

- The move away from relying solely on the *Cheshire West* "acid test" towards a more person-centred and multifactorial assessment.
- The importance of considering an individual's wishes and feelings when assessing consent, even where capacity is lacking.
- Reviewing existing DoLS applications where appropriate and ensuring care plans accurately reflect individuals' views and preferences.
- Preparing for updated national guidance while maintaining robust documentation and safeguarding processes during the transition period.

Norfolk County Council Updates

Roan Dyson provided an update on commissioning activity for working-age adult services.

Topics included:

- Early planning for a new residential framework contract ahead of the current arrangements ending in March 2028.
- Reviewing current care bandings, payment mechanisms and contract structures to create a simpler commissioning framework.
- Future opportunities for providers to participate in engagement and co-production activities to help shape the new arrangements.
- An invitation for providers to share feedback on the information and support they would find most valuable through future subgroup meetings.

Local Government Reorganisation

Members discussed the potential impact of local government reorganisation on adult social care.

Key themes included:

- The possible implications for commissioning, safeguarding and provider relationships.
- The importance of maintaining continuity for people receiving support throughout any future transition.
- A shared desire for regular communication and opportunities for providers to influence future developments as plans progress.

Provider Discussion

Providers discussed several operational challenges currently affecting services.

Key themes included:

- Delays accessing social work support, multidisciplinary input and mental health assessments for people with complex needs.
- The impact that delayed interventions can have on individuals' wellbeing, housing stability and care outcomes.
- The importance of stronger partnership working between providers, social care, health services and other agencies to support timely decision-making.
- Norfolk Care Association encouraged providers to continue sharing specific examples to help identify themes and escalate concerns where appropriate.

Human Learning Systems

Norfolk Care Association gathered provider feedback to support the development of Norfolk County Council's Human Learning Systems programme.

Discussion focused on:

- How providers would like collaborative learning opportunities to be delivered.
- What meaningful co-production looks like from a provider perspective.
- The importance of provider feedback resulting in visible action and continuous improvement.
- Ensuring learning continues to support service improvement during wider system change.

General feedback

- Providers welcomed the practical legal update on DoLS and the opportunity to discuss its implications for day-to-day practice.

- Members valued the open discussion around commissioning, partnership working and the future direction of adult social care.
- Collaboration, co-production and effective communication were recognised as essential to supporting people with learning disabilities, autism, mental health needs and physical disabilities.
- Attendees welcomed continued opportunities to influence commissioning and system improvement through the subgroup.