



From: Martin Keating - Disability Hate Crime 'bronze' lead for West Midlands Police

To: Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 24th November 2015

Subject: Adults with Autism and Criminal Justice System Scrutiny -

The following progress report has been prepared at the request of the Health & Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to set out the efforts made by West Midlands Police (WMP) as to its autism strategy and delivery of awareness training to its officers and staff in support of the autism community to which it serves.

The author of this report, although a long serving member of staff with WMP of 30 years, took up the invite to the Birmingham Autism Partnership Board in January 2014 commensurate with his role as disability officer to the organisation and in addition 'bronze' disability hate crime lead. He has standing passion within the disability arena and has family members on the Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

1. Introduction.

It has been a long standing concern and agenda item raised by the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, for West Midlands Police under the direction of the Police and Crime Commissioner Mr David Jamieson, to qualify 'how and by when' the majority of its officers would receive autism awareness training in order to understand the condition and to be able to interact with autistic people. Fundamentally these concerns were raised and evidenced by Autism West Midlands (Nigel Archer – AWM CJS Development Coordinator) and separately by that of Birmingham City Council, although their concerns were not alone to WMP, but to its Criminal Justice Partners i.e. police, courts, probation and CPS.

It was in this report, that Mr Archer gave an overview of the detrimental findings contained within the Birmingham City Council report (2012) against that of the lack of awareness training and strategies by that of WMP and its criminal justice partners. Highlighting the potential benefits of such training etc, Mr Archer gave an overview of the benefits already realised by a number of forces including that of West Mercia police as to their interaction and combined front-line / custody decision making with those on the autistic spectrum disorder including their diversion from the criminal justice arena.

2. Background.

Initial efforts by WMP in accepting the seriousness and risk by supporting autism awareness training with a view to rolling out such programmes had initially gone well. In that by 2013 approximately 18 of its force training officers had undergone autism training by AWM with the view that they in-turn would roll out this very training. These would be delivered within the mandatory held training days across the Local Policing Units (LPUs) and specialist departments i.e. Criminal Justice, Public Protection, and Force Contact etc. Unfortunately due to the impact of austerity on the organisation, the majority of these training officers were either forced to retire or were relocated to other frontline posts to make up the short fall and therefore this programme was never reinvested.

At the request of the board, in March 2014 a supporting business case was submitted to the Command Team – WMP for the approval of AWM to deliver autism training across the West Midlands and for funding to be set aside centrally in order for this to be delivered. With the approval of AWM all costing and delivery dates were included but regrettably this business case was rejected, on the grounds that such an objective was not included in the current force strategic plans. It was however suggested that the LPUs could implement their own programme and invest in any related training from each of their own supporting budgets.

At this time, Coventry LPU in partnership with Coventry City Council implemented their own local autism strategy which included autism awareness training to its front-line police officers and partners within the Coventry and Warwickshire area i.e. mental health practitioners, social services and council organisations. This training was delivered to 500 front line police officers within Coventry and paid for locally from their own budget.

However following a strategic review by that of WMP – Learning & Development department as to all organisational training, it was concluded that no LPUs or departments should be organising their own training without its review and only with the express permission of this department as it was impacting on numerous organisational risks, including; force cost cutting measures, non-recognised force strategic data, and the introduction of different training programmes and styles.

3. Current position – West Midlands Police.

It was clear for some time, that autism and its very impact on the community and criminal justice arena had ‘no home’ and overall strategic direction within WMP which included its link into those victims of disability hate crime who are on the autistic spectrum disorder. However, there are now two interlocking strategies as to how WMP supports the objectives with that of autism, namely:

- a) Having noted the tremendous success of the street ‘mental health’ triage team, it was therefore agreed with command team approval, that any strategic mental health approach would also include that of autism and dementia.
- b) The author took the view that autism should also form a key part of the disability hate crime strategy for WMP and it is here that the work will receive its most credible ‘buy in’ and marketing.

To date the following work has been undertaken in support of autism training and its strategic approach within the organisation, namely:-

- 500 front line officers and staff trained – Coventry police (August 2014).
- Custody Blocks – awareness training from the Education Authority specific to young persons (September/ October 2015)
- In-house autism training developed and trailed with two police neighbourhood teams, delivered by the diversity team and Andrew Bull – the autistic son of a member of police staff. Andrew is in his early 20’s, resides in Birmingham, master’s degree educated, and hopes that this training input will prove a worthwhile addition to his CV and find full time employment. *To-date the personal input by Andrew (additionally using the below information) and referring to his life experiences has been widely received.*

- In-house training package. This will be available on-line as part of an e-learning package, or used in conjunction with any personal training input, or available as part of a reference and guidance tool (package attached). This training includes references to:
 - What is autism (incl' triads of impairment)
 - Key behavioural signs and characteristics
 - Autism Attention Card
 - National failings of the police
 - Advice for police and criminal justice sector
 - Autism and disability Hate Crime
 - Further advice and information.
 - Street 'mental health' triage team across the West Midlands combining that of a crewed response/advice units and made up of police officers, psychiatric nurses and paramedics in dedicated response vehicles, responding to calls involving people believed to be experiencing mental ill health. The team provide on-the-spot assessments with a primary goal to ensure that these individuals are taken to safe health professional facilities rather than police custody, which previously would have been the norm. The team has provided assistance and safe guarding to those with autism on the street and on-going knowledge/awareness of autism to officers on a case by case basis in a potential custody escalation.
 - Autism Awareness (Level 2 – Health & Social Care qualification) - online training package delivered by North Warwickshire and Hinckley College in partnership with WMP – (*delivery date January 2016*).
- WMP have already marketed to all its officers/staff the availability of a number of free on-line (level 2) courses including that relating to, mental health awareness, dementia care etc. Since the summer of 2015, well in excess of 500 officers/staff have successfully completed and gained a credible national qualification. These numbers are increasing steadily with the courses only being advertised once the College has sufficient tutors available to provide the on-line assessments and scoring to satisfy all numbers.
- Autism West Midlands – Connect.
- Includes access to a number of FREE E-learning courses (incl' autism awareness / anxiety & autism and sensory issues etc). All users will have to register on an individual basis and it is hoped that that they will use their work's e-mail address i.e. west-midlands.pnn.police.uk, as AWM will be able to build a data profile of WMP users, courses completed and timeline.
- <http://elearning.autism-connect.org.uk/store>
- WMP training marketing.

There are a few minor IT teething problems as to the above WMP e-mail address being used but it is anticipated that by early December 2015, all officers/staff will have access to a dedicated internal Autism web page which will house all of the above related accessible guidance and courses.

4. Conclusion.

As the author of this report on behalf of WMP, I cannot answer as to the engagement and relevance that other local criminal justice partners hold that of autism awareness strategies etc. However, I am satisfied that after a slow start on this journey which includes the challenges of Force budget cuts and a general 'buy-in' to that which is autism. WMP has made steady and credible progress in raising its very profile and providing the related awareness by developing its own packages and/or with the availability of on-line free resources from external partners and community stakeholders.

The training and its risk is not currently seen as mandatory as to that required within each officers (and staff) dedicated training days, and the key is to ensuring that everyone has an awareness (not an expertise) from the basic in that of the acceptance of the autism attention card, to its key behavioural signs. Other police forces have unfortunately experienced both a public backlash and legal actions as a result of their poor handling of persons with autism or its development into a hate crime with devastating circumstances, and as a result have raised their risk and education awareness on the subject.

By ensuring its proactive development as key strategy objectives in both the Mental Health and Hate Crime delivery plans, should ensure that the disability that is autism and its continued awareness to all officers, receives the on-going support which will hopefully be reflected with that of its local Criminal Justice partners.

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