

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
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Your Ref: n/a
Our Ref 20210831 SH
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Dear Home Secretary,

I write in response to the HMICFRS report on Neurodiversity in the criminal justice system: A review of evidence.

I acknowledge the six recommendations made in this report and understand that they are for the attention of the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice.

The Chief Constable has provided a detailed response to me regarding the recommendations which assures me that the Force is aware and responsive to the issues raised and recommendations made.

I look forward to the development of a national strategy and national screening tool, and hope that these will be consulted on before their introduction and implementation. I currently co-commission the Liaison and Diversion service which assesses the needs of individuals entering custody in Essex, and a screening tool could enable greater consistency in identifying the needs of neuro-divergent people.

I concur that there will be benefits of identifying a person as living with a neuro-diverse condition at key points during their journey through the CJS, as this will enable better opportunities to support the individual, as well as informing wider service provision requirements.

Specialised thematic training and awareness raising would undoubtedly add value, and would sit well alongside the Diversity, Equality, Inclusion training programme which has been mandated across Essex Police recently.

Making reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of those with *neurodivergent conditions* is a step that we welcome in Essex. Essex Police Criminal Justice (Custody) Command has been accepted as one of three pilot sites for the use of sensory devices in the custody setting. The simple devices such as 'stress balls' and weighted blankets and such like provide a safe option to support neurodiverse suspects who may experience heightened anxiety whilst in police custody. The project is sponsored by the NPCC.

I am fully supportive of the concept of Criminal Justice agencies working together, including with other statutory and third sector organisations. This is something I actively encourage through my role as Chair of the Essex Criminal Justice Board. I would hope to use this role to encourage these agencies to consider how they can understand and meet the needs of neurodivergent individuals in the community, prevent offending and support rehabilitation.

Essex Police have indicated commitment to helping deliver the recommendations in the report, subject to the support required from other agencies, and I have every confidence that the Force will give the focus required to making these changes happen.

I will continue to monitor the work of Essex Police in this regard, and to hold the Chief Constable to account, including through the monthly Performance and Resources Scrutiny Board.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roger Hirst', written in a cursive style.

Roger Hirst
Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner

c.c. Ben-Julian Harrington, Chief Constable, Essex Police.

Appendix A – Recommendations

Main recommendation (1)

In order to improve outcomes for neurodivergent people within the criminal justice system a coordinated and cross-government approach is required. To give the leadership and direction needed, the Ministry of Justice should work with the Home Office, Department for Health and Social Care and the Department for Education and the Welsh Government to develop an overarching national strategy. This strategy should be developed together with people with personal experience of neurodivergence.

Recommendation 2

A common screening tool for universal use within the criminal justice system should be introduced, supported by an information sharing protocol specifying how information should be appropriately shared within and between agencies, to make sure that necessary adjustments and extra support are provided for individuals as they progress through the criminal justice system.

Recommendation 3

Screening data should be systematically collected and aggregated to provide a more accurate assessment of the prevalence of neurodivergence to inform needs analysis and service planning at all levels of the criminal justice system.

Recommendation 4

A programme of awareness-raising and specialist training should be developed and delivered to staff working within criminal justice services. For frontline staff this learning should be broad-based, mandatory, raise awareness of neurodivergent conditions and how they impact on communication and be supported by practical strategies for working with neurodivergent people. More specialised training should be provided for staff whose roles require it. The programme should be developed and delivered in consultation with people who have personal experience of neurodivergence.

Recommendation 5

Adjustments to meet the needs of those with neurodivergent conditions should be made throughout the criminal justice system. Relevant departments and bodies should work together to anticipate needs and make adjustments in anticipation of needs. Simple and largely low-cost changes to create neurodiversity-friendly environments, communications and staff culture are likely to benefit those coming into contact with the criminal justice system, regardless of neurodivergent conditions, and should be made as soon as possible.

Recommendation 6

Criminal justice system agencies should work together and with other statutory and third sector organisations in a coordinated way, to understand and meet the needs of neurodivergent individuals in the community, prevent offending and support rehabilitation.