

Learning Disabilities Community Partnership Group (CPG) Narrative Summary Report Meeting held 29th April 2026

Purpose of the Meeting

The Learning Disabilities Community Partnership Group (CPG) brought together people with lived experience of learning disabilities, carers, voluntary organisations, advocates and professionals to explore how services across Central Bedfordshire can become more accessible, inclusive and person-centred.

The meeting focused on understanding experiences of accessing healthcare, everyday support, independence, communication and community inclusion. Discussions were supported by lived experience presentations and group conversations designed to identify practical improvements and collaborative solutions.

The session reinforced the purpose of the Community Partnership Group as a safe and independent space where people can share experiences, influence future service development and contribute to practical change.

Key Themes Emerging from the Meeting

1. People Want to Be Seen as Individuals, Not Defined by a Diagnosis

A strong theme throughout the meeting was the importance of dignity, identity and independence. Participants repeatedly spoke about wanting:

- Professionals to speak directly to them.
- Services to avoid assumptions or patronising behaviour.
- Greater recognition of individual strengths, ambitions and abilities.
- Opportunities to live independently and make their own decisions.
- Funded community day spaces to encourage routine, independence, stability, consistency and genuine friendships close to home.

One participant highlighted that although she was grateful to have been provided with her own home, she had received very little practical support in how to manage it independently. She explained that ***“my parents are effectively running two homes”***, reflecting wider concerns that people are often expected to cope independently without sufficient practical life-skills support.

The phrase ***“see the able, not the label”*** strongly resonated throughout discussions and reflected wider concerns about how people with learning disabilities are perceived and treated.

2. Healthcare Appointments Often Feel Rushed and Inaccessible

Many participants described challenges when accessing GP appointments, hospital services and health checks.

Concerns included:

- Appointments not allowing enough time.
- Professionals directing questions to carers rather than the individual.
- Limited use of accessible communication.
- Lack of preparation before appointments.
- Anxiety caused by unfamiliar environments and processes.

Participants highlighted positive examples where surgeries had dedicated learning disability nurses or link workers, demonstrating the value of continuity, trust and personalised support.

3. Digital Systems Can Exclude People

The increasing use of online systems for appointments, medication requests and communication was identified as a significant barrier. Participants described:

- Difficulties using apps and online forms.
- Challenges understanding digital systems.
- Limited alternatives for those unable to access services online.
- Concerns that digital-first approaches reduce independence rather than improve it.

There was recognition that services need to provide more flexible and accessible ways for people to engage.

4. Communication and Information Need to Be Simpler and More Joined Up

Attendees consistently highlighted the need for clearer communication across services.

Key issues included:

- Overuse of jargon and acronyms.
- Repetition of information across different services.
- Lack of joined-up communication between healthcare providers.
- Difficulty understanding processes, appointments and next steps.

Participants emphasised that accessible communication is not an additional feature but a basic requirement for equitable care and support.

5. Community Inclusion and Access to Support Remain Uneven

Participants discussed the importance of safe, welcoming community spaces, peer groups and local opportunities. Concerns included:

- Limited local activities and support outside larger towns.
- Transport barriers preventing access to services and social opportunities.
- Lack of awareness about available groups and support.

There was strong support for improving community connections and ensuring people with learning disabilities can participate fully within their local communities.

Opportunities Identified Through the Discussion

Participants identified several practical opportunities to improve experiences for people with learning disabilities across Central Bedfordshire.

Key suggestions included:

- Promoting examples of good practice across GP surgeries and healthcare settings.
- Improving staff training around communication, accessibility and reasonable adjustments.
- Developing more accessible information and reducing jargon and acronyms.
- Creating clearer pathways for support and signposting.
- Increasing flexibility around appointments and communication methods.
- Strengthening community-based activities, local groups and transport support.
- Ensuring people with lived experience are directly involved in shaping future services.

There was also support for the Community Partnership Group continuing to act as a mechanism for co-production, challenge and shared problem-solving.

Overall Reflections

The meeting provided valuable insight into the day-to-day experiences of people with learning disabilities accessing health, social care and community support services.

Discussions highlighted that many challenges are not solely linked to services themselves, but to how services communicate, adapt and respond to individual needs. Participants consistently emphasised the importance of respect, accessibility, independence and being genuinely listened to.

Importantly, conversations remained constructive and solutions-focused throughout. Alongside sharing lived experience, participants identified practical examples of what works well, particularly where services provide consistency, accessible communication and personalised support.

The meeting also demonstrated the value of bringing together people with lived experience, carers, professionals and community organisations in a collaborative environment where issues can be openly discussed and practical improvements explored together.

The Community Partnership Group continues to provide an important forum for strengthening co-production, identifying barriers early and supporting future service improvement through lived experience, partnership working and shared accountability.