



Funding Boost Helps Improve Police Communication With Autistic People

Thames Valley Police (TVP) has been working in partnership to break down barriers to communicating with people who have autism.

Working collaboratively with Autism Berkshire, the force has helped to develop a new feature in which those who sign up for a recently re-launched Berkshire Autism Alert Card, can choose voluntarily to share their details with police.

The information is securely stored on TVP's computer systems, allowing officers to have awareness of how best to communicate with the person, if they have reason to do so.

Leading the project, Detective Chief Inspector Simon Steel, of the force's Autism Support Network, said: "We recognise that some people who are autistic may have specific needs which we may need to accommodate when they have a reason to contact us.

"An autistic person can choose to share their information about how they may act in a certain situation with police, which is a positive step towards ensuring we can have the most meaningful interaction. This helps to break down barriers to communication and assists us in being able to provide the best possible service.

"We are delighted to be working with Autism Berkshire and thank them for their support in helping us to meet the needs of the diverse communities we serve."

The card allows the holder, or their parent or carer, the opportunity to explain their condition with ease to others. The details used on the system can help the cardholder whether they are a victim of a crime, a witness or suspected of being involved in an offence. This could include the best ways to communicate effectively and contact details for someone who could assist if required.

Once established in Berkshire, Thames Valley Police plans to roll out the scheme to autistic people living in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

The project was funded with a £5,000 grant from the Thames Valley Police and

Crime Commissioner's Property Act Fund. The Police Property Act Fund is created from money recovered by the police and the proceeds from the sale of items that cannot be returned to identified owners, including seizures from criminals.

Matthew Barber, Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley, said: "I am delighted to hear how the Police Property Act Fund has been able to support Autism Berkshire in the re-launch of Autism Alert Cards. The cards allow people with autism to voluntarily share information with Thames Valley Police about how they may act in a certain situation. This is a positive move in ensuring officers can provide the best possible service for the community.

"Autism Berkshire is doing important work, addressing key areas within my Police and Crime Plan for the Thames Valley. I look forward to hearing more on the roll out of the scheme across Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire."

Since launching in 2010 more than 1,800 Berkshire Autism Alert Cards have been issued to autistic children, young people and adults in the county. Following a re-launch of the card, those applying have a new option to share personal details with police. It is not compulsory to do this when applying for the card.

Jane Stanford-Beale, the chief executive of Autism Berkshire, said: "I would like to thank everyone at Thames Valley Police who has helped us to make this valuable improvement to the alert card scheme, particularly DCI Steel and Acting Sergeant Lucie Gray, and the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office for funding the project.

"Sharing a small amount of information about a cardholder's autism and how they may react in certain situations can make a big difference to awareness and understanding when they have contact with the police."

<https://www.autismberkshire.org.uk/berkshire-autism-alert-card/>