



**Herefordshire  
and Worcestershire**  
Integrated Care System

# Herefordshire & Worcestershire All-Age Autism Strategy 2024-29



# About the strategy

- Welcome to Hereford and Worcestershire's All Age Autism Strategy, which has been co-produced by Herefordshire and Worcestershire Autism Partnership Boards on behalf of Autistic People
- This strategy is for and about people with a formal Autism diagnosis as well as those who identify as Autistic. It aims to look at how we can overcome barriers but also promote what Autistic People have to offer.
- My own experience...

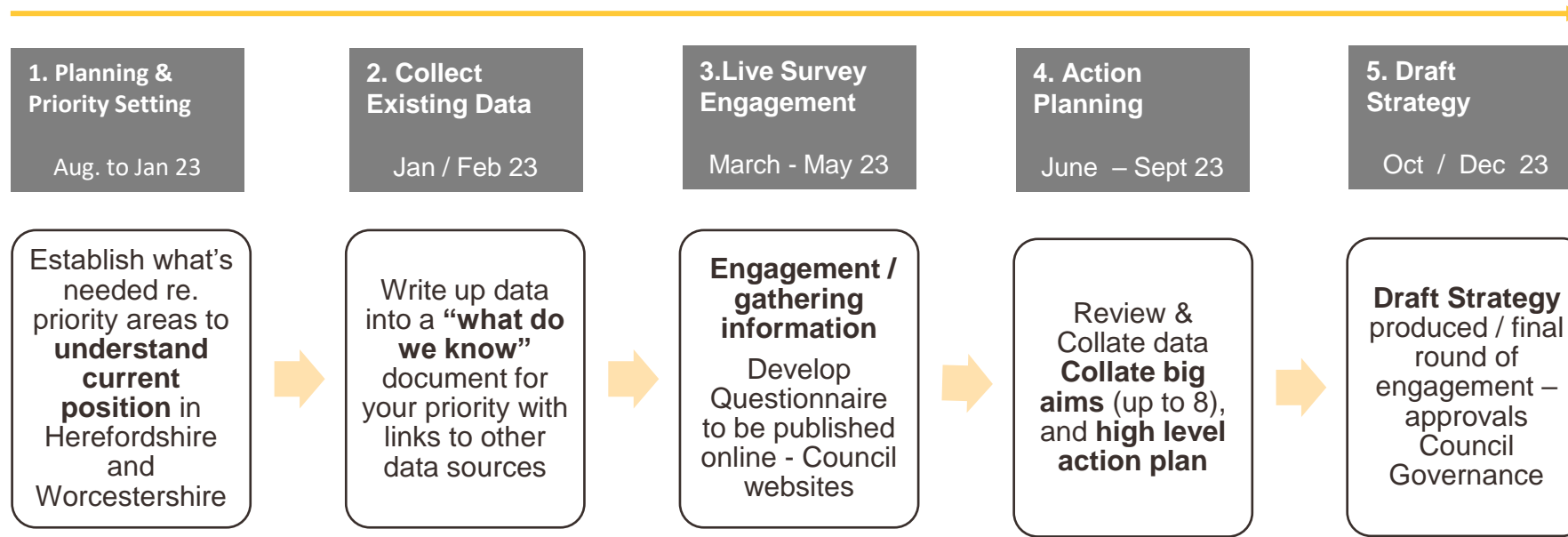
# About the strategy

- To develop our strategy, we talked to Autistic People, family carers, people who work in support services and people living in our communities with an interest in Autism. We ran workshops, facilitated groups and conducted a questionnaire.
- We also looked how we can implement [The national strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/the-national-strategy-for-autistic-children-young-people-and-adults-2021-to-2026) across our two counties.
- We agreed 7 priority areas and for each priority we have set out what we know, our high-level aims, and key actions.

# Co-Production / Strategy Development Process

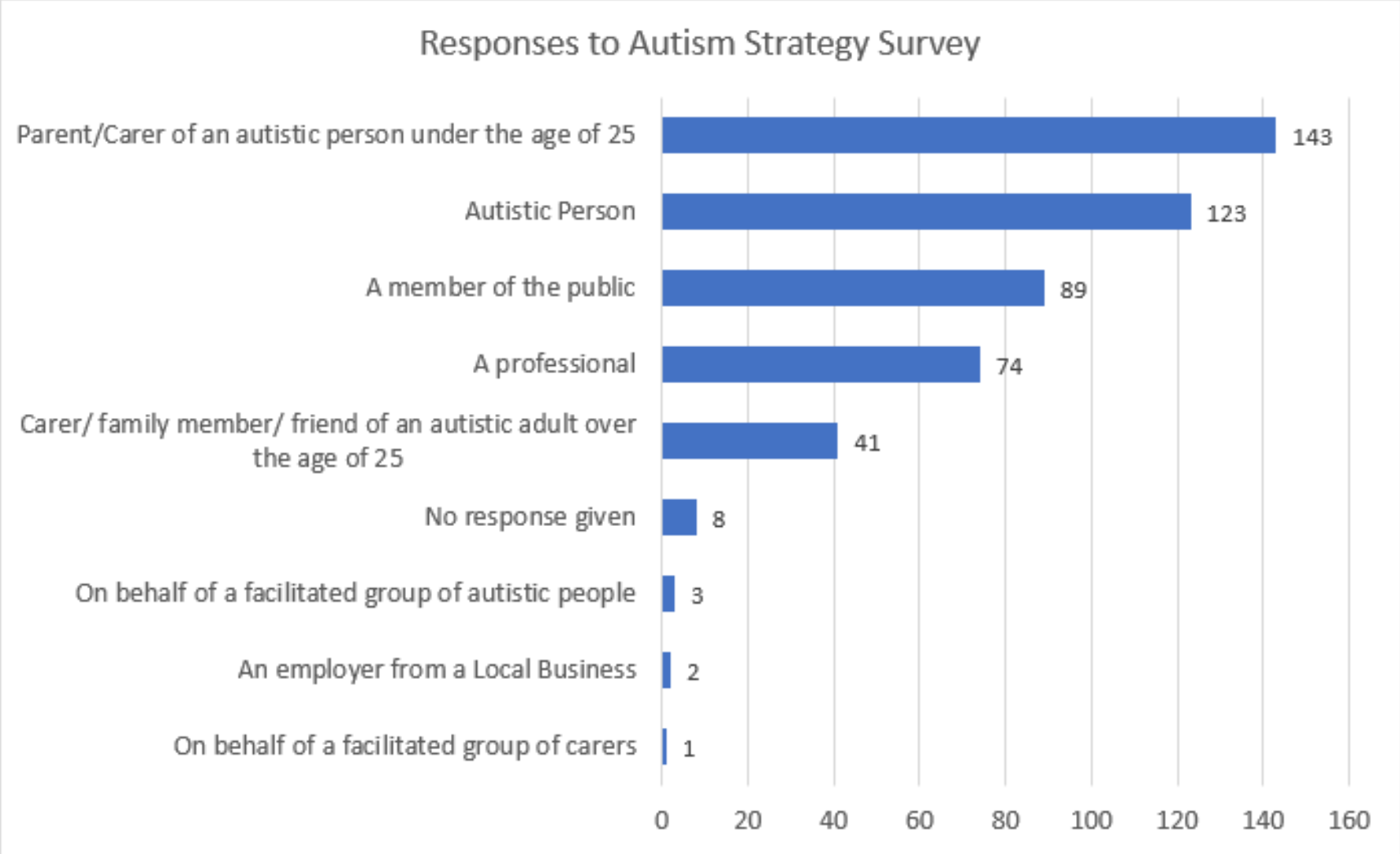
Aug. 2022

Dec. 2023



- There have been high levels of co-production and engagement in this strategy (focus groups, partnership boards, 442 responses to our online questionnaire)
- We will continue to co-produce action plans and work for each priority area
- Each priority has a workstream lead – workstream leads are from a range of agencies across the ICS
- There is a project working to design the strategy and the finished document will not look like the word document circulated. Autism friendly and sculpt principles will be applied to the finished document.
- This will also contain appropriate photos and video links

# Engagement – Survey Responses



# Our vision in themes

## **Priority 1: Improving understanding and acceptance of autism within society.**

We want to demonstrate that we have significantly improved public understanding and acceptance of autism, and that autistic people feel more included in their communities and less lonely and/or isolated. We want the public to have a better understanding of autism and to have changed their behaviour towards autistic people and their families.

## **Priority 2: Improving autistic children and young people's access into education and support positive transitions into adulthood**

We want education settings to provide better and more inclusive support to autistic children and young people so that autistic people are better able to achieve their potential. We want more teachers and educational staff to understand the specific needs of their autistic pupils, ensuring that more school placements can be sustained. We also want to demonstrate that more autistic children have had their needs identified early on and that they are having positive experiences in educational settings. We want to ensure that we make improvements to support and prepare autistic children and young people for transition to adulthood to enable them to reach their full potential.

# Our vision in themes

## **Priority 3: Supporting more autistic people into employment**

We want to make progress on closing the employment gap for autistic people. We want more autistic people who can and want to work to do so, and to ensure that those who have found a job are less likely to fall out of work. We also want to show that employers have become more confident in hiring and supporting autistic people, and that autistic people's experience of being in work has improved.

## **Priority 4: Tackling health and care inequalities for autistic people**

We want to reduce the health and care inequalities that autistic people face throughout their lives, and to show that autistic people are living healthier and longer lives, ensuring timely access to needs-led health care. In addition, to have made significant progress on improving early identification, reducing diagnosis waiting times, improving diagnostic pathways and access to mental health support for children and adults, so autistic people can access a timely diagnosis and the support they may need across their lives.

## **Priority 5: Building the right support in the community**

We want all autistic people to have the opportunity to participate in their communities among friends and family, and live in their own home or with people they choose to live with. We are clear that people should not be in inpatient mental health settings unless absolutely necessary for clinical reasons.

# Our vision in themes

## **Priority 6: Improving support in criminal and youth justice systems**

We want to have made improvements in autistic people's experiences of coming into contact with the criminal and youth justice systems, by ensuring that all staff understand autism and how to support autistic people.

We want all parts of the criminal and youth justice systems, from the police to prisons, to have made demonstrable progress in ensuring that autistic people have equal access to care and support where needed. In addition, we want autistic people who have been convicted of a crime to be able to get the additional support they may require to engage fully in their sentence and rehabilitation.

## **Priority 7: Keeping safe**

We want to enable autistic people to feel empowered to keep themselves safe in the community; have a better and safer experience of everyday life and be well supported by services that help them feel safe and secure.



# Our cross-cutting themes

**Public perception of autistic people** We want to demonstrate that we have significantly improved public understanding and acceptance of autism and have good quality local resources to share. We have set out aims and actions around this in priority 1 but people talked about this in each priority.

**Many Autistic People need support/advocacy to access mainstream services or navigate systems. Carers are worried there will be no support for their autistic child when they can no longer provide it.** The need for support was clearly evidenced through work on all of the priorities and for people of all ages and their carers. We want to continue the multi-agency approach taken with this strategy to plan the best way for people to get the support that they need.

**Some Autistic people are not getting the right support for their Mental Health needs.** We have set out aims and actions around this in priority 4 but people talked about this in each priority. Many people talked about feeling suicidal because of their situation. We want to use this strategy to tackle issues facing autistic people in Herefordshire and Worcestershire to improve mental health and wellbeing and to reduce risk of suicide and suicidal thoughts. Autism Partnership Boards are linking closely with Suicide prevention strategies.

# Our cross-cutting themes

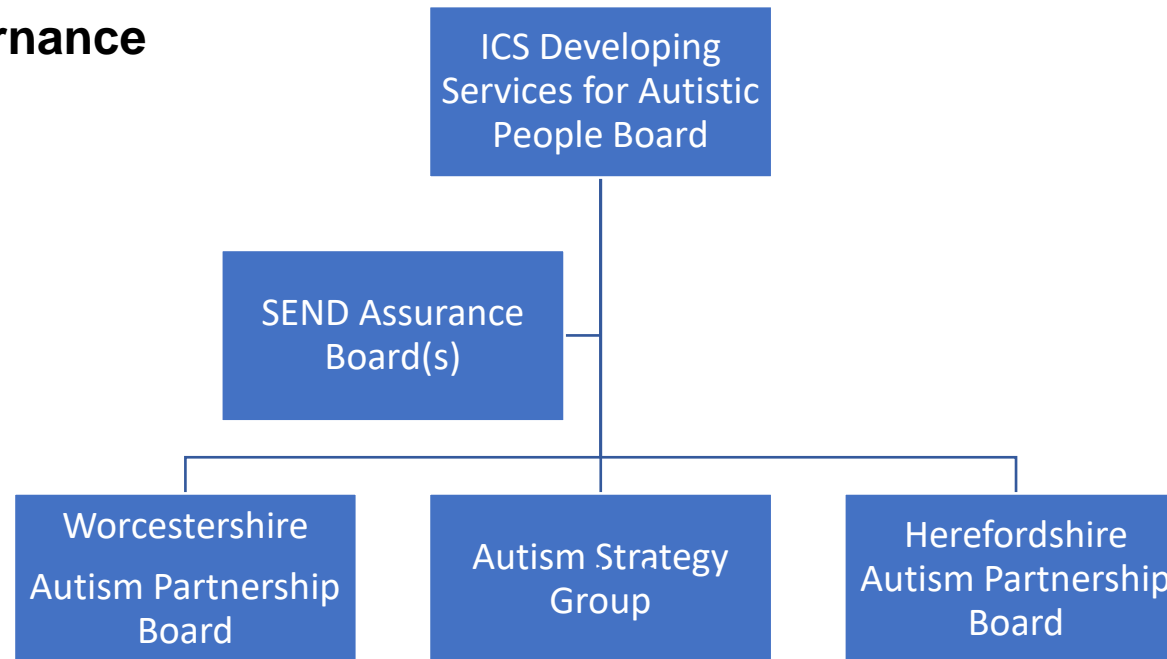
**Autistic people, particularly but not exclusively women and girls are “masking” as a strategy to fit in to a non-autistic culture.** We want to use this strategy to improve understanding of Autism and different neurodiverse behaviours, developing a culture of acceptance and understanding where Autistic People don't feel pressured to hide. We want to educate organisations about masking, so that we can improve the mental health and wellbeing of those who mask, as well as the families and carers who are supporting the exhaustion and burn out of a person who is masking.

**Organisations need to make reasonable adjustments.** We want to promote good practice examples of reasonable adjustments to all organisations in Herefordshire and Worcestershire and remind organisations of duties under the Equality Act 2010.

# How we will monitor the strategy

- There will be an identified lead for each priority who will work with partners to oversee the actions agreed. Progress will be discussed at Autism Partnership boards and reported to The ICS Developing Services for Autistic People Programme Board.
- An annual report will be taken to the Health and Wellbeing Boards in both counties.
- A bi-annual newsletter will be produced to keep everyone updates on progress.

## Governance



# Decisions

- We would like you to sign off and endorse this strategy
- We would like you to pledge support to take forward the aims and actions within the strategy
- We would like you to consider making Oliver McGowan mandatory training mandatory for all staff within the organisations represented
- For the strategy development Adult social care commissioners have led on 3 of the priorities. The system will need to identify support to take forward:-
  - Priority 1 – improving understanding and acceptance autism within society**
  - Priority 3 – supporting more autistic people into employment**