



## Autism Partnership Meeting

Date & Time: 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2025 10:30am – 1pm

Venue: Fownhope Room, Plough Lane Offices & Microsoft Teams

### Attendees

Name	Role
Valerie Fitch	Chair/Person on the Autistic Spectrum
Paul Choppen	Partnership Board Assistant, Herefordshire Council
Hannah Offord	Commissioning Manager, Herefordshire Council
Jack Caine	Senior Programme Lead – Learning Disability and Autism NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire
James Baker	Hereford Make/Person on the Autistic Spectrum
Alexia Heath	Post 16 Senior Adviser, Children and Young People, Herefordshire Council
Cllr Carol Gandy	Local Councillor
Val Howard	Parent Carer of a person on the Autistic Spectrum
Lucy Herds	Local Nas and HANDS CIC
Claire Hobbs	Parent Carer Voice/Parent Carer
Hilary Jones	Head of Additional Needs, Children and Young People, Herefordshire Council
Nikol Harrison	Area Team Manager, Neurodiversity Team, Worcester County Council
Sean Ladd	Star College, Manager
Emma Jones	Senior Social Prescriber for the South & West Herefordshire Primary Care Network (S&W PCN)
Zoe Bristow	Community Service Manager, Autism West Midlands
Harriet Morton	Assistant Manager, Autism West Midlands
Katie Eastaugh	Manager, Cart Shed

### Apologies

Name	Role
Hilary Hall	Corporate Director Community Wellbeing, Herefordshire Council
Marie Bridgewater	Hate Crime Officer, West Mercia
Laura Ferguson	Vice Chair, Co-Project Lead, Autism and Parental Blame Research Project, WM-ADASS
Nick Gregory	Carer Links Team Senior & Engagement Worker
Julie Kerin	Social Worker, County Team, Community Wellbeing, Herefordshire Council
Rachel Fellows	Walsingham Support
Aimme Chandler	Healthwatch
Rebecca Antrim	Person on the Autistic Spectrum
Katy Hughes	Parent Carer
Sylvia Nicholls	Hereford Disability United
John Swinson Davis	Spectrum Mondays

### Introductions and Apologies

Valerie welcomed everyone and asked for introductions.

## Conflict of Interest

No one declared a conflict of interest.

## Minutes and Actions from Previous Meetings

Valerie then went through the actions from the previous meetings. All previous actions had been completed.

Regarding Action 3 from the 23 April 2024 meeting James hadn't heard from Anna Swift after sending the details of the Youth Provision Board.

## 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2025

Attendee	Action	Detail	Update
Claire Middle	Action 1	Hannah asked if Claire could pass on the contact details of the Anna Freud Centre.	Complete, Claire Middle shared these details with Paul who forwarded them to Hannah.
Laura Sirrell	Action 2	Alexia suggested Laura contact Tracy Duffy the SEND Participation Officer regarding joined up group work on Keeping Safe and CCTV.	Complete
Hannah Offord	Action 3	Will meet with James to understand the level and type of support Hereford Make students need.	Complete
Paul Choppen	Action 4	Add Autism and Parental Blame, and Connect to Work Supported Employment Programme as agenda items for the next meeting.	Complete

## All-Age Joint Autism Strategy Update

### Worcestershire Autism Partnership Board Meeting - Valerie Fitch

Valerie gave a brief overview of what was discussed at Worcestershire's last Autism Partnership Board Meeting. The meeting was focused on Priority 4: Tackling health and care inequalities for autistic people. Updates were given on Worcestershire's new lived experience reference group and the ICS's projects.

The next meeting will be in September where they will be discussing mental health support for adults.

Valerie noted that during the update on the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training 125 people from Herefordshire Council and 450 people from Worcestershire County Council have completed one of the training tiers.

## Priority 7: Keeping Safe – Hannah Offord

Hannah then gave an update on Herefordshire's Priority 7: Keeping Safe. She discussed how the working group had met last month and updated their action plan for this year. The actions were:

1. To continue further consultation with autistic people about what needs to happen within their own areas according to their different needs, choices and lifestyle.

In quarter 2: September there will be an engagement event happening within Herefordshire, we'll be looking for opportunities in Worcestershire as well.

2. To gather evidence of good practice in other areas and use this to develop ideas to implement in the two counties.

We have linked with the ADASS network and we're looking at what commissioners are doing in other areas and providers. Herefordshire Helpers a group of young people will be helping with this.

3. Develop appropriate training in relation to keeping safe.

A scoping exercise is currently underway, colleagues within adult social care are looking at the outcomes and the delivery around the Oliver McGowan training.

We had a representative from Herefordshire and Worcester. Fire and Rescue attend the session, and they are looking at what training is available for retained and full-time firefighters.

We are going to be doing some analysis with our commissioned providers to understand what they are delivering and the impact.

We also need to link in with the police going forward to understand their training as well. Once all of that has been gathered, we will look at what training is already being delivered, take away the areas of good practice and understand where the gaps are and perhaps if we need to look at either some bespoke training or using something that already exists in a different way.

4. Supporting individuals in feeling safe while travelling in their local communities.

This is being led by Ffion Horton (Transport Planning Services Manager, Economy and Environment). She is currently consulting on local transport and is looking to include some information on how individuals can get support with feeling safe, but also how the transport providers can help and support individuals too.

We're also going to look to link with work being done on Priority one: Improving understanding and acceptance of autism within society around the Worcester Transport network later in the year.

And then the other two actions are for later this year, so quarter 4 going into year 3.

5. Helping people with crisis planning.

We're hoping that the engagement that we do at the event in September will help us understand what people need in relation to crisis planning.

6. Reducing isolation and loneliness through building support and facilitating connections.

We're hoping that the engagement will support us to better understand what we need to do in that area.

Members raised concerns that autistic people can have difficulty identifying and understanding when or where they can be safe.

Alexia suggested Hanna link with the independent travel trainers. Claire suggested Hannah also link up with the visual impairment travel trainers too. Hannah said she would link both with Ffion.

### **Autism and Parental Blame - Laura Ferguson (Co-Project Lead Autism and Parental Blame Research Project WM-ADASS)**

Laura was unable to make the meeting due to a personal issue; however, the presentation and video was shared with Board members. Laura will be invited to present this item at the next meeting on October 21<sup>st</sup>.

Please see the presentation attached and the link to a short film explaining Parental Blame issue here <https://vimeo.com/1022548545>

### **Autism West Midlands - Zoe Bristow**

Zoe went through a presentation (see attached), discussing the community support service that Autism West Midlands have been commissioned by the ICB to provide since 2022. It is due to go out for retendering again in April 2026.

She explained that commissioners wanted the views of people with lived experience on the service to understand whether the current service specification is meeting the needs of what individuals would like.

Autism West Midlands has gradually identified the needs in each county and developed their offer to include:

- One-to-One support sessions for anyone aged 16+ who identify as autistic with or without a diagnosis,
- Psychoeducation programme,
- Social groups,
- Wellbeing walks,
- Webinars,
- Access to our information line.

During the presentation Zoe showed figures of the number of individuals that had accessed different services offered over the past three years across both counties.

### **Action 1 - Katie asked Zoe to provide the figures from each service for each county.**

Zoe also discussed an autistic peer support online forum that is being developed. The forum will be available for autistic individuals across Herefordshire and Worcestershire with a residential address.

The forum will be monitored by staff during working hours, and all comments, posts and links will have to be approved by moderators before they go onto the forum. Staff can and will remove people from the forum if they don't adhere to the code of conduct.

### **ICS updates & Autism Strategy - Jack Caine/Anna Swift – Integrated Care Board**

Jack shared a presentation on the Adult Autism Support Service contract, please see attached. He asked members for their views on whether any changes need to be made to the contract. The current contract runs out in March 2026. The existing contract sets out broad measures and outcomes and then the service provider sets out a model for how they're going to meet those outcomes and reports back to commissioners in the ICB. So the contract outcome sets out:

- Reduction in the number of autistic people requiring support from secondary mental health services and social care, and successful engagement with people referred to the service,
- Working in partnership with people who actually use their autism service,
- Successful interventions leading to an increase in quality of life of autistic people and an improved understanding amongst people who are close to them,
- Positive interagency partnership working.

Contract Aims and Objectives:

- Provide a Herefordshire and Worcestershire service that supports autistic people to manage the experience and impact of being autistic on a daily basis.
- Provide personalised support which builds on personal strengths and identifies areas where support or reasonable adjustments may be required.
- To ensure carers and family members are supported and with consent, are aware of the needs of the individual they support.
- To support people to access other services.
- To develop the service with autistic people so that their voices and aspirations are reflected in the service model.
- To work with Commissioners to develop the service to meet the needs of autistic people and to achieve best value.

The current contract is nonclinical and due to the overall value of the contract over the contract period it falls under the Procurement Act, meaning it can't be directly awarded, and the ICB is obliged to advertise the contract to interested parties.

The Autism Strategy sets out an expectation that the ICB discuss this type of contract for the adult support service with the Autism Partnership Board so they can give feedback on it. This feedback will then be considered and the case for the contract for the Autism Support Service put forward to the ICB's Strategic Commissioning Committee to be scrutinised and challenged.

Jack also mentioned that market engagement has recently be completed on a Children's and Young People and Families Neurodivergence Support Service. The provider for the Adult Support Service would be expected to integrate with the provider of the CYP Neurodivergence Support Service.

**Action 2 - Valerie asked if the details of the contract could be shared with members, Jack said he would check whether this was possible.**

Kattie questioned whether the current contract value was enough, Jack said the contract value will be decided once the feedback had been gathered on what people are asking for.

### **Connect to Work Supported Employment Program - Alexia Heath (Post 16 Senior Advisor Children and Young People, Herefordshire Council)**

Alexia discussed the Connect to Work programme, part of the Get Britain Working programme to get more autistic people into work and off benefits.

The programme was launched in November 2024 and is a new government programme, part of the Get Britain Working Strategy, with the aim to get 80% of working age adults in paid work. It is a voluntary programme funding local supported employment across England and Wales, to help those with disabilities, health conditions and other complex barriers to employment to get into and stay in work.

In the 2026/2027 financial year the project aims to support around 100,000 people. The programme can provide support for 12 months for people out of work, and four months for people already in work. An advisor will support people looking for jobs, write applications and access support for managing health conditions and benefit advice.

Currently Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin are in a partnership, with Shropshire the accountable body and responsible for setting up the project and achieving the outcomes.

### **Police Hate Crimes reports concerning Autism – Marie Bridgewater – (Police Constable, Hate Crime Officer, West Mercia Police)**

Valerie has not received the latest autism hate crime reports from Marie. Valerie is continuing to give the police autism training.

### **Partner Organizations - All**

#### **a) Hereford Make**

Hereford Make have set up a go fund me to raise funding to support neurodiverse students. Please contact Jame Baker at [herefordmake@outlook.com](mailto:herefordmake@outlook.com) for details.

#### **b) Cart Shed**

Kate mentioned how they had managed to get continuation funding to keep their Different Not Less course going. The course is for parents of autistic children of any age. The Being Autistic programme is continuing to run. They have had feedback that people valued what they had learnt and wanted to revisit it, hence they are running Being Autistic Revisited in the autumn. They are also running additional creative courses for autistic individuals including woodwork and creative crafts. They are also running Being ADHD.

Kate also mentioned that she is trying to arrange a meeting with Onside who have taken over the work of the CLD Trust and also had Lottery funding to do work with Children and Young People who are Neurodivergent. She wants to bring a consortium of local providers together to enhance what the Cart Shed provides.

#### **c) Star College**

The extension to the Hereford College has recently been completed. Their partnership college with the Heart of Worcestershire has just come to the end of its first year.

#### d) HANDs Hub

Lucy mentioned how the HANDs Hub is growing faster than expected. They are running some of the HAF sessions (Holiday Activities and Food Programme), during the summer on arts and craft, and coding. Parents have been asking for drop-in sessions during the summer for their children. Organisations have been booking training sessions and using the autism spectrum room.

#### e) Parent Carer Voice

Claire mentioned how they had had some very successful coffee mornings recently. This includes Coffee with Colleagues whereby parents can pop in and discuss issues with staff from a different service providers each week, this has included members from the SEND team, travel trainers, CAMHS etc. They also have coffee mornings where parents can come in and discuss issues with each other.

#### A.O.B. - All

##### a) Oliver McGowan Training

The funding for the Oliver McGowan training delivered by the ICB is coming to an end in September due to Herefordshire and Worcestershire failing to meet its target. Organisations are being given the contact details of the deliverers in case they wish to book privately.

##### b) Supported Internships

Alexia mentioned the Supported Internships is for people with education, health and care plans (EHCP) who want to go into employment. The programme offers 6-12 months for individuals to do voluntary work with an employer for 3-4 days a week and 1-2 days a week with their education provider. Meetings have been had with the NDTI (National Development Team for Inclusive) and local colleges and providers to get the programme off the ground.

Beacon College is trailing some work with project search from September with five young people in the hospital.

Local providers with only a few young people have come together to form a collective as they are too small to deliver it themselves. Herefordshire, Shropshire, Ludlow College is then looking at what this collective might look like and is taking the lead in terms of delivery.

**Next Meeting:** Tuesday 21st of October 2025, 10:30am-1pm, Fownhope Room, Plough Lane Offices

#### Actions

Attendee	Action	Detail
Zoe Bistow	Action 1	Katie asked Zoe to provide the figures from each service for each county.
Jack Caine	Action 2	Valerie asked if the details of the contract could be shared with members, Jack said he would check whether this was possible.