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15/01/2019
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National Assembly Members

National Assembly for Wales

15th January 2019

Dear Assembly Member,

Plenary Debate on Proposed Autism Bill

In advance of the debate on the proposed Autism Bill, scheduled in plenary on Wednesday 16 January, we wanted to take this opportunity to remind you of our views on the proposed Bill and the work already on-going across Wales, including through the work of the WLGA/PHW National ASD Development Team to support Integrated Autism Services and other public bodies, to improve services for and the life experiences and opportunities of autistic people.

The WLGA have stated the view that the proposed Autism Bill, as currently set out, is not supported. We believe the clear direction of travel as set out by Welsh Government, through the Strategic ASD Action Plan for Wales and the draft statutory Code of Practice under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act currently out for consultation, address the majority of issues included in the draft Bill. We are also concerned that too much detailed prescription through a Bill may hinder successful implementation and delivery, with focus shifting to meeting statutory duties and requirements rather than maintaining focus on making changes and improvements to services that lead to better outcomes. Over the past few years awareness of autism has increased significantly which has led to some tangible improvements and these are set out below and in the attached briefing. This progress has been achieved without the need for legislation or prescriptive direction.

It is accepted by all that there are still significant changes to be made, both in public services and society as a whole before autistic people feel they have equality and fairness in all aspects of their lives. The life experiences and outcomes of autistic people must improve and local authorities are committed to supporting and enabling that change. Hosted by the WLGA in partnership with Public Health Wales, the National ASD Development Team, funded by Welsh Government, undertakes a range of work in support of the delivery of

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Croesawn ohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg a'r Saesneg a byddwn yn ymateb i ohebiaeth yn yr un iaith.

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the Strategic ASD Action Plan for Wales, working closely with the Local Authority ASD Leads and Health Leads, as well as stakeholders and providers in the Third Sector. The team also engage regularly with autistic people, their families and carers to help inform their work. We feel that the Strategic ASD Action Plan, along with the draft statutory Code of Practice provides the right current and future direction for Welsh public policy.

The attached Briefing, "Driving Improvements in Services for Autistic People in Wales" provides an overview of the considerable amount of work which is being undertaken across Wales, across many organisations, in support of people with autism and the parents, carers and families of autistic individuals and children with autism.

The vision for a national **Integrated Autism Service** is one that ensures the needs of autistic people are met through a collaboration between health and social care in a very real and integrated way are met. The IAS service was developed to fill the gap identified in existing services and complement those services; the gap having been widely acknowledged as the "missing piece of the jigsaw." To ensure a consistent, wide ranging approach to the support of autistic individuals, the National ASD team will continue to develop innovative resources with its partners, which are being utilised across the world. These include:

- Information and advice guides for parents and carers
- Awareness raising programmes for health, social care, employment support, employers, transport, housing and leisure providers
- Resources to support autistic adults in daily living activities
- Training resources for early years settings, primary and secondary schools and further education settings

Significant progress is being made with the implementation of the Integrated Autism Service (IAS), as 5 of the 7 regional IAS services are now fully operational and with the remaining being operational by April 2019, under the leadership of the 7 Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) of integrated health and social care. In the past three months, 5 of the 7 RPBs have received update presentations on the work nationally and regionally in relation to work on-going related to autism including the IAS and wider activity at a local level. To date, each RPB has committed to identify a **Regional Champion for Autism** at Board level to act as an advocate for awareness raising around the issues faced by autistic people and parents and carers of autistic adults and children.

By undertaking this pragmatic approach of providing national practical support to service delivery at a regional and local level, we are certain that the needs of autistic individuals will be met and therefore supported to live fulfilled lives. Public Health Wales and the WLGA also support the work of the Together for Children and Young People neurodevelopmental work programme. Neurodevelopmental teams now exist in all health boards in Wales and the guidance for the delivery of neurodevelopmental services has been published alongside other resources. These can be found at:
www.1000livesplus.wales.nhs.uk/neurodevelopmental-services

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As you will be debating the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee Stage 1 Report in relation to the proposed Autism (Wales) Bill, we saw this as an opportunity to highlight the work being rolled out across Wales. The attached Briefing offers a summary of this work and includes specific case studies of people in Wales receiving support, advice and guidance.

The WLGA and the Adult Diagnosis Community of Practise provided evidence to the Committee (both written and oral). In relation to the Committee recommendations, we would make the following observations. The first recommendation references a potential lack of consistency of the Integrated Autism Services across Wales. The IAS is being delivered against a set model of staffing and service delivery, which requires a consistent approach. Concerning the second recommendation, a number of the IAS' engage with third sector services working 'on the ground' to ensure signposting to local services and opportunities for autistic people. The Learning with Autism Programme is coordinated and led by the National ASD Development Team and to date almost 4500 teaching staff in Primary Schools have completed the scheme, 5,000 Learning Support Assistants. We have over 26,500 autism "super heroes" in primary schools. There have been 111 schools awarded the whole school award certificate which shows an increase on previous years. At Secondary school level, more than 2000 teachers have completed the scheme and over 9000 pupils have signed the pupil pledge (reference Recommendation 6).

It is our view that the Code of Practise published by Welsh Government at the end of November is sufficiently comprehensive to meet the needs of autistic people and parents and carers. It builds on what has already been achieved through the Refreshed Strategic Action Plan, yet takes it further and commits Health Boards and Local Authorities to further address the needs identified by autistic people and parents and carers.

Further detail of the work referenced above is also available in the National ASD Development Team's Annual Report 2017/18 www.ASDinfoWales.co.uk/national-asddevelopment-team. We would welcome the opportunity to share our work with you in more detail. If this would be of interest, please do not hesitate to contact either Sara Harvey, National Strategic Lead for Autism, or Wendy Thomas, National Professional Lead for Autism (email ASDinfo@wlga.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely



Cllr Huw David
WLGA Spokesperson for Health and Social Care

Enclosure "Driving Improvements in Services for Autistic People in Wales" Briefing, January 2019.

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