



**Welsh Parliament
Cross-Party Autism Group**

2025 Annual Report and Accounts

Since its establishment more than 20 years ago, the Cross-Party Autism Group has played a key role in bringing autistic people, their families, friends and carers together with professionals and Members of the Senedd to discuss services and support in Wales.

1. Group membership and office holders

Chair: Mark Isherwood MS

Other members:

Paul Davies MS
Hefin David MS
Heledd Fychan MS
Mike Hedges MS
Joyce Watson MS

Secretary: James Radcliffe, National Autistic Society Cymru

2. Group meetings

The Cross-Party Autism Group has held four public meetings over the past year: on 13th February, 22nd May, and October 2nd. Our AGM was held on 9th January 2026

Meetings have been held via Microsoft teams.

Summaries of the issues discussed and a list of attendees can be found below:

13th Feb

This meeting discussed the issue of 'forced' home education and the experiences of parents and children who were unable to continue with education due to a lack of suitable places within the education system, and for whom their parents withdrew them to home educate them. Kate Gibson, a former teacher who established cross

roads education to support parents in this situation, presented on this issue, and members of the group shared their own experiences. The second item discussed was the issue of fabricated and induced illness, with a presentation from Professor Luke Clemments on the issue. There was a discussion on the issue. The group wrote to the Welsh Government highlighting the issues raised in this meeting.

Attendees: Mark Isherwood (chair), James Radcliffe (Secretary- NAS), Julian Morgan, Kate Gibson, Kara Monkiewicz, Denise Jones, Prof Luke Clements, Fiona Dakin, Kerrie Hopwood, Janine Cusworth, Alex Still

22nd May

This meeting discussed Autism and/or adhd amongst women and girls. Sarah Thomas of the Women's Institute spoke about their campaign 'thinking differently' which aims to raise awareness of the under-diagnosis of autism amongst women and girls, tackle long waiting times for an assessment, and call for better training amongst health professionals. Sarah Morgan of the National Autistic Society also spoke about their 'trummies' project that helps introduce children to autism. The group also had an update on the Stolen Lives project.

Attendees: Mark Isherwood (chair), James Radcliffe (Secretary- NAS), Julian Morgan, Kate Gibson, Denise Jones, Rhian Connick, Nigel Morgan, Sarah Thomas, Sarah Morgan, Beth Rees, Lee Green, Kara Monkiewicz, Chad Rickard, Julie Mears, Kerrie Hopwood.

2nd October

This meeting started with tributes to Hefin David MS and the invaluable support he had given to the group.

Laura Fergusson, from the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, presented on the paper she had co-authored *blamed instead of helped*, which referred to the experiences of parents of autistic children with social services, in which they were blamed rather than supported. The group discussed the findings of her research and what actions could be taken.

There was also a presentation from Eluned Evans from Cardiff Council regarding Cardiff's neurodiverse city initiative and the steps they were taking to create a more inclusive Cardiff. The group also heard from Alex Swift, an autism activist, about the social model of disability and the ways in which we can build environments based on inclusion and well-being.

Attendees: Mark Isherwood MS (Chair), James Radcliffe (Secretary - NAS), D Jones, Nigel Morgan, H Wilson, K Jones, Mike Hedges MS, Kirsty Rees, Kerrie Hopwood, Alex Still, Ioan Bellin, Laura Fergusson, Eluned Evans, Alex Swift

AGM Jan 9th 2026

A short AGM was held on 9th January 2026. During this meeting the Chair (Mark Isherwood MS) and Secretary (James Radcliffe - National Autistic Society) were re-elected, with nominations (for both positions) made by Mike Hedges MS and over email by Paul Davies MS and Sioned Williams MS. There was also an informal discussion about topics that could be discussed in future meetings.

Attendees: Mark Isherwood MS (Chair), James Radcliffe (Secretary - NAS), Mike Hedges MS, Nigel Morgan.

3. Professional lobbyists, and voluntary or charitable organisations with whom the group has met during the preceding year

Representatives of the following organisations have attended group meetings over the past year:

- National Autistic Society
- Crossroads educational consultants
- Women's Institute
- Association of Directors of Adult Social Services
- Cardiff council
- The Stolen Lives Campaign

4. Financial Statement

Expenses

During the last year, there have been no expenses as all meetings have been online via teams

Benefits

The secretariat and meeting expenses (in terms of time taken to organise the meetings) were met by the National Autistic Society.