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Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Health and Social Services



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref MA-L/VG/0005/19

Chair of Health, Social Care and Sport Committee
Chair of Finance Committee

National Assembly for Wales
Ty Hywel
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

18 February 2019

Dear Chairs,

I am writing to thank each of your Committees for their stage one scrutiny of the Autism (Wales) Bill, and provide a response to committees' report recommendations (Annex A) which were directed at the Welsh Government. As the Bill was not successful in the vote following the General Principles Debate on 16 January, my response reflects this decision as I have not commented on recommendations relating to the possible progress of the Bill.

I am pleased to be able to agree the remaining recommendations, although in some cases I provide further explanation about what Welsh Government intends to do.

I want to assure all members of our firm commitment to improving autism services. This will be achieved through the delivery of the ASD Strategic Action Plan, the development of the Code of Practice on the Delivery of Autism Services and by embedding the services and reforms we have introduced including maximising the impact of the significant additional financial resources that have been allocated. I will shortly publish a Written Statement confirming the Welsh Government's intention to step up the pace of improvements to autism services and to review the outcomes which are achieved.

Yours sincerely,

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Health Social Care and Sport Committee

Recommendation 1. *We recommend that the Welsh Government directs the integrated autism service to improve the consistency of the services across the regions to ensure a national approach and reports back to the Committee within six months. We also recommend that they produce clear public information to clarify what people can expect from the Integrated Autism Service.*

Agreed The Integrated Autism Service (IAS) is supported by the National Autism Team that is hosted by the Welsh Local Government Association and Public Health Wales. The Team facilitates a Heads of IAS group to promote collaborative working. Recent work has included reviewing and updating the specification for the service, and to agree outcome focussed service wide monitoring arrangements. I expect the revised national specification and monitoring arrangements to be available by April. Information on the IAS and autism resources is freely available on the ASDinfo Wales website www.asdinfo.wales.co.uk. Each regional service will also produce their own communications materials.

The IAS has been designed to bridge an identified gap in services rather than replace existing support. The IAS will sometimes refer individuals to other mainstream services which are better placed to provide specialised support.

We are working to build autism knowledge and skills across public sector services through the resources and training being delivered by the National Autism Team and locally by the IAS teams. Examples of these resources can be found on the ASDinfo Wales website.

As each IAS has overlaid existing autism services in their regions, there will be some differences in how local services are delivered, to take account of variances such as the professional mix of staff, local geography and the services most in demand in any area. We aim to publish findings from the independent evaluation of the implementation of the service by the end of February, and we will carefully consider recommendations made there alongside those made by the scrutiny committees. We will set out further plans for evaluation and monitoring of our reforms as part of the annual report on the delivery of the ASD strategy in June 2019. We will send the Annual Report to each committee.

Recommendation 2. *We recommend that the Welsh Government increases the provision of direct ASD support services across Wales (beyond the services currently offered by the Integrated Autism Service), and ensures vital third sector services receive sustainable funding to continue and expand their specialist support services, which are providing direct frontline support and plugging the gaps which the Integrated Autism Service cannot deliver.*

Agreed The IAS is an additional service designed to increase capacity, local authorities and health boards should also have existing autism services which work alongside the IAS. From 2015/16 the Welsh Government placed the autism infrastructure grant of £40k per local authority in the Revenue Support Grant. This funding is available for local authorities to support autism services which could include securing third sector support. Also the Welsh Government Sustainable Social Services third sector grants scheme is specifically designed to provide national voluntary sector groups with funding to deliver community support services. The next grant will be available from April 2020 and we encourage voluntary

sector groups including those which provide specialist support services for autistic people to apply for funding through the competitive grant application process which will be advertised later in 2019.

Recommendation 3. *We recommend the Welsh Government takes urgent action to address the clear need for employment support for adults with ASD. There must be a clear pathway for adults to be able to access support to assist them into employment. Careers Wales should play a greater role but there is also a case for providing additional funding to third sector agencies to deliver specialised employment support services.*

Agreed We are working to support autistic adults people who experience difficulties in accessing and maintaining employment, many of whom will have a wide range of skills and experience.

The National Autism Team and local autism leads have strong working relationships with the Department of Work and Pensions to assist their staff in supporting autistic people who are in receipt of out of work benefits, which are non-devolved.

Our Working with Autism programme delivered through the ASD National Autism Team is supporting Careers Wales and Job Centres to provide advice and support for individuals with autism seeking employment support. By the end of 2018, over 30,000 individuals have completed our ASD aware scheme (8,006 completed during 2018) and 1,210 have completed Working with Autism scheme. A further 263 have completed the Positive about Working with Autism HR scheme. The Autism Aware scheme is also now being rolled out to Welsh Government staff.

The Welsh Government is also working in partnership with the Big Lottery – Getting Ahead Two project which is a five year programme designed to support young people who have learning disabilities or autism into the workplace. This project is delivered by a third sector consortium and is in its third year. Up to November 2018, 200 autistic young people have been referred into the service, 170 have received a vocational profile, 160 have undertaken placements and 33 autistic young people are now in sustained employment.

Also in 2018, we published a cross-Government employability plan that set out our vision for making Wales a full-employment, high-tech, high-wage economy. At the centre of this ambition, we are committed to helping everyone achieve their full potential through meaningful employment, regardless of their ability, health issues, background, gender or ethnicity. We are supporting people who are not working with a particular emphasis on those who are economically inactive and less likely to be in contact with mainstream employment support. This will include supporting autistic people and we will investigate where more can be done to provide them with the tailored support they need.

The Employability Plan takes action in four distinct themes; providing an individualised approach to employment support, underlining the responsibility of employers to support staff, closing skills gaps and preparing for a radically changing labour market. Individualised support gives advisers the autonomy and flexibility to address the needs, strengths and ambitions of the person preparing for work.

Recommendation 4. We recommend that the Welsh Government amends the Codes of Practice for Parts 3 (assessing the needs of individuals) and 4 (meeting the needs) of the Social Services and Well-being Wales Act 2014 to include specific provisions on ASD.

Agreed The Welsh Government has published a consultation on our proposals for a Code of Practice on the Delivery of Autism Service on 30th November, which is open until 1 March 2019. This Code will be made under both the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the NHS (Wales) Act 2006. The purpose of the Code will be to ensure that both statutory services and autistic people understand their rights and responsibilities under existing needs based legislation and codes of practice. The Code will seek to ensure services are adapted to meet the specific needs of autistic people.

Recommendation 5. We recommend that the Welsh Government instructs Health Boards and local authorities to ensure there are multiple appropriate clear referral pathways available to all, including a specific primary care pathway, and that existing barriers between the health, care and education sectors are removed, for example to enable GPs to refer children for education support.

Agreed Through the work of the Together for Children and Young People Programme, neurodevelopmental workstream, there are now nationally agreed pathways to access children's assessment services. The IAS is also developing national pathways for adult services as part of service improvement.

The consultation on the Code of Practice for the Delivery of Autism Services makes specific reference duties in relation to the provision of care and support pathways, this includes diagnostic pathways for assessment and diagnosis, to be aligned with social care pathways. There are also plans to require primary care pathways, particularly for GPs and to ensure there are appropriate pathways for autistic people with other co-existing conditions to access support which is appropriate for their needs.

Recommendation 6. We recommend that it should be mandatory for all school staff (particularly teachers and teaching assistants) to receive training in awareness and understanding of ASD, during their initial teacher training and as part of their continuing professional development.

Agreed We are currently reforming the way in which initial teacher education (ITE) is delivered in Wales. The ITE reforms require accredited ITE partnerships to design and deliver courses that support the four purposes of the new curriculum for Wales and address the six areas of learning and experience (AoLE) in order to develop future teachers to meet the needs of all learners, including learners with ASD. Furthermore a key element of our overall reform agenda has been to introduce a new more rigorous approach to the accreditation of programmes of ITE, and that these should be governed by the EWC so enabling the profession to set its own entry requirements. These new programmes will be available from September 2019.

New ITE Partnerships will develop approaches to assist aspiring teachers to understand the importance of research informed practice, so that teachers are taught the importance of keeping up to date with research, such as research on ASD, to inform their teaching

practice on an ongoing basis throughout their working lives. In addition all teachers in Wales are required to understand and be aware of the wellbeing, personal, emotional and social development of all learners.

The consultation on the Code of Practice for the Delivery of Autism Services includes a section dedicated to improving staff knowledge and skills. Statutory bodies will be expected to undertake autism training needs analysis for their staff, tailored to their professional needs. In relation to schools the National Autism Team have developed the Learning With Autism (LwA) programme aimed at increasing knowledge across teaching staff and learners, there are now packages available for early years, primary schools, secondary schools and further education. Applications for the LwA awards are being received on a daily basis. Our success so far is as follows.

- Primary Schools launched in March 2016: Almost 4500 teaching staff have completed the scheme, and almost 5,000 LSA's. We now have over 26,500 autism superheroes, 11,640 this year alone. There have been 111 schools awarded LwA whole school award certificate (more than 40 schools across Wales during 2018).
- Early Years: almost 1000 members of staff completed the scheme. 40 settings have been awarded their certificate. (35 more since January)
- Secondary Schools: more than 2000 teachers have completed the scheme and there have been 9161 pupils signed the pupil pledge (which is over 8,700 pupils undertaken the pledge since January 2018). 8 schools applied and successfully received their awards.

Recommendation 7. *We recommend that the implementation of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 is closely monitored to assess whether it meets the needs of children and young people with ASD considered 'high functioning' and who do not have a co-occurring learning disability.*

Agreed Under the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 ('the ALNET Act'), all children and young who are identified as having an additional learning need (ALN), which might include those with ASD considered high functioning, will be entitled to an individual development plan and associated rights and protections under that Act. The Welsh Government is committed to undertaking a post-implementation review of the ALNET Act five years after its commencement. This will assess the extent to which the ALNET Act has had a positive impact on children and young people with ALN in Wales.

Recommendation 9. *We recommend that the Welsh Government's Code of Practice makes provision to ensure that individuals can access appropriate information and support in their language of choice.*

Agreed The consultation on the Code of Practice makes specific reference to the availability of services meet Welsh Language Standards and where required provide reasonable adjustments to ensure that autistic people with protected characteristics have equal access to services and support. We have also published an Easy Read version of the consultation on the proposals for the Code.

Finance Committee

Recommendation 1. *In future, should the Assembly vote in favour of the motion tabled in accordance with Standing Order 26:91 the Committee recommends that the Welsh Government commits to providing information to ensure that costs in an explanatory memorandum are as comprehensive and detailed as possible utilising cost information which the Welsh Government has available.*

Agreed. A letter from the First Minister, responding directly to the Committee's concerns was issued on 21 December 2018. The Welsh Government will provide information held by us, but we would not undertake any additional data gathering or bespoke data analysis etc., as this is the responsibility of the Member in Charge.