

SUBMISSION FROM GLASGOW CITY COUNCIL

Section 1: Autism Strategy

1. Autism, Asperger syndrome, Pervasive Developmental Disorder and other related conditions are lifelong conditions that express themselves in varying ways and levels of severity. They are characterised by a triad of impairments in social interaction, social communication and inflexibility of thought. The term Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has been coined to describe this continuum of impact, and includes autism, Asperger syndrome and related disorders. Autism Spectrum Disorders occur right across the intellectual range and individuals may have associated severe learning difficulties or may have a very high IQ rating.
2. For some people the condition may be severe and disruptive, undermining their capacity to live independently. Such people although responding to early intervention will require substantial and ongoing support. Others however may only experience subtle effects in social behaviour, it may have a more minimal impact on their capacity to live a normal life, require little by way of support and may indeed remain undiagnosed.
3. However, ASD is lifelong and will touch on all aspects of someone's life. In this respect, all services that deal with the public are likely to come into contact with people with ASD, and, as such, need to know how to respond appropriately. These include council departments, health boards, colleges, universities, employment agencies, employers and such like.
4. People with ASD are more prone to a variety of mental illnesses. Depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorders and other psychiatric conditions are not uncommon particularly amongst adolescents and adults. ASD cuts across all social and ethnic groups in equal measure although males are 4 times more likely to have ASD than females.
5. Estimating the number of people with ASD in Scotland is of course an important precursor to planning and delivering the right type and level of services. It is unclear the precise number of individuals with ASD there are in Scotland. Given current prevalence rates it is estimated that there may be as many as 50,000 individuals, but problems with diagnosis have meant that only around 15% have been identified.
6. A problem of such scale and diversity requires a coordinated national approach to deal with it. The range of needs and the diversity of impact means that an all-inclusive framework needs to be adopted. Glasgow's work within its housing and its criminal justice services has already proven the benefits of a joined up, multi-agency response to this issue. In addition, the continued funding of a multi-agency Autism Resource Centre in Glasgow shows the commitment in the city to low-tariff but high

benefit flexible interventions and approaches which have previously been highlighted as good practice in Government reports.

7. Clarity from the Scottish Government on a strategic approach to working with people on the spectrum, how services should be provided and who should be providing them is therefore important. Recognition within the Bill that people with ASD are entitled to support from services would be highly beneficial. Criteria and protocols for access to services in the widest sense can sometimes prevent people with ASD from obtaining support they deserve. Previous guidance has however had little impact on resolving these issues, so strong national leadership through an autism strategy would have much more impact if it places a duty on government, and if Parliament can hold it to account.
8. The introduction of an Autism Strategy should also provide a statutory basis for the resolution of issues that require a multi-agency approach. The pervasive nature of ASD means that a solution to the problems any one individual presents will often require a multi-agency approach. Agreement and coordination of this would benefit greatly from legislative support.
9. Many of the recommendations that are likely to be provided in a national autism strategy are ones that Glasgow is already striving towards, and so any legislative change would only help in working towards the attainment of these.

Section 2: Guidance by Scottish Ministers

10. As stated above the introduction of an Autism Strategy would be broadly welcomed. A successful strategy will set a standard across Scotland for how support services are planned and developed.
11. These duties should not specify 'how' local agencies should carry them out, that is for them to decide what is appropriate for their area.
12. They should however specify 'what' needs to be carried out if the needs of people with autism are to be met appropriately. The proposed duties should mean that all local agencies would behave in the same way and will clearly understand what actions they need to take.
13. Public finances will face significant pressures over the coming years but many people with autism will be left exceptionally vulnerable if support is removed from them. A national strategy would ensure that limited resources are used to the greatest effect.
14. Evidence points to significant costs relating to individuals with autism in terms of their health and wellbeing when they don't get the right assistance. The costs to local government and health services of this have been highlighted by the National Audit Office (NAO) in a report on the economic costs of autism. There is a challenge for government to

consider the full costs of unmet need and the reliance on more expensive care packages compared with the costs of early intervention, which could potentially lead to significant savings.

15. Evidence also shows that the right care and support, provided at the right time to someone with autism, can really change their prospects and allow them to live full and independent lives especially if they can be supported into employment.
16. For instance, within Glasgow, through our multi-agency Criminal Justice Group, we have examined the prevalence of ASD in prisons. There is a clear over-representation of ASD within the prison system, and if a timely diagnosis had been made and the right interventions had been put in place, would this have resulted in a much more positive outcome for individuals as well as potential for a reduced cost across the public sector.
17. Whilst the NAO findings should be noted, any direct costs associated with the implementation of an Act would need to be recognised and accounted for by the Scottish Government, as well as being reflected in allocations made to local authorities. Without the identification of appropriate resource, at least in the shape of some development or change funding, it is unlikely that the strategy will have the effect intended.
18. With respect to the specific issues mentioned, the following should be noted—

The provision of relevant services for the purpose of diagnosing autistic spectrum conditions

19. Diagnosis methodology and access to services varies greatly across Scotland. There exists a 'postcode lottery' as to the length of waiting time and the resource available in various parts of Scotland. Clear guidance could involve standards that services are required to meet in this respect.

The identification of persons with such conditions

20. In order to inform the planning and delivery of services for people with ASD, accurate information in relation to the numbers of people on the spectrum is required. Information collation is improving within Children's services but this knowledge is not always transferred to provide accurate numbers of individuals on the spectrum in Adult services. Similarly in Adult services, individuals sit across multiple care groups and there is no single defined system enabling identification of individuals, which prevents adequate understanding of issues and planning for services.

The assessment of the needs of persons with such conditions for relevant services

21. The complex and pervasive nature of people on the Autism Spectrum means that provision of appropriate services for people can sometimes

be hard to achieve. Guidance on the provision of services would be welcomed but any additional services that would need to be provided would need to be matched by increased funding to local authorities.

Planning in relation to the provision of relevant services to persons with autistic spectrum conditions as they move from being children to adults

22. Transition planning is another area that could be improved through tighter guidance and the development of a strategic approach to this.

Other planning relation to the provision of relevant services to persons with autistic spectrum conditions

23. Autism is a pervasive condition that affects people in many ways and aspects of their lives. As such, people on the spectrum may come into contact with a wide range of services. Glasgow has already recognised this fact and done much work with a range of services. However providing options and guidance to other services (e.g. Criminal Justice, Employment, Housing) is imperative in provision of an adequate response to the wide range of needs presented.

The training of staff who provide relevant services to persons with such conditions

24. Improving training options for staff who work with people with ASD is a core priority for Glasgow and support to seeing this approach being rolled out from national government would be beneficial.

Local arrangements for leadership in relation to the provision of relevant services to persons with such conditions

25. Glasgow has in post an Autism Services Coordinator and this has proved highly beneficial in coordinating and addressing issues for people on the spectrum. A role out of this across Scotland could be seen as a positive step.

Section 3: Local Authorities and NHS Boards

26. Provided the above points in relation to finance are taken into account Glasgow would support the implementation of guidance. In addition, it should be remembered that this will take place within a context of local planning arrangements so the strategy should include what should be delivered and by whom, rather than the exact how this should be delivered.

Section 4 and 5: Interpretation, Short Title and Commencement

27. No comments.

Policy Memorandum

28. The policy memorandum is viewed as being generally helpful. However, it outlines that there will be minimal direct impact on local government, and that the financial and resource impact is also expected to be

minimal. It is the view here that given the current financial restraints on local authorities any additional costs incurred as a consequence of the Bill would need to be addressed through allocations to local government.

Explanatory Notes and Financial Memorandum

29. These again are viewed as generally helpful. However, it is clear from the financial memorandum that the costs on local authorities having regard to the guidance issued as a result of the strategy are not clear. As per above it should be again stressed that any costs as a consequence of the Bill would need to be addressed through allocations to local government.

Consultation Prior to the Introduction of the Bill

30. This was carried out adequately within the timeframes allowed.

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