

PE1704/G

Stirling Council submission of 30 October 2018

Comments from Children and Families

These comments have been developed following discussion within Children's Services – representing Schools, Learning and Education and Children and Families.

- *That every person in Scotland going through an autism diagnostic procedure will be assessed within a calendar year and receive a statutory services assessment from a qualified social worker as an integral part of this process, within twelve months from the date of their initial referral.*

The first aspect of this question is best addressed by CAHMS, who have presumably been asked for their views separately. From a Children's Service perspective in Forth Valley the diagnostic process can and does work well and often in a timely way. We would like to enhance the partnership nature of this work and have plans to meet with colleagues across Forth Valley to address this. In individual cases there can be delays and frustration about the process from parents and we feel that two other things may help with this

- 1) Clearer, timely protocols and communication about the processes followed, so that individuals and families know what to expect as they go through the experience
- 2) Clarity about the complex nature of diagnosis in some cases, where there are multiple complex factors to be considered

Setting a year as a limit is not the change that we feel would be most appropriate to resolve these concerns.

A services assessment from a children and families social worker is not always wanted by individuals or families following diagnosis. Clear signposting to services and partnership approaches to support, in line with existing legislation – ASL Act and CYP Act make this support available to individuals as and when it is required. Locally we have changed referral procedure to ensure that access to social work support is not delayed by our processes, when support is required for the reason of a disability.

In adult services support from a qualified social worker is delivered in line with a nationally recognised eligibility criteria, and the access to services may equally be identified and signposted by other staff or services. Ongoing work to support independence and a 'normal' life for people with disabilities aims to provide the support required at the level required rather than to escalate every situation to statutory services. There is an existing statutory responsibility to assess subject to the Social Work(Scotland) Act 1968, Section 12.

- *That children with autism in mainstream schools will have their assessed needs for classroom support met by an ASL assistant with a recognised autism qualification as part of a mandatory registration process for ASL professionals.*

The assessed needs of children with autism are met in schools by a wide variety of approaches. It is the role of teachers, to lead on this work and support from a support for learning assistant may be identified as appropriate to enable some aspects of learning and development. The question of support provision, often seems to be simplified to the provision of hours of support assistant time, rather than reflecting the work of a team around a child in line with the ASL Act and Staged Intervention processes, used to plan to meet the needs of all children who have identified additional support needs. Research shows that support assistant time can support engagement positively but can also decrease attainment and the focus is on helping children to develop strategies and skills for independence and to support the leading of a 'normal' life. Learning and development required by teachers and support staff often needs to be bespoke to the child and provision of generic training is only one aspect of the work to support school staff to best support children with ASN including ASD.

- *That young adults with autism will have a statutory right to specialist support from their local authority up to the age of 25.*

It's not clear why this statutory right would be made available to people with autism, rather than all people with ASN or disabilities. Locally we are working with adult services to address some challenges which arise at the transitions stage. We are aware of parental concern about challenges associated with the different models of support delivery, which reflect need and individual presentation at the children's stage, but may meet a different threshold at the point of transition to adult services. All people can already access services required when they meet the criteria for that service and assessment of need is already mandated in legislation. We were not clear how a statutory right would add to this.

- *That an Autism Act will be in place within the next 5 years to enshrine specific rights and services for autistic people in our legal system.*

There is a significant bank of legislation and guidance in place which covers the concerns leading to this petition – The ASL Act, the CYP Act, Children's Scotland Act, Social work Scotland Act and Refreshed Guidance 'Included, Engaged and Involved Part 2: a positive approach to preventing and managing school exclusions, all cover these concerns for all with additional support needs, including autism. People with an autism diagnosis are a very broad group, some who will need significant and ongoing support and others who will not, or who will be able to access support as required. We don't believe that additional and specific legislation would be a step forward in ensuring that there is consistency of appropriate support available across all local authorities.

Comments from Regeneration and Inclusive Growth:

- 1) From an equalities perspective, the introduction of a series of targets designed to provide a framework for securing the quality and consistency of services and support for children, young people and adults with autism across Scotland should in principle be welcomed.

- 2) The need for these, their proposed nature and the implications for current service provision is within the Stirling Council area is out with my field of knowledge but I understand is being considered by colleagues in Children & Families.
- 3) The proposed introduction of statutory right to support for young adults with autism up to the age of 25 is very similar to that provided for care leavers.
- 4) The proposed introduction of an Autism Act continues the demand for an increased focus on and specific rights and services for people within the current "protected characteristic groups" identified under the Equality Act 2010. Current examples of this are the Carers Act and the British Sign Language (BSL) Scotland Act 2015. Whilst this trend is likely to continue and from an equalities and human rights perspective should be welcomed, the resulting challenges for service providers, including local authorities will be significant and will require Scottish Government support if these are to be met in a meaningful and consistent manner.