

# Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

5th Meeting, 2021 (Session 6), Wednesday 6  
October 2021

PE1837: Provide clear direction and  
investment for autism support

## Note by the Clerk

**Petitioner** Stephen Leighton

**Petition summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to:

- clarify how autistic people, who do not have a learning disability and/or mental disorder, can access support and;
- allocate investment for autism support teams in every local authority or health and social care partnership in Scotland.

**Webpage** <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1837>

## Introduction

1. This is a continued petition, last considered by the CPPPC on [8 September 2021](#). At that meeting, the CPPPC agreed to take evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport on the various concerns raised in written submissions received on the petition.
2. A summary of submissions from the Scottish Government, Scottish Autism, COSLA and the petitioner can be found in the [previous Note by the Clerk](#).
3. At this meeting, the Committee will take evidence from -
  - Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care;
  - Hugh McAloon, Deputy Director for Children and Young Peoples Mental Health; and
  - Jacqueline Campbell, Unit Head, Children and Young Peoples Community Mental Health

4. Since the PPC last considered the petition two written submissions were received from the petitioner and have been summarised in this paper.

## Background

5. Autism is regularly described as a learning disability, but out of that 67% of people who are autistic do not have a learning disability in a form commonly understood by the term. The petition raises concerns that definitions of autism as a mental disorder within the existing Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 is impacting on the ability of autistic people to receive support from local authorities and health and social care partnerships
6. The petitioner argues that the legislation requires amendment and proper acknowledgement of autism; that is neither, necessarily, a mental disorder or a learning disability as these are currently defined in the legislation.
7. Arguing for allocation of investment for autism support teams nationally, the petitioner expresses that support teams would create a care pathway for autistic people out of mental health services which currently are unequipped to provide the necessary support.
8. The petition has received 25 written submissions to date and has been considered three times.

## Petitioner submission

9. In one of his [most recent submissions](#), the petitioner raised concerns about the efficacy of the post diagnostic support (PDS) pilot as he noted that the charity services are available in certain areas of Scotland and only to those diagnosed within the last two years. Accessibility issues were noted as the pilot contains mostly online groups which are not available to everyone.
10. The submission reiterates a previous point that there is an impression that autism is covered in the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 2015 under the definition of a learning disability, resulting in autistic people being signposted to learning disability or mental health services.
11. The petitioner reiterates that 67% of autistic people do not have a learning disability and therefore are left without support. This issue was raised [in The Accountability Gap](#) report.
12. The [other recent submission](#) highlights findings of the independent review of the 10-year Autism Strategy. The petitioner points out that the review echoes concerns raised in The Accountability Gap report, with the report concluding that:

“After ten years, valuable resources have been created and new and additional services delivered. However, real change for many autistic people, both in how they engage with services and in how they are supported to live

productive lives, is not as evident. To have a greater impact, the services and support need to have greater reach, become embedded and be sustained.”

13. Quotes from the report are highlighted throughout the submission and cover issues raised in the petition such as concerns about the conflation of autism and learning disability; gaps in service provision, particularly for adults; and the limited impact of the Autism Strategy.

## Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition. Options include –

- To consider the evidence heard at a future meeting;
- To take any other action members consider appropriate.

## Clerk to the Committee

## Annexe

The following submissions are circulated in connection with consideration of the petition at this meeting-

- [PE1837/Y: Petitioner submission of 27 September 2021](#)
- [PE1837/Z: Petitioner submission of 27 September 2021](#)

The Scottish Parliament launched a new website at the end of Session 5. All written submissions received on the petition before May 2021 can be viewed on the petition on the [archive webpage](#). Written submissions received on the petition after May 2021 can be viewed on its [new webpage](#).