

PE1704/T

Fife Council submission of 5 June 2019

The following responses to the questions set out were received from members of the Autism Strategy Working Group. This group includes representatives from Adult Services Social Work, Children and Families Social Work, NHS Children Services, NHS Psychology Service, Education Services and Scottish Autism, (provider of Fife Autism One Stop Shop).

Statement 1; That every person in Scotland going through an autism diagnostic procedure will be assessed within a calendar year and receive a statutory service assessment from a qualified social worker as an integral part of this process, within twelve months from the date of their initial referral.

Response; In terms of the capacity within Fife NHS, (both children and adult services), at the moment this target is not achievable within existing resources. NHS Children Services are working exceptionally hard to adapt the multiagency diagnostic process for children in Fife but it will take time.

The legislation around assessment for children with a disability states that this will be undertaken at parental request by a representative of the local authority. From the perspective of Fife Children and Families Social Work, S23 assessments are not currently necessarily undertaken by qualified social workers. In Fife a great number of these assessments are undertaken (with support) by Social Work Assistants within Fife Children and Families Social Work Service. The service delivery model within Children and Families Social Work Services is such that it is a tiered approach of universal, additional and intensive. The Child Wellbeing Pathway sits within this. All local authorities have a named person, lead professional escalation model, (like the Child Wellbeing Pathway), in place which considers unmet need and risk. Therefore a distinction between these two processes, (S23 and Child Wellbeing Pathway), is key when considering outcomes for people with autism being met. In considering that spectrum of need, many of the issues raised within the discussion around this petition considered timescales, educational experiences and having the right multi-agency support at the right time.

S23 and social work support have a part to play within this. However, the overall co-ordination of a multi-agency plan would be achieved within the Child Wellbeing Pathway and child plan process. The experiential feeling of staff in Fife, (though not based on any data), would be that there continues to be a slower escalation of unmet need within this pathway. If children from the community are considered within a Child Wellbeing Meeting or have a multi -agency child's plan in place, it may be that the setting of the suggested target would not result in a better outcome.

From the perspective of Adult Social Work Services, Eligibility Criteria is in place which explains how finite resources will be targeted. Currently Adult Services have to target resources, (i.e. assessments and services following assessment), to those where there is evidence of critical risks. Those adults with autism where there is evidence of critical risk are prioritised for assessment and a service. Those who do not meet this criteria can be signposted for support from the One Stop Shop and voluntary services. Therefore, unless there is a significant additional resource, it will

not be possible for Adult Social Work Services to prioritise all people with a diagnosis of autism for an assessment within 12 months of being referred for a diagnosis. The additional resource would need to be such as to allow for recruitment of registered social workers, (similarly to Children and Families Social Work, many assessments are undertaken by Social Work Assistants), as well as sufficient resource for services, (however, it is not clear what those services would be).

In Fife, the representative from Scottish Autism thinks it would be ideal for every adult with an autism diagnosis to get a statutory service assessment from social work. It is her understanding that people with a Learning Disability are more likely to get this, and those who are high functioning autism may not be currently considered eligible by social work. However, many of these high functioning individuals require assessment and support and in an ideal world this should happen to prevent mental health issues and more difficulties down the line. To make this possible greater resource is likely to be needed for both adults and children to achieve this, and a review of eligibility criteria may be necessary to accommodate this. (Personal view).

Education Services indicated no comment.

Statement 2; 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.

Response; Feedback from Education Services is that currently they provide support to pupils based on a continuum of support and that support does not always need to be provided by an ASL assistant. Where appropriate, support can be provided by the class teacher. Support for pupils should be aimed at developing independence. If a pupil requires support from an ASL assistant this is agreed through the planning processes. Schools often have support strategies in place before diagnosis is made.

Feedback from Education Services is that they would not support the need for a recognised Autism qualification for all ASL staff working with pupils with an ASD. ASL Assistants need to work with pupils with a range of ASN and are not required to have qualifications in ADHD, Dyslexia or Attachment Disorder. Feedback from representatives from NHS Fife indicates that the ASL services is under considerable pressure and again unless further resource is found to support the service this will not be an achievable target. NHS Fife are a long way off mandatory training and registration of ASD for professionals. From the perspective of someone assessing children who are primarily already at school, it appears that by the time the children are seen for assessment the school has usually identified specific needs and have some kind of support package in place. Optimising Outcomes gives clear guidance on specific levels of knowledge required for those supporting people with ASD. Given the funding that the government used to develop this material it would seem prudent to adopt the model therein - would this be accepted as recognised training?

Children and Families Social Work and Adult Services Social Work ask why this question only focuses on the classroom assistant having a recognised autism qualification as part of a mandatory registration process for ASL professionals. The

Optimising Outcomes Framework describes the levels of knowledge and skills required for different professional roles within the NHS - from Autism informed to Expertise in Autism. In Fife, there is an e-learning resource for autism, (in line with the national training framework). The resource (Informed About Autism - Level 1) is intended for all staff working in health and social care, regardless of their current level of knowledge or expertise.

Feedback from the representative from Scottish Autism is that school support is varied, depending on the training and support of the staff at the school. Significant additional financial resource would be required to achieve the above objective.

Statement 3; That young adults with autism will have a statutory right to specialist support from their local authority up to the age of 25.

Response; Feedback from representatives from NHS Fife is that in Fife, this target is not achievable within existing resources, neither within NHS adult services or children services. There is significant work being done to adapt the multiagency diagnostic process for children in Fife but it will take time. Also, clarification would be required as to whether this includes young adults with dual diagnosis e.g. intellectual disability, ADH-D, Tourette's syndrome, etc.

Feedback from Fife Adult Services Social Work is that Adult Services Social Work have finite resources to meet the needs of the population of Fife who are deemed eligible for support from Adult Services. It is recognised that there are different approaches across Scotland. However, the proposal that everyone diagnosed with autism be entitled to specialist support up to the age of 25 years would not be consistent with Fife Council current Eligibility Criteria for Adult Social Work which focuses on outcomes and risks rather than on specific clinical diagnosis. Also, there are many people with autism who do not need specialist support, therefore the current approach which enables delegated staff within the local authority to assess whether a person's needs are such that they will be at an agreed level of risk, (to warrant support), would seem to be the most appropriate approach. Statutory services are committed to promoting independence and not creating dependence.

Feedback from Children and Families Social Work echoes the above.

Feedback from Scottish Autism is that the proposal would be the ideal position to reduce risks of people with autism developing mental ill health, experiencing problems with employment and possible criminal justice issues. To achieve this would require significant financial investment and a national review of Eligibility Criteria.

Feedback from Education Service is that transition support needs to be considered going forward following education. Too often young adults only manage to sustain college or work placements for short periods of time after leaving school.

Statement 4; 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.

Response; Feedback from representatives from NHS Fife is that if an Autism Act was brought in that entitled people with Autism to an agreed level of service, then Fife would need a significant increase in resource to meet that statutory obligation. ASD spans many neurodevelopmental conditions -not least of all intellectual disability (approx. 40%).

Feedback from Fife Adult Services Social Work echoes the above.

Feedback from Scottish Autism is that they would support an Autism Act however, this would require financial resources to ensure statutory rights to services could be achieved.

Feedback from Education Service indicates no comment.