

PE1837/L

The National Autistic Society Scotland submission of 21 January 2021

About us

The National Autistic Society Scotland is a leading charity for autistic people in Scotland and their families. There are around 56,000 autistic people in Scotland, both children and adults, plus their more than 174,000 family members and carers. We provide local specialist help, information and care across Scotland to autistic children, adults and families. We offer a wide range of personalised quality support at home and in the community, both in groups and one-to-one. Our branches in Scotland offer families and autistic people help and mutual support, and our employment team support autistic people in work and their employers.

Petition PE1837

The National Autistic Society Scotland welcomes the recent resourcing of the national autism post diagnostic support service for people diagnosed within the last two years and is currently working in collaboration with the Scottish Government to ensure that our charity can play a positive, high impact role in this new service. However, it is our charity's view that there continues to be an absence of consistent and accessible support services for autistic people throughout their lifespan in a number of local authority areas across Scotland, creating something of a postcode lottery. This issue requires further action by the Scottish Government and COSLA to ensure that the human rights of all autistic people are recognised in Scotland.

Our charity, therefore, broadly welcomes the call for more resources to be made available by the Scottish Government in order to provide support for autistic people, not just across local authorities and health and social care partnerships in Scotland, but also across the third sector and autistic people's organisations. As the collaborative work around the post diagnostic support service, and services which resulted from the Scottish Strategy for Autism such as the One Stop Shops, shows, it is only by involving third sector organisations and APOs in this work that tangible, long-term success can be achieved.

In terms of investment, we recognise that a lack of funding is currently a concerning issue and greater resources are required in order to support autistic people through services at a local authority level. However, we would also wish to highlight that it is often simplistic to automatically attribute failings at local authority level solely to a lack of investment, whilst not understating the importance of increased investment. As the Cross Party Group on Autism's recent review of the Scottish Strategy for Autism found, as detailed in the resulting *The Accountability Gap* report¹, there is a lack of accountability and consistency across local authority areas that continues to be a serious barrier to providing adequate and accessible support. Therefore, we would suggest that work should be undertaken to identify best practice at a local level with the aim of then sharing this widely to ensure greater consistency across Scotland, alongside a commitment to additional funds.

¹ Cross Party Group on Autism (2020) *The Accountability Gap*. Available to download at: <https://www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/news/scotland-cross-party-group-on-autism-report>

The aforementioned Cross Party Group report, *The Accountability Gap*, sets out an array of findings and lists a number of recommendations that would help to ensure greater consistency and availability of efficient support services for autistic people in Scotland. The primary recommendations identified are the creation of a new fully funded Autism Strategy, and the foundation of a Commission or Commissioner role. It is our charity's view that such a role would subsequently be in a position to undertake some of the work mentioned above, such as investigating and sharing best practice, and orchestrating collaborative work between the Scottish Government, local authorities, health and social care partnerships, third sector organisations, and APOs.

Conclusion

The National Autistic Society Scotland acknowledges the Scottish Government's response to this petition, including highlighting the recently established national post diagnostic support service. We welcome the resources that have been made available for this service and our charity is committed to making it a success. However, we do recognise that further support is still required for autistic people throughout the lifespan and we do agree that more resource is required within the system to support autistic people at a local level. Our charity mirrors the views of the Cross Party Group on Autism that a new fully funded Autism Strategy and the establishment of a Commission or Commissioner role are both required to ensure consistency and accountability is implemented across every local authority area. This would be a crucial first step to lifting the barriers currently preventing adequate support being made available to all autistic people in Scotland.