

PE1837/R

Petitioner submission of 1 February 2021

There is a pattern emerging from the submissions. It seems to take years for people to be diagnosed, only to then struggle to access any meaningful support across the lifespan. This proves the 10-year autism strategy has been a failure.

The National Autistic Society and Scottish Autism were instrumental in producing the Cross Party Working Group for autism report 'The Accountability Gap' – highlighting that autistic people are not being supported at a local level and that investment is needed. The Petitions Committee asked The National Autistic Society Scotland and Scottish Autism to provide submissions.

Scottish Autism did not make any submission.

The Scottish Government gave £200,000 to the National Autistic Society Scotland and Scottish Autism to support autistic people in relation to the pandemic. Out of the £250,000 allocated for the Post Diagnostic Pilot, £110,000 was given to the two charities. That is a combined £360,000 in the last 8 months.

The Scottish Government seem to highlight two main outcomes to the closure of the strategy:

- The new Post Diagnostic Pilot
- The new 2 year 'Learning/Intellectual Disability and Autism Recovery Plan 2021' – to bridge the gap between the closure of the autism strategy in 2021 with the learning disability policy (The Keys to Life) that will close in 2023.

The new Post Diagnostic Support is only a 6-month pilot, what happens after this? When does Post Diagnostic Support stop and ongoing support start? The need to develop a post diagnostic support toolkit highlights that there is no tangible ongoing support for autistic people across the lifespan - if there was ongoing support, you wouldn't need to develop a post diagnostic toolkit! The charities that are involved in this Pilot were already providing this support, they have been collectively paid £250,000 to more or less be reviewed as to what they were already doing. The money was initially procured to develop an alternative model, not just review what was already being provided. I sent a Freedom of Information Request to the Scottish Government asking for the minutes/contract/tendering process of how this money was allocated. The Scottish Government said they don't have any information to provide. How can they allocate a quarter of a million of pounds of public money with no record of how that decision was made?

The joint 'Learning Disability and Autism Plan' is a major concern for the autistic community, for all the reasons made in various submissions. By joining the two groups together (autism & learning disability) gives the public

the perception that learning disability services support autism needs. So, it will look as if there will be support for autistic people, but these services will only support people with a learning disability who are autistic, but not autistic people who do not have a learning disability. As the narrative is now shared with learning disability, it will be even harder for autistic people to 'close the accountability gap'.

The Scottish Government claim the issues faced by autistic people and the learning disability population are similar, hence the joint plan, yet they are not the same. I sent a Freedom of Information Request to the Scottish Government asking who made the decision to join learning disability and autism, they said they have no information they can provide me as to who made the decision to join learning disability and autism together. Instead they said the stakeholders agreed, the stakeholders being The National Autistic Society and Scottish Autism. How can they have no record/minute of such a big policy decision? Also, why did they make this decision before the closure of the autism strategy? It is clear that policy officers are designing policy without reflecting what the autistic community are saying, and are therefore giving the Scottish Government the wrong information to act on.

There seems to be a pattern emerging from the Scottish Government – the charities get to be a 'stakeholder' and get access to funding, then the Scottish Government claim they are getting 'the consent of the autism community' because these charities say so. As other submissions have highlighted, the charities do not have a mandate to represent the autistic community.

This is why the autistic community feel let down by some of the charities, as they seem to be 'willing to go along' with joining learning disability and autism. How can these charities claim to be advocating for autistic people, asking for people to fundraise for autism, by agreeing to policies that merge autism with learning disability, especially considering 67% of autistic people do not have a learning disability?