

Our ref: MMcA/bd/ew

4 January 2011

Dr Kathryn Bell
Committee for Health, Social Services & Public Safety
Room 410
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
BELFAST BT4 3XX

Dear Dr Bell

AUTISM BILL

I refer to your letter dated 10 December 2010 with regard to the Autism Bill. Please find comments from the Southern Trust as follows:

Clause 1: Amendment to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995

The Trust is empowered, under existing legislation, to assess the needs of people with autism and to provide services to meet their needs and those of their carers. Under the Children Order, the services are provided to children with autism as children in need. The development of UNOCINI has enhanced practice, strengthening multi-disciplinary and inter-agency contribution to assessment and identification of need.

The increasing numbers of children being appropriately referred for specialist autism assessment is an encouraging indicator that increasingly people are now having needs identified, and services provided, at an early stage.



Clause 2: Autism Strategy

The DHSSPS Independent Review of Autism Services and subsequent Regional Autism Spectrum Disorder Action Plan 2008/09 – 2010/11 have provided a strategic framework for improved services and better health and well-being outcomes for people with autism and their families/carers.

Under these arrangements, the level of collaborative working between agencies and sectors has greatly improved, and delivering the Action Plan is being given high priority in all Trust areas. The structure of regional and local fora, particularly given the level of carer/service-user participation inherent in the processes, is an important co-ordinating mechanism which is holding participants to account for discharging their responsibilities.

Given the diverse needs of the population of those with autism, its lifelong nature, and the miscellaneous service requirements of those affected, multi-agency co-ordinated responses to need are essential. The regional and local fora are proving effective mechanisms to enable agencies to respond in a co-ordinated way.

Clause 3: Content of the Autism Strategy

The current Regional ASD Action Plan seeks to set out how the needs of people with autism spectrum conditions and their carers/families are to be addressed throughout their lives. The level of inter-departmental, inter-agency and cross-sector commitment has already been significantly enhanced by the Action Plan and the operation of the fora.

The matter of an autism awareness campaign is also being addressed through the Action Plan. A regional training strategy is being developed which seeks to provide a framework for training at all levels, from awareness-raising to highly specialist diagnostic/intervention training, locally and regionally.

I hope that this is of assistance.

Yours sincerely


MAIREAD MCALINDEN
CHIEF EXECUTIVE