

Petitioner submission of 2 March 2022

PE1837/CC - Provide clear direction and investment for autism support

This submission is in response to the Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care submission on the 16th of December 2021.

The Minister's response did not explain specifically where autistic people, particularly those who do not have a learning disability or mental health issue, can access support. The Minister's response was vague and highlighted pilot projects which are obviously time limited and only available in some areas across Scotland. The pilot is now finished, therefore meaning this support is no longer available.

The autism post diagnostic pilot review was published in February 2022. The report did not highlight what supports are available for people that need ongoing and lifelong support after initial diagnosis. The conclusion was there needs to be further discussion as to what could be made available longer term after people receive a diagnosis.

The Scottish Government have still to address petition point 1; to clarify who supports solely autistic needs?

There is legislation in Scotland saying autism is a mental disorder, and clinicians and NAIT saying autism isn't a mental disorder.

The petition highlights the context as to why there is much confusion around who supports autistic needs in Scotland. Currently autism is defined as a mental health disorder under the Mental Health Care Treatment (Scotland) Act 2003, even though autism is not mentioned or referenced in the Act. Yet mental health clinicians and NAIT (National Autism Implementation Team for the Scottish Government) say autism is not a mental disorder.

This confusion is resulting in autistic people being signposted between services (mental health such as CAMHS, LD and social work services), often without support being provided, resulting in some autistic people being denied basic statutory supports such as s.12 of the Social Work Scotland Act 1968 (for adults), and s.23 & 24 of the Children's Act (Scotland) 1995 (for children & families).

This is why there needs to be clarification from the Scottish Government on who provides autism support ... is it social work or mental health?

A summary of the petition is being discussed at the next Chief Social Work Officer Committee in May 2022. I would recommend the Citizen Participation & Public Petitions Committee wait for the outcome of that meeting before deciding what further actions may be needed.