

Northern Health and Social Care Trust

General comment

This Trust is aware that opinions on the proposed legislation are still very much split and this will require an informed and reasonable discussion at Committee Stage. Some argue that the Disability Discrimination Act is more than effective as it presently sits, regarding those who have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Specific legislation is not under consideration and therefore ask the reasons why autism should be treated differently.

It is also recognised that there has been a historical lack of strategic planning and joined up working, and there are individuals with ASD who are unable to access needed services which specific legislation could help address. However, careful consideration needs also to be given as to whether these issues could be addressed within the framework of existing children's and disability discrimination legislation or whether this could only be achieved through the proposed legislation.

The current ongoing work undertaken by RASDN has, in developing an action plan, allied to targets, begun to impact on awareness across the region, as have recent Judicial Review decisions made under existing legislation.

There is acknowledgement of the need for change, and a recognition that, legislation or not, a vision and related guidance are required in terms of how the needs of families and carers are to be addressed.

Specific Comment

Clause 1

There is no issue with amendment to social impairment. With regard to 'normal day to day activities' we would suggest an insertion about vulnerability as a result of inappropriate social interaction.

Clause 2

With reference to the department seeking information from five Trusts prevalence, this is particularly difficult within adult services as many ASD people are coded on IT systems with regard to the service/therapy/treatment they are getting and not on an autism coding. There are clearly IT implications with this issue.

Clause 3

The view here is that for adults, the strategy would only refer to people with a diagnosis of ASD and an associated social dysfunction.