

Dr Kathryn Bell
Clerk, Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Room 416,
Parliament Buildings,
Stormont
BELFAST
BT4 3XX

6 January 2011

Dear Dr Bell

**Re: AUTISM BILL - South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust response to
Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety**

South Eastern Trust welcomes the opportunity to make a written submission in regards to the Autism Bill which has been referred to the Committee stage.

South Eastern Trust supports the general principles underpinning the Bill which is intended to have a positive impact on people with Autistic Spectrum conditions and aims to enable those with Autistic Spectrum conditions realise their full potential. The South Eastern Trust is of the view that specific legislation in this area is not required in addition to the existing legislation already in place. Any legislation introduced to address the needs of a specifically identified group, as in this case those on the Autistic Spectrum, runs the risk of highlighting the needs of one group of individuals over other groups who also have additional support needs.

The Trust would also be concerned that specific legislation could lead to an over emphasis on diagnosis rather than on meeting individual need and providing personalised care. The Trust's view is that individuals should be assessed on their needs not on a diagnostic label in keeping with a social rather than medical model of disability. Current legislation and policy places clear statutory duties on Trusts to assess each individual's unique circumstances with the service user and their carer central to the assessment process. The Trust would wish to avoid the development of a hierarchy of disabilities which would have the potential to create greater inequalities for other conditions not covered by specific legislation

Clauses 1- 3;

The Trust recognises that any legislation needs to add value and make a real difference in comparison to what can be achieved without legislation. The Trust believes that appropriate legislation is already in place to ensure equity of access to services for individuals on the Autistic Spectrum.



Chairman
Colm McKenna

Chief Executive
Hugh McCaughey

Significant strides in the development of services for individuals with Autistic Spectrum Disorder have already been achieved, without specific legislation, through the independent review of Autism services, a regional Action Plan and investment funding over recent years. The establishment of the regional Autism Network, and associated regional project structure, has facilitated the development of a timeframe with specific recommendations for service improvement. Central to the process has been representation from service users and their carers and their involvement in service planning and monitoring service delivery.

With regards to Clause 2 (development of an Autism Strategy and collation of prevalence data) South Eastern Trust believes that the structure to deliver improvements are already in place through the regional A.S.D. network. In regards to data collation, South Eastern Trust is constantly working to improve data collation across both children's and adult services and view this as central to service development which does not require legislation.

Clause 3; South Eastern Trust recommends that the Content of the strategy must set out how the needs of people with Autism are to be addressed throughout their lives. Furthermore the focus should be on how services can be delivered that support individuals to maximise their independence throughout their lives rather than focus on how needs are to be addressed which may convey dependency and undermine independence.

In terms of training the Trust would support the need for targeted awareness training and would refer to the progress made by the regional network in this area.

The Trust remains committed to improving Health and social care services for children and adults with Autistic Spectrum conditions and for those who care for them. The Trust will continue to lead the local A.S.D. forum to maintain a multi-agency focus on service development in the South Eastern Trust area.

I hope you find this helpful and please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further information.

Yours sincerely

Kieran Drayne
Assistant Director, Corporate Planning and Strategic Development