

Minutes

Meeting of the APPG on Autism – *Think Autism* and the statutory guidance

10 June 2014

14.00-15.00, Committee Room 18, House of Commons

Chair: Robert Buckland MP, Chair of the APPGA

Speakers: Michael Swaffield, Autism Policy Lead at the Department of Health (DH)

Robert Buckland MP welcomed and thanked visitors for attending the meeting. He explained that the meeting would be a chance for attendees to find out more about the recently revised autism strategy, *Think Autism*, and introduced Michael Swaffield, Autism Policy Lead at DH

Michael Swaffield gave a short presentation on the new strategy.

- *Think Autism* was published on 2nd April, in line with the duties under the Autism Act 2009, and following the review led by DH into progress in implementing the 2010 Adult Autism Strategy.
- The revised strategy sets out a clear programme of work that DH and other Government Departments will be taking to improve the lives of people with autism, primarily through taking actions that will support local authorities, the NHS and their local partners with implementation work.
- The update contains a commitment to invest in new services through an ‘innovation fund.’ There are four areas under which DH will invite proposals for funding: advice and information; gaining and growing skills for independence; early intervention and crisis prevention; and employment, particularly involving the use of apprenticeships.
- There is £4.5million in funding available to support this project; £1 million of revenue funding for non-capital aspects of autism innovation project bids and £3 million of capital funding. This can be bid for as part of an autism innovation project or to support local autism environment adjustments.
- The application process will be open to Local Authorities, the NHS, the third sector, commercial organisations and individuals (working in tandem with a partner).
- The application process will open later in June with applications to be submitted by early August. Decisions on successful bids will be made by September. This will allow 6 months for projects to be undertaken or work completed.
- People who have ideas about services that could be funded through the innovation fund should contact their local autism lead to discuss their proposals and prepare a bid. This needs to be done quickly as funding must be allocated by March 2015.
- The local authority self-assessment exercise was last completed in November 2013 and is next due in November 2014. More information is available here: www.ihal.org.uk/projects/autism2013
- The Department of Health would like to make the information collected in the self-assessment exercise more accessible and interactive so that individuals can leave comments and feedback, and use this as a more effective tool to track progress in their areas.
- The statutory guidance for local authorities on implementing *Think Autism* is out for consultation over the summer until September. The consultation will encourage respondents to consider what should be included from the 2010 strategy and what new additions should be included.

Robert Buckland formally recognised the life and work of Dr Lorna Wing, founding member of the National Autistic Society, academic and pioneer in the autism community, who sadly passed away on Friday 6th June 2014.

Question and Answer session

Baroness Uddin highlighted three areas of concern:

- Funding – there are vast areas of the country that have very little awareness about autism. The new funding should be made available as widely as possible and areas of particular need should be targeted.
- Statutory guidance – worried about local authority funding and loss of moderate/substantial bands in eligibility criteria for care and support.
- Access to blue badges – the NAS and Baroness Uddin have been in discussions with the Department for Transport about access to blue badges for people with autism following changes to the award criteria with the introduction of Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

Rita Williams asked if moving Fair Access to Care (FACS) criteria from moderate to substantial would mean that those with moderate needs will be excluded from post-diagnostic support.

Michael Swaffield reassured Baroness Uddin and other stakeholders that DH will be working collaboratively with other stakeholders from across the country. The aim will be to engage with as many individuals, groups and organisations as possible to encourage national coordination. Awareness is a key priority in the new strategy, as is employment.

DH is aiming to invest in projects that showcase what kind of support could be made available for those who do not qualify for care – the innovation fund is designed to support the development of this.

Rt Hon Cheryl Gillan MP spoke about the recent [study published by the LSE](#) which has found that autism in the UK costs £32billion a year in terms of treatment, lost earnings, and care and support for children and adults. If it can be relied on, it was suggested that the APPGA use this and others as a hook to generate interest in our work and get autism back on the agenda. **Michael** said he would look into this research, but that it does seem to make the case for more investment in this area.

Dr Elizabeth Guest, an academic from Leeds described her idea for an equality standard for employers related to autism, 'Investors in Neuro-Diversity'. This would be a similar project to Investors in People which is a well-regarded scheme for employers, but with a particular focus on autism. **Michael** confirmed that this is the kind of project that could be funded through the autism innovation fund, particularly if the programme met challenges at a local level. Dr Guest asked for support in developing this idea and Michael suggested that she contact her autism lead at Leeds City Council in the first instance to discuss the idea further.

An audience member said there is a lack action on the Autism Act and strategy in some areas, and suggested that this could be addressed by more legislation to strengthen current duties.

Leslie Stanberry, who works a counsellor in West London, expressed concern about looked-after children who are at risk of falling into crisis because sufficient support is not in place.

An audience member highlighted that adults who are not FACS eligible should be signposted to appropriate services by local authorities and asked if this would be measured in the next local authority self-evaluation exercise. **Michael** said he is keen to receive suggestions as to how the self-assessment exercise can be made more useful, relevant and transparent. Local authorities should be consulting people on the autism spectrum and liaising with the Autism Partnership Board in their areas to feed into this work.

JD Scott described the difficulties that her local autism partnership board have had in holding regular meetings due to lack of space and resources. She asked if it would be possible to bid for funding to facilitate partnership boards meetings and those of other groups associated with developing the actions in the strategy at a local level. **Michael** said that there may be scope to do this on the basis that it encourages the local authority to invest in facilities in the long term.

Dr Juli Crocombe asked how DH managed the points of overlap between the adult autism strategy, the reforms following the events at Winterbourne View and the forthcoming review of the Mental Health Code of Practice. **Michael** said that he works in the same team as the Winterbourne View and Mental Health Code of Practice review policy leads so they all try to coordinate where they can. He offered to meet with Dr Crocombe outside of the meeting to discuss this further.

An audience member said that funding applications can be quite onerous for small organisations with little resource and expertise. Very often smaller charities have great ideas but the most effective way to represent these is through more personal communications such as a pitch or conversation with the relevant person. **Michael** said that the application form will be as simple as possible so it will hopefully be accessible for organisations of all sizes. He encouraged people to contact him if they have any specific questions about the process or would like some guidance on how to apply.

On the point about employment, **Cheryl Gillan MP** explained that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) ran a campaign in the past highlighting the benefits of hiring older workers. Large companies like B&Q were particularly supportive of the project. This could be replicated for people with autism and could develop Dr Guest's ideas about employment.

Robert Buckland thanked all for attending and closed the meeting.

If you would like more information about Think Autism or the statutory guidance please contact

Michael Swaffield (Think Autism) – Michael.swaffield@dh.gsi.gov.uk

Anita Wadhawan (statutory guidance) – Anita.Wadhawan@dh.gsi.gov.uk