

Policy into practice

Implementation of the National service framework for children, young people and maternity services by local authorities



A report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Autism

Executive summary

The gap between policy ideas and their implementation on the ground is a core concern of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Autism (APPGA). We aim to account for the difference between the policies we debate in Parliament and what we hear about the impact of those policies from parents, professionals and people with autism¹.

We asked local authorities about their implementation of a key policy for people with autism and their families: the *National service framework for children, young people and maternity services* (the Children's NSF) in England. Councillors and officials responded to two sets of questions in an online survey, and the results represent an illustration of views from across local government.

Central and local government must ensure that the Children's NSF remains compatible with new programmes as they are introduced, and that the vital details contained within the NSF are not to be neglected. At present, the NSF is not seen as a 'must-do' document and, as such, is overshadowed by other, more urgent priorities. Its progress is limited by funding, staff and structural difficulties.

Key findings

- Almost half (44%) of officials and 70% of councillors were not aware of the autism exemplar chapter of the NSF.
- Only 35% of officials and 10% of councillors said their authority uses the autism exemplar chapter of the NSF.
- Authorities with a named manager responsible for autism were far more likely to be aware of the autism exemplar and to use it.
- Awareness amongst councillors was much lower than amongst officials.
- Around half of officials said they keep a count of the number of children with autism and the total number of disabled children.
- Over 20% do not share information on children with autism with any other agencies.
- No respondents said that all staff in health, social care or education were trained in autism.
- Only 4% said that all children with a need for speech and language therapy included in a statement of special educational needs (SEN) receive the full provision.
- Funding was by far the biggest constraint to implementing the NSF: 73% of all respondents said it was a big constraint; no officials and only one councillor said it was not a constraint.
- The second largest perceived constraint was the presence of other, more urgent priorities.

¹ For the purposes of this document the term 'autism' refers to all conditions on the autistic spectrum, including Asperger syndrome.

What MPs can do

MPs can take a number of actions to support the work of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Autism (APPGA) and drive forward the implementation of the Children's NSF. Contact the Clerk to the APPGA on 020 7903 3769 or email appga@nas.org.uk for further information.

- Join the APPGA
- Sign up to the APPGA manifesto
- Become a 'manifesto champion' and drive forward one of the objectives in the APPGA manifesto
- Take the following actions in your constituency:

1. Ask the Ministers responsible how they will ensure that the Comprehensive Spending Review will deliver for people with autism.
2. Convene a meeting with the local authority, primary care trust (PCT) and local voluntary groups to discuss joint working in provision of autism services.
3. Ask your local authority and PCT whether they use the autism exemplar chapter of the NSF, and how they use it.
4. Ask local agencies whether they collaborate to ensure a multi-agency assessment is available for children with suspected autism.
5. Ask whether local agencies maintain a database on the number of children with autism, and the total number of disabled children, that is routinely shared with other agencies.
6. Ask whether your local authority provides a key worker service for families of children with autism, and how it decides who receives the service. Is the Early Support Programme used to provide integrated support after a diagnosis?
7. Ask your local authority how training in autism and disability is delivered and cascaded. Many local and national voluntary organisations are able to provide autism training.
8. Ask what arrangements are in place for joint working in relation to speech and language therapy. Does the local authority work with schools and PCTs to ensure that therapy is delivered where there is a need, regardless of statements?
9. Ask whether councillors in your area are engaged in the development of services for children and adults with autism and disabilities more generally.
10. Ask whether your local authority has appointed a named manager with responsibility for autism. Tell them about the benefits of this approach suggested by this survey.
11. Ask whether and how the Children's National service framework is incorporated into your local authority's Children and Young People's Plan.