

Implementing *Fulfilling and rewarding lives*

The National Autistic Society briefing

Summary

The Autism Act 2009 put two key duties on the Government.

The first was to produce a strategy on services for adults with autism. This was published in March 2010.

The second was that statutory guidance for local authorities and local health bodies had to be published by the Secretary of State for Health by the end of 2010. The Act stated that the aim of this guidance was to secure implementation of the strategy.

On 17 December 2010 the statutory guidance was published. This guidance sends a clear message that local authorities and the NHS must improve:

- training for their staff
- identification and diagnosis of autism in adults
- planning of services for people with autism, including the transition from child services to adult services
- local leadership.

As this guidance is statutory, it is to be treated as if it were issued under section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970. Therefore, local authorities and NHS bodies must follow the guidance when it is relevant to them and, unless a good reason can be given, can be challenged through the courts.

This brief explains in more detail exactly what is in the guidance but, if you would like more information – or to see a copy of this guidance – please visit www.autism.org.uk/autismstrategy

What does the statutory guidance say?

The guidance is structured as follows:

- Training of staff who provide services to adults with autism.
- Identification and diagnosis of autism in adults, leading to assessment of needs for relevant services.
- Planning in relation to the provision of services to people with autism as they move from being children to adults.
- Local planning and leadership in relation to the provision of services for adults with autism.

Training of staff who provide services to adults with autism

In the first draft of the guidance, training was a particular area of concern. However, in the final draft the training section has been significantly improved. Stating very clearly that:

- general autism awareness training should be available for everyone working in health and social care
- key staff – such as GPs and those responsible for conducting community care assessments – should have specialist training.

These two measures will not only help raise awareness but also mean that, within each area, there will be some staff that have clear expertise in autism.

The guidance also says that adults with autism and their parents/carers should, where possible, be included in training programmes at a local level.

Identification and diagnosis of autism in adults, leading to assessment of needs for relevant services

Central to the Government's vision for improving services for people with autism relies on improving the diagnosis and access to support in each area.

This section of the guidance reconfirms that a community care assessment cannot be denied on the grounds of a person's IQ. It also makes it clear that on receiving a diagnosis of autism the newly diagnosed adult should be able to access a community care assessment and any carers should access a carers assessment.

Furthermore, the guidance states that each area should put in place a clear route through which a person can receive a diagnosis and, from initial referral, get a community care assessment

Finally, each local authority should appoint a lead professional in autism who is responsible for delivering these improvements.

Planning in relation to the provision of services to people with autism as they move from being children to adults

It has long been recognised that transition can be a particularly complex time for children with autism. Therefore, transition is a key area that needed to be covered by the statutory guidance.

This guidance seeks to make sure that the whole transition process works better for people with autism.

Also, following the success of our *You Need To Know* campaign, the guidance also sets out that NHS bodies – including Foundation Trusts – should make sure that there are agreements in place in every local area for the transition of clinical mental health care for children with autism in receipt of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

Local planning and leadership in relation to the provision of services for adults with autism

This section of guidance focuses on how local authorities can better identify need and make decisions based on adequate population data.

The guidance gives two key actions that should be taken to improve this:

- Local authorities should allocate responsibility to a named joint commissioner/senior manager to lead commissioning of community care services for adults with autism in the area.
- Commissioning should be based on accurate population figures and, as such, local authorities must improve the data they collect on autism. One of the best ways to do this is to include autism in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA).

The guidance also sets out the importance of local autism partnership boards and local autism teams in the improvement of services at a local level.