



Ein cyf/Our ref MB/GT/0785/14

William Powell AM
Chair
Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales

Dear William,

8 March 2014

When I last wrote to you in October 2013 I agreed to ask local health boards to provide me with information about waiting times for autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnosis in children and to enquire about compliance with National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) ASD guidelines. I subsequently wrote to health boards in November to request this information for both children and adults so as to give me a full picture of ASD diagnostic services.

From the responses I have received it is apparent that health boards have clearly recognised that more needs to be done to reduce waiting times and that this work is a high priority. In many areas, including Hwyl Dda, which you specifically enquired about, improvement plans are now in place with a significant reduction in waiting times anticipated. I was also pleased to see that health boards have developed their diagnostic pathways taking into account the relevant NICE guidelines. A fuller summary of the responses received is enclosed but in short waiting times for children from referral to initial assessment by health board are as follows:

Abertawe Bro Morgannwg UHB	information not yet provided
Aneurin Bevan UHB	12 months
Betsi Cadwaladr UHB	6-26 weeks for initial assessment and 30 -90 weeks for completion of assessment
Cardiff and the Vale UHB	information not yet provided
Cwm Taf UHB	North Cwm Taf 17 weeks/ South Cwm Taf 52 weeks
Hwyl Dda UHB	Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion 2 years Pembrokeshire 4 years
Powys THB	13 weeks maximum, average 7 weeks

In their responses health boards have highlighted that the management of both children's and adult's ASD diagnostic services is very complex, as the diagnostic pathway involves multi agency professional teams working collaboratively across health boards and local authorities. Many different professions are involved in the diagnosis to ensure that the correct diagnosis is received, and as such the pathway can take a very long time to complete. It is also the case that waiting times have been exacerbated by a significant increase in diagnosis referrals in recent years and there are also other urgent competing pressures for services which are impacting on ASD provision.

You specifically asked for an update on the progress being made by Hywel Dda University Health board in implementing its action plan to address ASD waiting times. I have been advised that a dedicated clinical team which will focus solely on ASD diagnosis has been created and recruitment has now been undertaken to fulfil the necessary roles. There is also a commitment to broaden the expertise around diagnosis across the health board so that there is a consistent clinical approach to the diagnostic pathway. Also strategic planning will now be undertaken by the newly convened population health group for mental health and learning disabilities and the operational structures needed to deliver the ASD plan are in place.

It is important that there is transparent information across health boards and you will see there is an absence of data provided by some areas. I will be writing again to both Abertawe Bro Morgannwg UHB and Cardiff and the Vale UHB, requesting the information on children's diagnostic services including waiting times they have yet to submit. I will provide you with an update when this information is received.

The committee may also be interested in the progress achieved in adult's diagnostic services. The absence of adult's services was recognised by our ASD Adults Task and Finish Group and through the implementation of the Autistic Spectrum Disorder Strategic Action Plan (ASD SAP) we have supported the development of the all Wales Adults ASD Diagnostic and Pre/Post Counselling Network. This has brought health boards together to develop a clear diagnostic pathway, agreed diagnostic standards and has raised awareness and increased clinical expertise through training. I am heartened by the progress achieved which is an excellent example of where the Welsh Government has provided focussed support to address a gap in service provision. There is still a lot more that needs to be done and I will look to continue the adult's network to secure further improvements. At present the waiting times from referral to initial assessment for adults ASD diagnosis are:

Abertawe Bro Morgannwg UHB	within 12 weeks
Aneurin Bevan UHB	12 months
Betsi Cadwaladr UHB	up to 40 weeks (average is 16 weeks).
Cardiff and the Vale UHB	within 70 days
Cwm Taf UHB	below 14 weeks
Hwyel Dda UHB	up to 10 months
Powys THB	up to 16 months (will be reduced by March 2014)

We are currently refreshing the ASD SAP and an ASD Advisory Group is providing me with advice on the actions we need to take to address the priorities for action which includes timely access to children's diagnostic services. As part of the implementation of the refreshed ASD SAP we will work with our partners to agree how we can best target the resources available to bring the greatest improvements. I will ensure that parents and carers will be included in any future discussion. We will shortly be consulting on the draft refreshed ASD SAP and I would urge members of the Pembrokeshire Parents Group to respond to the consultation as their views will help us to set the right direction for the years ahead.

Yours Sincerely



Gwenda Thomas AC / AM

Y Dirprwy Weinidog Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Deputy Minister for Social Services