# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **TITLE** | **Statutory Code of Practice on the Delivery of Autism Services** |
| **DATE** | **21 September 2020** |
| **BY** | **Vaughan Gething AM, Minister for Health and Social Services** |

In my Written Statement of the 23 September 2019, I updated members on the progress we are making in delivering improvements to autism services across Wales.Since then we have all experienced the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic. In April this year I had planned to launch a consultation on the draft Statutory Code of Practice on the Delivery of Autism Services, however the emergency situation meant that many difficult decisions had to be made and this included the need to postpone the consultation for a short time.

I am pleased to announce that today we will be issuing the draft Statutory Code of Practice on the Delivery of Autism Services and an accompanying guidance document for public consultation which will run for 12 weeks to 14 December. The consultation can be found at the following web page: [https://gov.wales/code-practice-provision-autism-services](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fgov.wales%2Fcode-practice-provision-autism-services&data=02%7C01%7CRachel.Brown%40gov.wales%7C7eea1445fe3a4a92dfc108d85a415240%7Ca2cc36c592804ae78887d06dab89216b%7C0%7C0%7C637358583879604671&sdata=b%2B%2Bkip3KubSDNJQ9Vx6J1VD2AUXxpbft8SCkrkHDfzw%3D&reserved=0). I encourage members to take time to look over our proposed documents and respond.

To inform the development of the Code, two rounds of technical group meetings have taken place providing opportunities for a wide range of key stakeholders including autistic people to have their say on the priorities and actions in the Code. I was pleased to share a working draft of the Code with the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee at the end of last year, as I had committed to do.

The draft Code is made under the Social Services and Well-being Wales Act 2014 and the NHS (Wales) Act 2006, it is for children, young people and adults and has four main chapters. These are assessment and diagnosis, accessing health and social care, awareness raising and training, planning and monitoring and stakeholder engagement. The guidance will provide clarity on what statutory services need to take into account when meeting the needs of autistic people and their carers.

Collaborative working is at the heart of our autism improvement programme. In November last year, we held two public engagement events, one in Llandudno and Carmarthen and they provided an excellent opportunity to engage directly, particularly with families and parents as well as local authorities, local health boards, the Integrated Autism Services and education. The event in Llandudno in particular had a strong representation from local parent and family groups. We followed this up and my officials returned to North Wales earlier this year, over three days, meeting parent and family groups to discuss their experiences and to seek their views on where service improvements should be made. Before lockdown I was also able to meet with the Blaenau Gwent National Autistic Society Group along with my colleague the MS for Blaenau Gwent.

Continued social distancing will mean that we are not able to hold public consultation events in the same way as we have done in the past and we are considering how technology can help us ensure everyone can share their views on the draft Code. This will include arranging webinars and on-line meetings to enable remote engagement, details of these events will be published shortly.

In his July legislative statement, the First Minister noted that the Coronavirus crisis has required a radical recasting of our secondary legislative programme and that priority has been given to measures which respond to the COVID crisis, relate to EU exit and transition, or are essential for legal or other unavoidable reasons. We will publish a report on the response to the consultation in January 2021 before we turn to finalising the Statutory Code. We had committed to publishing the Code this term, however, due to the impact of the Coronavirus crisis, it may not be possible to lay the Code until the start of the next Senedd term. Following an introductory period including familiarisation sessions, we are still aiming to commence the Code in September 2021, establishing a new autism advisory group to develop an implementation plan.

We are also listening to recommendations made in recent evaluation to consider the future sustainability of autism services. A demand and capacity review of neurodevelopmental services commenced before the Covid-19 lockdown will resume and further work will be commissioned to develop options for future sustainable neurodevelopmental services. I also want to re-affirm the commitment to re-occurring funding for autism services I made in my last written statement on 23 September 2019. For 2021-2022 the Integrated Autism Service funding will continue through the Integrated Care Fund which is overseen by the Regional Partnership Boards, emphasising the integrated nature of the work, between health and social care, together with other partners.  Funding will be available for a further year to give more time for the demand and capacity review to be completed and future funding decisions to be made.

We are not standing still whilst the service review is taking place, recognising that further capacity is urgently needed, through the Sustainable Social Services Third Sector Grant Scheme we have announced two projects which will increase capacity and bring new expertise to existing autism services. These projects being delivered by the National Autistic Society and by Autism Connections Cymru, began in April 2020 and funding is available for three years, we have established a collaborative project board to encourage collaborative working across all services, both statutory and third sector. The impact of these additional services will be taken into account in the demand and capacity review.

Our National Autism Team has also continued to support autistic people and has updated and will shortly be relaunching its resources website. During the pandemic the team has worked with partners to develop advice on the lockdown rules and guidance to help autistic people to help cope with the impact of COVID 19 on their everyday lives, this will continue as we support autistic people to engage with the post COVID-19 world.