

Gwenda Thomas AC / AM
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Plant a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref :P04-358
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William Powell AM
Chair
Petitions Committee
National Assembly Of Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

HW February 2012

Dear William,

Thank you for your letter of 23 January on behalf of the Petitions Committee about the Caerphilly Autistic Spectrum Service (CASS). I am aware that Jeff Cuthbert AM initially raised this matter on behalf of his constituents with the Minister for Education and Skills.

CASS was developed as part of the "Unlocking the Potential of Social Schools" initiative led by the Minister for Education and Skills. The terms of the funding included a requirement that recipient bodies have in place a sustainability strategy to ensure those services developed as a result of the funding, would continue following the end of the initiative. Caerphilly's sustainability strategy included a specific commitment to sustain the CASS model of support for children and young people with ASD.

I understand that as part of the overall package of support available to children with ASD and their families in Caerphilly, CASS aims to help families overcome a particular problem. Once that need has been met, the family is discharged from the service but is able to be referred back should that problem recur or another problem arise. As part of the Authority's ongoing responsibilities to build the skills of parents of children in need including those with ASD and provide a support mechanism for them, Caerphilly is also helping to develop support groups for parents through specialist support organisations such as the National Autistic Society.

Since the launch of our Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Strategic Action Plan for Wales in 2008-09, £6.8 million has been made available to local authorities through the Revenue Support Grant to support the delivery of services to children with ASD. In addition, since the launch of the Strategy nearly £4 million has been distributed via specific grant to local authorities to enable the further development of the key actions outlined in local ASD Strategic Action Plans.

Final budget decisions for 2012-13 have not yet been made, however, the Committee will be aware of my continuing commitment to improve the lives of people with ASD and their families.

Officials from my Department have spoken with Caerphilly Borough Council who confirmed that these are the resources through which the CASS is supported and that CASS has not been withdrawn and that there are no plans to do so. The CASS service is run by Jacquelyn Elias who has confirmed that she would be happy to speak to parents about CASS to allay their concerns. She can be contacted on 01443 866646 or via e.mail: eliasj@caerphilly.gov.uk

Whilst the delivery of services and the distribution of resources are matters for local determination, individuals, particularly those with distinct needs such as autism as well as those who care for them, have rights and entitlements to an assessment of those needs carried out by their local social services department. As a result of that assessment they may be entitled to a range of services including day services, respite care, residential services, aids and equipment. In addition following a referral from a doctor, social worker or school, people with autism may be entitled to help from their local health service such as speech and language therapy, behaviour management and help with diet and sleeping difficulties.

I have agreed that a consultation on the future direction of the ASD Strategic Action Plan should be opened in the summer which will draw on the findings of the Evaluation Report together with other relevant reports and research such as the Report of the Adult Task and Finish Group and the Wales Autism Research Centre's study of children's diagnostic services. It is imperative that the consultation engages with people with ASD and their families and carers about what is important to them and what can make a real difference to their lives.

I hope that this information is helpful to the Committee.

*Yours sincerely,
Gwenda.*

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