

Melanie McGinnis  
Economic Policy Unit  
OFMDFM Room E5.22  
Castle Buildings  
Stormont  
Belfast  
BT4 3SR

3 April 2008

Dear Ms McGinnis

**Re: Programme for Government, Budget and Investment Strategy**

I am replying to the invitation by your Department to respond within the current Equality Impact Assessment of the above process.

Five years ago, referring to the needs of those affected by Autism in the Province, the Audit Commission reported "a lottery of provision, dependent on where people live, and how hard they can push for the services provided, too late, with long waits for information, equipment and treatment; a maze of services, that frustrates and confuses families; ...and pockets of good and innovative practice, and service champions".

Since then little has changed, and this is why the Minister of Health set up a Ministerial Review on Autism (Sept 2007). It is also why the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People carried out research on services for young people with Asperger Syndrome. Finally, it also explains the work of Autism NI over the last 18 years, work that has pioneered innovative practice based upon effective partnerships across the Statutory and Voluntary Sectors. Together with research carried out by the University of Ulster, on behalf of Autism NI, the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Social Services (available at [www.autismni.org/publications](http://www.autismni.org/publications)).

The reviews and research cited above support the following developments to address current unmet need and the need for cross-cutting reform:

- 1 The development of a network of One Stop Shops across Northern Ireland to provide a signposting information, training co-ordination and helpline service for families and professionals in the field of Autism. This model is supported by the Ministerial Review on Autism and the DHSSPS-funded research into an "ASD Training Strategy for Northern Ireland" 2008.

There is a clear need for a cross-departmental development budget for this service which can be multi-agency with Autism NI, which, with its credible and unique expertise in project co-ordination and service partnerships, can drive such an initiative forward.

Year 1 Budget      £250K      Appointment of Regional Co-ordination Team  
+ Employers      (5 local posts)  
costs

- Year 1 Aim
- (i) To identify service reconfiguration potential
  - (ii) To identify "new money" required (premises, admin **support** and **resources**)
  - (iii) To establish "One Stop Shop" model (identifying CAB, Relate and Statutory services)

2. The establishment of a Social and Life Skills service across Northern Ireland to provide and co-ordinate existing provision in line with best practice principles. The model to be applied will impact on the lives of young people and adults with Autism, their families and the local community. The AutismNI model is the first to be independently researched and evaluated in Northern Ireland with funding from BBC Children in Need.

Year 1 Budget      £200K      Appointment of 5 local practitioners  
+ Employers      (Regional spread)  
costs

- Year 1 Aim
- (i) identification of partner agencies and resource pool
  - (ii) implementation of model

(N.B. Service to be based within local "One Stop Shops".)

3. The establishment of a Family Support Service to coordinate and provide signposting, information and helpline services within the "One Stop Shop" and to develop a network of volunteer "parent mentors".

Year 1 Budget      £200K      Appointment of 5 local practitioners  
+ Employers      (Regional spread)  
costs

Year 1 Aims      Integration of model within statutory provision

(N.B. Service to be based within local "One Stop Shops".)

4. The establishment of an Adult Transitions Service (ASD) to coordinate and provide specialist advice and support on:

- Sexual health and relationships
- Employment
- Social/leisure activities
- Supported living
- Criminal justice/emergency services (ASD alert)

