

Immediate need to tackle the waiting lists for diagnosing autism in children

“Autism can cause significant social, communication and behavioural difficulties. The number of school age children with autism has soared in recent years. A total of 2,562 children were diagnosed as on the autistic spectrum last year across the north of Ireland. Five years previously the figure was 1,472. Children from social and economically disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to have autism - with boys three times more likely to be diagnosed than girls.

However, in Belfast thousands of children with suspected autism are waiting up to two years to get a diagnosis from the Belfast Trust. Early diagnosis and intervention is key to the future of these children and parents are distressed that valuable time is being lost while their children remain on waiting lists.

Many parents have had no option but to pay for private assessments which cost circa £1,400. All 5 of the norths health trusts now accept private referrals and this is leading to concerns about a two-tier health system that will see children from disadvantaged backgrounds left further down the waiting lists.

This Council asserts that, whilst the pandemic has affected autism services, all children with autism deserve to have timely assessments and the vital support they need at the earliest possible stage in their development. This Council will write to the Minister for Health to ask him to take all steps necessary to immediately tackle the unacceptable waiting lists for diagnosis of autism in children and to provide the necessary supports and interventions for their development.”

Proposer: Councillor McAteer

Seconder : Councillor Magennis

(To be debated by the Council)