‘World first’ to improve autism services in Wales

New, wide-ranging efforts to tackle autism and improve services for those who are affected by the condition were announced today (Tuesday, 22 April) by the Welsh Assembly Government.

The Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Strategic Action Plan is to be launched today at the 3rd Wales International Autism Conference organised by Autism Cymru in Cardiff. Funding for the next 3 years has been identified with the first years funding of £1.8m being announced to drive forward key actions for the first year.

Wales is the first country in the world to have established a cross-cutting national strategic action plan for ASD that will help the estimated 30,000 people that are either directly or indirectly affected by Autism in Wales.

The Action Plan will drive improvements across both children, young people’s and adult services in health, social services and education services – and also expand into areas of housing, leisure and society in general.

Wales has secured another coup in the appointment of Hugh Morgan OBE, Chief Executive of Autism Cymru, to the post of Implementation Manager to drive forward the very important first 12 months developments in the mapping of needs and services which has to be undertaken by every Local Authority in Wales.

Speaking at today’s conference Deputy Minister for Social Services, Gwenda Thomas, said:

An increasing number of people are being diagnosed with Autism in Wales and there is a need to improve the provision that is available for children, young people and adults with ASD.

It’s crucial that people with Autism have every opportunity to fulfil their potential which is why the Welsh Assembly Government has committed to having an ASD Strategic Action Plan in place which addresses the needs of all ages, touches on all agencies and involves individuals and their families/carers in the decision making process.

We are doing something positive in Wales to address this issue and we can be proud of the fact that we are witnessing yet another ‘World first’ for Wales with the launch of this new Strategic Action Plan today.

The Welsh Assembly Government has worked closely with both major Autism charities to develop our Action Plan. With real partnership working between a wide range of public, private and voluntary sector organisations we will see a positive and sustainable change that will benefit the individual with ASD, their families and society.

I am delighted to have Hugh Morgan in the key role of Implementation Manager and am sure his world renowned expertise will only further enhance this ground breaking strategy.

Education Minister, Jane Hutt said:

Children deserve the very best educational start in life and I strongly believe that we must ensure they are fully equipped to meet the challenges of the future. This is particularly important for children and young people with special educational needs such as Autistic Spectrum Disorders.

We need to ensure that practitioners are able to recognise where young people are having difficulties and are able to support them so that they fulfil their potential. This new strategy, developed in close collaboration with partner organisations, will play a key role in improving the provision available to individuals, their carers and families.

Commenting on the new Action Plan, Implementation Manager, Hugh Morgan, said:

In Wales there has been a desperate need to take a consistent approach to establishing support for people with autism, and their families, wherever they should live. The establishment of Welsh Assembly Government’s Strategic Action Plan for autism is an innovative and significant step forward and I am pleased to see that the Assembly Government is making a firm financial commitment to its implementation over the first few years.

The message is now clear, this is an opportunity not to be wasted and therefore all groups representing autism in the public and independent sectors must now all work together to implement the strategy so that it makes a genuine, positive and long-lasting impact for the autism community in Wales.

Notes to editors:

- The plan is supported by £1.8 million funding in 2008/09 and future years funding will be announced in due course.
- The 3rd Wales International Autism Conference, organised by Autism Cymru, will be held at the City Hall in Cardiff on 22 & 23 April.
- Today’s announcement is in addition to the recurrent sum of £1.7m previously allocated by the Welsh Assembly in the revenue support grant since last year, to support children with ASD.

Tuesday, 22 April