



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Autism (Amendment) Bill: Clause-by-clause
Consideration

11 January 2022

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson)
Mrs Pam Cameron (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Alan Chambers
Mrs Deborah Erskine
Ms Órlaithí Flynn
Ms Carál Ní Chuilín

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): This is the Committee's formal clause-by-clause consideration of the Autism (Amendment) Bill. Do members wish to declare an interest at this point?

Mrs Cameron: I officially declare an interest as the Bill's sponsor. Should any issues arise, even at this stage, if the Clerk wants to write to me formally, as the Bill's sponsor, I am happy to respond.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): Thank you, Pam.

The Bill Clerks have provided revised amendments based on the discussions that we had on 16 December. The first amendment — amendment c — includes housing in the list, as per the Committee's request. Members will recall that we discussed that at some length, and we concluded that we would like housing to be included. Are members content with that amendment?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): Also included are two different options for the independence of the reviewer. Again, we discussed that in some detail. The first option states:

"The ... reviewer must not be a person employed by a ... department."

The second option also states that but adds:

"The ... reviewer is not subject to the direction or control of ... departments"

here in the North, apart from:

"the requirement ... to pay the ... reviewer's expenses and allowances."

Should any further clarity be required, the Bill Clerks are available. If members want to speak to the Bill Clerks about that, we will need to move into closed session. Members seem to be content with the

housing one, so we will set that to one side. Are members content with the first part of the amendment about independence, as drafted?

Mrs Erskine: I support *[Inaudible owing to poor sound quality.]*

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): Clerk, have we lost Deborah, or have you lost my feed?

The Committee Clerk: I think that we have lost Deborah. She has frozen. We will try to get her back.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): OK. While we are trying to get Deborah back online, does any other member wish to indicate their preference for either of the two options or give any thoughts on them? *[Pause.]* No; we do not have that. We will give it another minute or two. We have found that it is easier to get people back online if we continue with the session.

Deborah, are you back online? *[Pause.]* Deborah, can you hear me now?

Mrs Erskine: Sorry, I do not know what happened there. Everything just dropped out.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): No problem.

Mrs Erskine: I support option two as drafted.

You said that we might have to go into closed session. If it would make it easier, I could wait until we are in closed session. I would like some clarity from the Bill Clerks on that option. If you want, I can ask for that now.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): No. If you want clarity from the Bill Clerks, we will go into closed session. We will take that piece of work and then come back to the clause-by-clause consideration.

Clerk, will you put us into closed session and bring up the Bill Clerks to get a steer from them for Deborah?

The Committee went into closed session from 1.36 pm until 1.37 pm.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): OK. Thank you, Clerk and members. We will resume. Members, I will now go through the clause-by-clause consideration. I will put the Question on each clause formally to the Committee for agreement.

Question, That the Committee is content with clause 1, put and agreed to.

Clause 2 (Additional components of autism strategy)

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): There are four previously agreed Committee amendments to this clause.

Amendment proposed:

*"In page 1, line 17
After 'autism' insert 'support and"*

Question, That the Committee is content with the amendment, put and agreed to.

Amendment proposed:

*"In page 2, line 7
At end insert '(ca) physical health,'"*

Question, That the Committee is content with the amendment, put and agreed to.

Amendment proposed:

*"In page 2, line 9,
at end insert - '(f) housing.'"*

Question, That the Committee is content with the amendment, put and agreed to.

Amendment proposed:

*"In page 2, line 9
at end insert-
'(4E) The autism strategy must set out how the Department will reduce waiting times for autism
assessment and treatment services provided by HSC trusts."*

Question, That the Committee is content with the amendment, put and agreed to.

*Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the proposed amendments, put
and agreed to.*

Clause 3 (Methodology of the autism strategy)

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): There are two previously agreed Committee amendments to this clause.

Amendment proposed:

*"In page 2, line 17
After 'multidisciplinary' insert 'and cross-departmental'"*

Question, That the Committee is content with the amendment, put and agreed to.

Amendment proposed:

*"In page 2, line 18
Leave out subsection (4) and insert-
'(4) The autism strategy must set out how consistency of practice is to be achieved across –
a. HSC trusts, and
b. education services."*

Question, That the Committee is content with the amendment, put and agreed to.

*Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the proposed amendments, put
and agreed to.*

Question, That the Committee is content with clause 4, put and agreed to.

Clause 5 (Autism reviewer)

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): There is one previously agreed Committee amendment to the clause. It is option 2:

Amendment proposed:

*"In page 3, line 16, at end insert-
'(1a) The autism reviewer must not be a person employed by a Northern Ireland department.
(1b) The autism reviewer is not subject to the direction or control of the Northern Ireland
departments.
(1c) But this is subject to the requirement under this section for the Department to pay the autism
reviewer's expenses and allowances."*

Question, That the Committee is content with the amendment, put and agreed to.

*Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the proposed amendment, put and
agreed to.*

Question, That the Committee is content with clauses 6 to 8, put and agreed to.

Question, That the Committee is content with the long title, put and agreed to.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): Members, that completes our formal clause-by-clause consideration of the Bill.