



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Maria Caulfield MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department of Health & Social Care*

*39 Victoria Street
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John Broadbridge
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17 January 2023

Dear Mr Broadbridge,

Thank you for your letter of 25 April 2022 to the Minister of State for Care and Mental Health at the time, Gillian Keegan, about the death of Zoe Zaremba. I am replying as Minister with responsibility for Mental Health and thank you for the additional time allowed.

Firstly, I would like to say how saddened I was to read of the circumstances of Ms Zaremba's death, and I offer my sincere condolences to her family and loved ones. The circumstances your report describes are very concerning and I am grateful to you for bringing these matters to my attention.

The Government is committed to suicide prevention and awareness raising and we are taking actions which aim to improve support for autistic people and address the issues raised following Ms Zaremba's Death. I have described these below.

We know that having the right workforce with the right skills and training to support autistic people is crucial in ensuring a person receives safe and appropriate care and support. This is why, from 1 July 2022, registered providers are required to ensure their staff receive specific training on learning disability and autism appropriate to their role.

There are also initiatives underway in NHS England to ensure autistic people receive the right care and support which they have described in their response. This includes investing £1.5 million into the development and trialling of autism training for staff working in adult inpatient mental health settings by March 2023.

The Government recognises that to improve autistic people's experiences in hospital they may need to access adjustments, but that currently professionals cannot always identify that someone is autistic or what their needs might be. That is why, as part of the NHS Long Term Plan's priority focus on autism and learning disability, NHS England are committed to develop a digital flag by 2023/2024. This will ensure that staff across health and social care will be aware that an autistic person needs reasonable adjustments for them to access services. This flag is currently being piloted across 13 early adopter regional sites before it becomes more widely available.

Some people may have sensory needs, which are important to consider as part of creating the right environment for their care. NHSE commissioned the National Development Team for inclusion (NDTi) to develop 10 principles¹ that can be used to increase awareness and provision of environments suited to people's sensory needs.

You raised the importance of community provision. In 2022/2023, we are investing £70 million to prevent avoidable admissions and improve community support for autistic people and people with a learning disability. This includes £40 million to improve the capacity and capability of 7-day specialist multidisciplinary and crisis support for autistic people and people with a learning disability in every area of the country. Additionally, £30 million has been committed for keyworker services for autistic children and young people and children and young people with a learning disability with the most complex needs at risk of being admitted to mental health settings or who are inpatients.

In July 2022 we published the Building the Right Support Action Plan to help us make further progress on commitments that will enable autistic people and people with learning disability to lead ordinary lives in their community and reduce reliance on mental health inpatient care.

Furthermore, on 27 June 2022, we published the draft Mental Health Bill, which includes our proposed Mental Health Act reforms to help improve support for autistic people and people with a learning disability and end inappropriate detentions. We will bring this before the House as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

¹ <https://www.ndti.org.uk/resources/publication/its-not-rocket-science>

As part of our proposed Mental Health Act reforms, a person with a learning disability or autistic person will no longer be able to be detained for treatment under section 3 of the Act unless they have a co-occurring mental health condition that requires treatment in hospital. There will also be duties on commissioners to understand the risk of crisis at an individual level and ensure an adequate supply of community services for people with a learning disability and autistic people who are at risk of admission under part II of the Act. Recommendations from Care (Education) and Treatment Reviews (C(E)TRs), will be placed on a statutory footing, for certain detained patients, meaning that they must be taken into account as part of someone's care and treatment. This will build upon the work on CETRs described in NHSE's response.

More generally, we launched a 12-week public call for evidence on what can be done across government in the longer term to support mental health, wellbeing and suicide prevention. In the discussion paper published alongside the call for evidence, we recognise that autistic people and people with learning disabilities experience worse mental health than the general population. This closed on 7 July. We received submissions from 5,273 respondents representing a broad range of stakeholders from across England and we are currently considering these.

You may also wish to know that, on 21 July 2021, we published the refreshed National Autism Strategy, which aims to improve the lives of autistic people by addressing health inequalities and improving access to public services.² Actions within the strategy include improving health and care professionals' understanding of autism. We remain committed to implementing the strategy and are considering the most effective mechanisms to achieve this, including empowering local systems to deliver improved outcomes for autistic people.

Furthermore, as of January 2022, the 'Learning from lives and deaths – People with a learning disability and autistic people' (LeDeR) programme includes autistic people. Taking the learning from this programme will help us ensure people are better supported and cared for in future and that we can take the necessary steps to prevent future deaths from occurring.

Finally, on 2 November 2022 NHS England published the reports of the investigations it had commissioned into three deaths in the child and adolescent mental health services run by the Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust. These highlighted multiple failings in the care the Trust provided.

I understand the Trust has accepted in full those recommendations in the reports that are for the Trust. The Trust has a significant improvement programme underway and is working with NHS England to improve standards in the care it provides, including working with the local Integrated Care Board to assess where additional targeted activity could lead to further improvements.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-strategy-for-autistic-children-young-people-and-adults-2021-to-2026/the-national-strategy-for-autistic-children-young-people-and-adults-2021-to-2026>

NHS England has also commissioned a system-wide investigation into the safety and quality of CAMHS services at the Trust which is due to be published early in 2023.

Finally, in light of these tragic losses of life at the Trust and the subsequent Urgent Question raised in response in the House of Commons, we are considering what more can be done to improve the quality and safety of mental health inpatient care and will make an announcement in due course.

I hope this response is helpful. Improving the support that autistic people receive and preventing such circumstances in future is essential. Thank you for bringing these concerns to my attention.

Yours sincerely,



MARIA CAULFIELD