

Autism: A Guide for Practitioners within Housing and Homelessness Services

ISBN 978-1-78286-039-6

September 2019

Foreword

I welcome this amended Guide which highlights the issues some people with autism face when applying for housing for the first time, or the obstacles they can encounter within their tenancies. The Guide, and the associated training which will be available, provides housing practitioners with practical solutions for dealing with issues which are sometimes seen as anti-social behaviour. The Guide builds on a 'person-centred' approach, putting individuals at the heart of the decision-making process; helping to identify issues early on to address possible conflict.

Increasingly, through Welsh Government funded training, the housing sector is following trauma informed approaches to create psychologically informed environments. Doing so makes it possible to address the sometimes complex needs of tenants who may be at risk of homelessness, allowing them to access and maintain stable accommodation and live independent lives.

Evicting people from social housing makes no sense. Once they have been made homeless they are likely to be moved into less secure accommodation or even temporary accommodation, which in the worst case scenario is a bed and breakfast hotel. They risk losing contact with informal and formal support networks which makes a bad situation worse.

This approach is corrosive; we need to invest in vulnerable families. Not shift them from a secure stable home into insecure unstable temporary accommodation. Supporting families to make a success of their tenancies and remain in their communities is what we should be trying to achieve.

What we need in Wales is good quality, stable housing. This is the foundation of thriving communities. The Guide and the principles it promotes will help us achieve these goals and I recommend its use to all housing practitioners.

Julie James AM,
Minister for Housing and Local Government

This refreshed Housing Guidance is timely following the implementation of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. Following a survey commissioned by Welsh Government in 2015 of over 1000 autistic people, parents and carers and professionals of the issues facing autistic people in accessing services and leading fulfilled lives, concerns over Housing emerged as a consistent theme.

This refreshed Guidance attempts to address those concerns by providing Housing professionals working within any sector in Wales with the tools and advice and increased awareness of autism.

I am particularly pleased that the National Autism Team has co-produced the Guide with autistic advisors, housing professionals and professionals working with autistic people as well as parents and carers and NAS Cymru. A large Task and Finish Group provided oversight of the work chaired by Cymorth Cymru and a smaller Writing Group met several times to write and produce the document over a period of 12 months.

We are grateful to Welsh Government for funding and supporting this important piece of work.

Councillor Huw David,
Spokesperson for Health and Social Care, Welsh Local Government Association

The refreshed Guide for professionals working in the housing sector is taking a new approach by the National Autism Team. The Guide will be available in hard copy with "inserts" that can be easily refreshed and replaced, rather than the traditional hard copy bound Guide. It will also be available on line where people can review and print off files that they need.

The first part of the Guide has been produced in easily accessible "Chapters" that reflect the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, supplemented by "Hints and Tips" sections.

The second part provides a comprehensive guide to autism, further information about the condition and how professionals may adapt their practise to make sourcing housing advice and guidance that much easier for autistic people. This section, like the whole Guide was co-produced with autistic advisors. I am pleased to endorse the Guide which I am sure will be used by professionals in health as well as other sectors.

Dr Tracey Cooper,
Chief Executive, Public Health Wales

Introduction

This guide is a response to issues raised by autistic people and professionals through a consultation facilitated by the National Autism Team on behalf of Welsh Government in 2015 and reports commissioned by Shelter Cymru, that highlight the challenges faced by autistic people in relation to housing and the higher proportion of homeless people who are autistic.

Use of language

The team that co-produced this guide have given consideration to our use of language, understanding that it evokes strong responses and should be sensitive to the autistic community. We acknowledge that there will be no “one size fits all” policy that will fit with everyone’s wishes, as we know there is much debate around preferred terminology.

We have decided on the use of identity first language rather than person first language, i.e. ‘autistic’ rather than ‘has autism’, after considering recent research, “Nothing about us without us.”¹, the views of the autistic community, and of the autistic advisors on the Autism Housing and Homelessness Guide Task and Finish Group.

Language throughout the guide will reflect this decision. However, we feel it is of utmost importance to endeavour to respect personal preference around language in individual instances and would advise anyone consulting this document for guidance to do the same.

¹ Which terms should be used to describe autism? Perspectives from the UK autism community, Kenny et al; 2015

Purpose of this Guide?

This guide has been written for professionals, across public, private and the third sector who engage with autistic people and their carers/families within a housing context, this includes, but is not limited to :



This good practice guide is prepared in line with the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. It could also be applied in other settings and to other conditions and disabilities. This guide has been produced co-productively with several housing professionals, autistic people and colleagues working with autistic people across Wales.

Why is it important?

A diagnosis of autism does not necessarily mean a person is unable to cope with living independently, but they may require additional consideration in the choice of housing; in the way the property is managed; and that the tenant is supported.

Without appropriate support, autistic people may face specific difficulties in housing and may be at higher risk of homelessness. As the social model of disability suggests, reducing the barriers autistic people may face in the housing sector could mean they reach the best possible outcome in housing and consequently their overall well-being.

What is an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

An autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition which affects the way a person communicates with, and relates to, other people and the world around them.

The ways in which people are affected varies from one individual to another.

“Once you’ve met one person with autism, you’ve met one person with autism.”
Dr Stephen Shore

The second part of this guide provides practitioners with more detail about autism.

Equality Act 2010

Public Sector organisations in the UK are prohibited from discriminating against any of the protected characteristics contained within the Act.

The protected characteristics are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

The Equality Act 2010 Guidance states: ‘A disability can arise from a wide range of impairments which can be; developmental, such as autistic spectrum disorders (ASD), dyslexia and dyspraxia’.

Section 20 of the Act places a duty on public organisations for reasonable adjustments to be made to prevent discrimination against anyone with a disability. You should be mindful of all of the above characteristics; however, this guide suggests some things to consider in your practice which could help you make reasonable adjustments in relation to autism.

How can you use this Guide?

The intention is for this Guide to be used practically and easily. It is split into themed chapters following the themes and elements of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, and the good practice developed by the housing and homelessness sector over the period prior to and since its implementation.

Top tips can be found at the end of each chapter which can be printed out for ease of reference and used by practitioners at all levels.