



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

Disability Service  
South East Community Healthcare  
Health Service Executive  
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8<sup>th</sup> October 2020

Ms Jennifer Murnane O'Connor TD  
Dail Eireann  
Leinster House  
Dublin 2

**PQ 26448/20**

**To ask the Minister for Health when progress will be made on reducing waiting times in early intervention speech and language therapy in counties Carlow and Kilkenny for assessments; if a timeline can be provided for the reduction of the current backlog of three years; if a speech and language therapy vacancy in Bethany House SLT Services Carlow has been filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy Murnane O'Connor

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which was submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

*I have reviewed the matter and the following is the current position.*

The disability services in the South East Community Healthcare (SECH) area provide a range of multidisciplinary supports and services for children with disability including Early Intervention (EI) (0-6 years) and School Age Services (6-18 years). There have been significant year on year increases in the number of children applying for assessment including Autism Disorder Spectrum and all disability services which has led to delays in timeframes.

It is acknowledged that given increased referral rates and demands for assessments and interventions by the Disability Services, there is a requirement for additional resources to meet current need.

The South East Community Healthcare (SECH) aim to ensure every child and young person will be supported to reach their potential to be healthy, confident and resilient. To meet this objective the SECH have established an Integrated Children's Service Committee to develop and deliver an integrated local service model for Children and Youth across SECH within the context of National Frameworks and within available resources. In line with national policy this committee for SECH will be tasked with

- developing a high level SECH wide strategic plan

- establishing integrated children's services within SECH and across care groups and SECH population health and social care needs,
- optimising the health and wellbeing of all children & youth through the provision of appropriate services that are accessible, integrated and clearly signposted.

Regarding speech and language therapists (SLT) in Bethany House there are 1.8 WTE currently allocated for EIT in Bethany house. Due to a resignation in May 2020 1WTE was vacant. While the recruitment process had been completed the successful candidate was on maternity leave and therefore did not take up the post until August 2020.

The newly appointed SLT is admitting cases from the EIT waiting list but it will take some time to safely build up a caseload to ensure best practice for all the children concerned.

Due to Covid-19 there has been an additional delay in offering appointments for assessments, and at this time it is not possible to specifically advise if waiting lists will be reduced will be offered an appointment.

The HSE regrets the difficulties in accessing SLT assessments and are seeking to reduce the waiting times and address issues arising for all children and their families through a number of measures including;

- The HSE continues to fill approved posts through in line with HSE Recruitment and National Pay-bill Management Framework including a Liaison Officer/Early Intervention Co-ordinator.
- Appointed Children's Network Disability Managers (CDNM) to progress the implementation of Progressing Disability Service for children and young people under the National reconfiguration plan. During this reconfiguration phase the CDNM's will lead out on the reconfiguration of services with local managers and services.
- Waiting list validation is in operation with a particular focus on those who are waiting longest.

In line with public health guidance, at the outset of the pandemic, these services, along with many other services, were significantly reduced to limit exposure to Covid-19. At this time the HSE are reviewing best practice, based on Public Health guidelines to resume assessments.

I trust this information is of assistance to you. Should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



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**Ms. Janette Dwyer**  
**Head of Service, Disability Service**  
**South East Community Healthcare**