

## **Cross Party Group on Deaf Issues | Minutes**

*Monday, 10:30, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2021 – Via Zoom*

### **Attendees**

**Mark Isherwood** – AM

**Mike Hedges** – AM

**Peredur Owen Griffiths** – AM

**Heledd Roberts** – On behalf of Rhun ap Iwerth

**Callum Mclean** – Minute taker, Wales Council for Deaf People

**Debbie Thomas** – Head of Policy & Influencing in Wales, National Deaf Children's Society

**George Baldwin** – Policy & Campaigns Officer for Wales, National Deaf Children's Society

**Karen Robson** - Director, Wales, Royal National Institute for Deaf People

**Michelle Fowler-Powe** – Access & Inclusion Co-ordinator, British Deaf Association

**Nicola George** – Audiologist, Cardiff & Vale UHB

**Nigel Williams** – South Wales Cochlear Implant Support Group

**Sarah Angove** – Teacher of the Deaf, BATOD

**Cathie Robins-Talbot** – CRT Consultant / Talking Hands

**Sue Williams** - ASLI Member / BSL Interpreter

**Jacqui Bond** - Social Worker

**Alison Bryan**

### **Communication Support**

**Hilary Maclean** – Speech to Text Reporter

**Rachel Williams**– BSL interpreter

### **Apologies**

**Louise Sweeney** – CEO, Wales Council for Deaf People

**Anthony Evans** – BSL Interpreter

**Sarah Thomas** – Managing Director, Centre of Sign Sight Sound

**Dr Rob Wilks** – Lecturer, University of South Wales

**Stephen Brattan-Wilson** – ASLI Member / BSL Interpreter

*As this was an initial meeting to reform the group, the current secretariat, Callum, chaired the meeting until a chair is formally elected*

**Chair** began by asking everyone to introduce themselves alongside their role in the group.

### **Key Issues the Group Would Like to Take Forward This Assembly Term**

**Debbie** started by drawing attention to three key points:

1. The Additional Needs Reforms – Due to be implemented September 2021, need to keep an eye on as a group in case of any misinterpretation of legislation
2. BSL – BSL charter regarding families learning BSL

3. Covid-19 – Difficulties with facemasks/lipreading, remote learning and more.

**Sarah** added that the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf (BATOD) have similar concerns, noting the inequity of provision across different educational authorities which has been highlighted by Covid-19. This, coupled with potential long term plans for 'blended' learning, which would include both online and in person learning has raised significant concerns due to the way the students would be supported. They also questioned if the NDCS's quality standards could be used to measure services & resource provisions, ensuring fairness and equality across the different local authorities.

**Jacqui** highlighted the ongoing work with the All Wales Group for Deafness Mental Health & Wellbeing, in which a report will soon be produced titled Deaf People in Wales – Hidden Inequality. Said report shows Deaf people in Wales that require inpatient mental health care are still required to go to England for services. The full report will be made available for the group when completed.

**Mark** referenced his proposed BSL bill, and added that the group may be aware of an individual who has been contacting members of the Senedd strongly opposing said bill, and commenting on the motives of all the organisations involved with the Cross Party Group on Deaf Issues. These claims were brought up so that they can be commented on by the group in future if necessary. Secondly, Mark commented that he has been in contact, and has had an online meeting with the Association of British Sign Language Tutors & Professionals after the vote on the proposed bill last term, during said meeting the group noted they would like to work with this Cross Party Group on both proposed acts and proposed bills, as well as their call for a national registration of BSL Teachers & Interpreters, and added it may be useful for the group to discuss this on future agendas.

**Sue** noted that she was standing in for Stephen – Brattan Wilson, and highlighted the concern BSL interpreters have over the inequality of provision amongst GPs & hospitals with access to BSL interpreters during the pandemic. She explained that some GPs would have remote interpretation access, whilst others would not, or would simply involve the GP calling the interpreter over the phone, whilst the interpreter would simultaneously video call the patient using their own equipment, instead of having such services put in place such as a 3-way video call or similar services that the NHS could implement.

An example was also given where Sue was recently called to attend an emergency hospital appointment, in which the use of iPads was unknown to the staff, when supposedly the specific health board had iPad provisions in place for this very reason.

An accessibility issue was also highlighted, in which Deaf people have been unable to contact their GPs/ health professionals due to appointments being over the phone only, or requiring a phonecall to book an appointment in the first instance.

**Michelle** added that they have noticed many instances of this which has been reported to them by the BSL community. They mentioned a checklist for standards that the BDA had created years prior, which indicated what health boards have been doing well, and which procedures are either helping or hindering access for Deaf people.

Michelle adds that some instances such as emergencies, warrant for online interpreting, however face to face is more suitable due to the nature of the communication.

**Callum** agreed and added that the pandemic and accessibility go hand in hand in highlighting both the faults and strengths of communication access and technology.

**Karen** agreed with all previously made statements and added it is something she would like to bring up to the Welsh Government Hearing Project Board. The board are due to meet in a couple of weeks and will look at the audiology framework and the impact of people with hearing loss accessing other medical disciplines to ensure they receive the support needed.

They also added that they were surprised in there being some opposition to Mark's BSL bill, and that the RNID have not received any negative feedback regarding it. Karen then suggested that the group takes a clear stance that we support and advocate for BSL equality, but also all other forms of recognised communication support, such as Speech to Text Reporters, DeafBlind interpreters, Translators & Notetakers as well as lipspeakers.

Callum checked to see if anyone else would like to provide additional comments or standing agendas for future meetings.

### **Election of Secretariat**

The group discussed potential secretariats, and Callum was voted in by all members of the group in attendance.

### **Election of Chair**

Mark Isherwood was proposed as chair. This was seconded by Mike Hedges & Peredur Owen Griffiths. Mark Isherwood is to be the chair of the CPGDI this Assembly term.

*Congratulations were given to Mark & Callum*

### **Any Other Business**

**Debbie** noted that she was happy to see multiple Senedd Members in attendance, and suggested that some of what was discussed be put together in an email to all MSs ahead of any future meetings to see if any other members would wish to join. Callum agreed and said he would discuss with Mark's team.

**Sue** highlighted that the pandemic and service access has been very difficult for BSL interpreters as well as everyone else, specifically noting the technical difficulties of working online with their own equipment, the additional cognitive load and concentration required online, childcare, having to work from home, and mentioned that some interpreters are considering changing careers due to it being such a difficult year for them. She believes once face to face interpreting has been restored as the main use of interpreting, this would lower interpreter and patient stress, as many nuances such as body language are taken into consideration when using BSL and interpreting.

**Sarah** agreed with Sue, and added that children have been finding virtual learning particularly difficult, and are pushing for the return of face to face learning for all of their Deaf students.

**Alison** in contrast noted that as she lives in a rural area, the nearest BSL interpreter to her lives 2 hours away, and so her being able to access interpreting online has actually been beneficial, but recognises this is not the same situation for everyone and that the option for either online or in person should always be available where possible.

*Meeting was concluded*