

# MINUTES

## Cross-Party Group on Deaf Issues

Friday 30 June 2023

10.30am – 11.30am

Meeting sponsored by Mark Isherwood MS

- Attendees:** Mark Isherwood MS (Chair)  
Rob Wilks (Secretary)  
Alison Bryan  
Cath Booth (Achieve Together)  
Hannah Winters (University Hospital of Wales)  
Helen Foulkes  
Jacqui Bond (Social Worker for the Deaf)  
Lisa Wilcox (BATOD)  
Mark Davies  
Martin Griffiths  
Nigel Williams (South Wales Cochlear Implant Support Group)  
Polly Winn (RNID)  
Sarah Thomas (Centre for Sign Sight Sound)  
Tony Evans (BSL/English Interpreter)
- Apologies:** Dawn Sommerlad (Centre of Sign Sight Sound)  
Gareth Foulkes  
Llyr Gruffydd MS  
Peredur Owen Griffiths MS  
Margaret Buchanan Geddes (Advisor for Deafblind UK)
- BSL/English Interpreters:** Julie Doyle RSLI  
Samantha Hopkins RSLI

**Speech-to-Text Reporter:** Hilary McLean

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### Minutes of last meeting

There being no minutes produced by the previous Secretariat, this agenda item was skipped. The Chair will check his records to see if he has received them.

**Action: Chair to check receipt of minutes of previous meeting.**

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### Matters arising

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None.

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### **Election of new Secretariat**

To appoint Dr Rob Wilks of Cardiff University as the Group's Secretary for the remainder of the current Session.

The only nomination for the new Secretary of the Group was for Dr Rob Wilks of Cardiff University. The Chair reminded attendees that both the Chair and the Secretary have to be re-elected annually so the appointment of Rob Wilks would be for the rest of the current year before the next AGM.

Tony Evans proposed that Rob Wilks be appointed Secretary of the Group and this was seconded by Martin Griffiths. Rob Wilks was duly elected Secretary of the Group until the next AGM.

***Action: Rob Wilks is appointed Secretary, and he will inform the Table Office accordingly.***

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### **Invisibility of Deafblind adults in Wales Margaret Buchanan Geddes [in absentia]**

In Ms Buchanan Geddes' absence, the Chair summarised the motion as follows:

The number of dual-sensory adults in Wales of working age or below remains at roughly 0.002% of the population. 1 in every 40,000 babies born in Wales will be Deafblind or dualsensory. Of these figures 0.02% have varies degrees of Deafblindness and independence. It is argued that the needs of Deafblind people in Wales are ignored by the Government, particularly in modern transport design and station designs. The member would like the Chair to write to a Minister on behalf of the Group for a response to the issues raised.

Helen Foulkes suggested that communication guide training and provision for deafblind people needs to be included in the letter. She also said that she would like to see statistics confirming the number of professional communication guides for deafblind people in Wales included in the letter.

Mark Davies suggested that Martin Griffiths (present) is the new Wales Manager for the British Deaf Association (BDA) may like to contribute to this discussion.

Martin Griffiths confirmed that the contents of Ms Buchanan Geddes' email was correct and that there does seem to be an oversight when it comes to deafblindness. There is quite a focus on people with sight loss and a focus on people who are deaf but there seems to be a gap that doesn't really get filled when it comes to deafblind people so obviously she has put some figures down. Martin Griffiths is one of the 40,000 people who were born with dual sensory loss which has worsened over the years but those figures don't include people who acquire deafblindness so the number is actually larger. It is part of the BDA's strategy going forward to focus on the deafblind population of the UK, whose first language is BSL because Deafblind UK, for example, does not provide for people who are sign language users so there is a lot of work to be done.

***Action: The Secretary will write a letter to Jane Hutt MS, Minister for Social Justice accordingly, on behalf of the Group.***

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### **Future meetings Helen Foulkes**

The Chair summarised Helen Foulkes' agenda item as follows:

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Ms Foulkes suggests that the Secretary arrange a series of speakers for future Group meetings to update the Group on various activities related to deaf and BSL issues in Wales. Some speakers suggested include:

- Suki Wescott, Disability and BSL Policy Manager, Welsh Government
- Gaye Hampton, Disability Rights Taskforce and BSL Advisory Board
- Eleri Goldsmith, Head of Curriculum Development, Welsh Government
- Wales BSL and Deaf Issues Research Group

We may need to increase the length of future Group meetings to say 1.5 hours in order to accommodate this, and perhaps give speakers a 20-30 minute slot at each meeting.

Helen Foulkes added that as she is in North Wales and there is a divide between north and south Wales, many do not understand what's going on and because we have all these separate groups this would be the perfect opportunity for us to be able to discuss what's going on in Wales.

Polly Winn (new External Affairs Manager for Wales, RNID) agreed with the proposal as there is a lot of cross working going on with different areas of focus and it would be great to use the speaker series as an opportunity to align. The RNID and BDA are currently working with the equality group in the Health Department of the Welsh Government to review the All-Wales Standard for Accessible Communications. There has been a series of workshops last of which is on Monday then we're now setting out the next steps for that piece of work. This could be of interest for the Group and a speaker could be arranged with an update. Tony Evans added that he did a presentation to GP tutors from right across Wales recently on how to work with interpreters, and not one of them had heard of the All-Wales Standard for Accessible Communications.

The Chair suggested adding ASLI/VLP on the matter of interpreters, the BDA regarding the BSL Charter Audit of the Welsh Government, bearing in mind that the Chair has brought the need for a BSL Act to the attention of Jane Hutt MS, Minister for Social Justice, who refers the Chair to the BDA's work. This is particularly important as the UK Parliament's BSL Act gave powers to UK ministers with overall matters applying in England, but doesn't apply to devolved matters. Welsh Government ministers need to have equivalent responsibilities and powers and that would require Welsh legislation. The Chair achieved support in the Senedd Chamber for the proposal for a Bill with no one voting against, ministers abstaining as they normally do and others cross party voting in favour. He needs an opportunity to propose a Private Members Bill to take this forward as the Welsh Government has not included this in its legislative programme for the next 12 months. It would therefore be helpful to hear from the BDA where they're up to with this in their engagement with the Welsh Government.

Martin Griffiths confirmed that the BDA has a meeting booked on 13 July 2023 with Suki Westcott and Wayne Cornish in the Welsh Government's Equality Division and believes that there will be some progress.

The Chair also added that as he lives in North Wales in Flintshire so if any Group members want him to come along and to have a coffee and a chat, to let him know.

Tony Evans thinks Helen Foulkes' proposal is an excellent idea, and he thinks this meeting historically has become a bit muddled in a way so we may need to go back and revise the purpose of the Group meetings, but as it's moved online and become much more accessible for a many in North Wales and mid-Wales, we need to make use of that. We've got excellent resources around the country, and this is a genuinely useful way of networking and making sure they're included, their voices are heard and that we discuss relevant points.

The Chair suggested inviting Jane Hutt MS, Minister for Social Justice, along to attend a Group meeting in the near future which should be possible with sufficient notice.

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The Secretary confirmed that he has been involved in some discussions in Welsh Government about the BSL Act plans and it does seem at the moment that the plan would be to put it on the agenda for the next Parliament session from the year 2026 onwards as the legislative agenda for the present parliament is already full. He is happy to look at organising speakers going forward and plans to book in the next 4 meetings and with that can arrange the speakers. Please email with any further ideas for speakers.

The Chair suggested that we ensure that relevant speakers are also brought in for people with hearing loss who may not be BSL users, such as ear wax issues. Polly Winn confirmed that the ear wax issue was a big focus of the RNID at present.

***Action: Secretary to organise speakers for future meetings and arrange meetings with sufficient notice to encourage MS to attend.***

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## **Attendance of Members of the Senedd**

### ***Alison Bryan***

The Chair summarised Alison Bryan's agenda item as follows:

Ms Bryan queries that that the Chair appears to be the only MS who attends the Group meetings, and wonders whether there is anything we could/should do in this regard to ensure that other MS attend in order to become fully aware of Deaf issues in Wales.

Alison Bryan added that she believes we should have four MSs here. Do they read our minutes? Can they contribute? What do we want to do as part of this Group?

The Chair confirmed that MS are generally quite busy with Senedd business including Committees, work in their constituencies, other meetings etc., and in addition there are 70 cross party groups with only 60 MS and Government members are not formal members of cross-party groups. So, they are stretched rather thinly across the board. The Chair chairs 7 cross-party groups. There is always competition to get MS' attention. It is important to ensure that invitations to meetings are circulated well in advance, which depends on the secretary being proactive. Some groups appoint deputy chairs to ensure greater involvement, so this may be something to consider going forward. Each cross-party group must have a minimum 3 MS from at least two parties.

Polly Winn agreed that appointing deputy chairs would be useful and she has seen this happening in other cross party groups.

There was some discussion about whether to have face-to-face Group meetings, online on Zoom or hybrid. It was agreed that the meetings would continue on Zoom, as it means that members based in mid-Wales and north Wales are able to attend.

***Action: CPGDI meetings will continue on Zoom for the foreseeable future.***

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## **GCSE BSL**

### ***Mark Davies/Tony Evans***

The Chair summarised this agenda item as follows:

Both Mark Davies (former trustee of the Centre for Sign, Sight and Sound in Colwyn Bay) and Tony Evans raised the issue of the GCSE BSL due to be introduced in England in September 2025. The Department of Education in London has launched a consultation.

For context, it is worth mentioning that Qualifications Wales has now announced that there is to be a 'Made-for-Wales' GCSE in BSL: <https://qualifications.wales/regulation->

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[reform/reforming/qualified-for-the-future/made-for-wales-gcses/](#). The focus of this agenda item may well now focus on the Welsh BSL GCSE instead.

Mark Davies explained his work with regard to the BSL GCSE in England to date.

The Chair suggested that the Group may wish to consider writing to Qualifications Wales, highlighting any particular matters that should be addressed.

Tony Evans raised his concerns regarding who will teach the new BSL GCSE. England have announced that the GCSE BSL will be available from September 2025. As there are not enough deaf teachers to teach BSL in schools where take up is expected to be high, it could well be that hearing teachers are recruited to teach BSL, and they may not have the prerequisite levels of BSL skill to be able to do so. It would never happen with Welsh. We still have a situation where deaf children from birth, early years, infants, juniors are suffering through language deprivation. The teachers, the support assistants that are working with them aren't fluent in BSL. So, we're not developing a generation of BSL users, and it is this that we need to focus on first. Tony Evans would like the Group to write to the WJEC, write to the Committees that are debating the BSL GCSE, and say whilst it is a marvellous aim, I think it is absolutely what we want to be happening, but it is too early. You can't rush into a GCSE BSL in 2024 when we don't yet have enough people who are fluent in BSL to support the deaf children that are in schools. If we can't support our deaf children, why will we prioritise teaching hearing children who may never use a BSL GCSE?

Lisa Wilcox of BATOD agreed with Tony Evans, and said that teachers of deaf children are receiving requests from other teachers for teaching resources and using YouTube etc. Foundations need to be established first.

The Chair suggested the Secretary capture those thoughts and any others in a letter to the Senedd Education Committee who are scrutinising this, the WJEC and Qualifications Wales who have overall responsibility. We can also bring this to Jane Hutt MS' attention when we write to her/invite her to attend a Group meeting.

**Action: Secretary to write letter to Senedd Education Committee, WJEC and Qualifications Wales.**

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## **International Day of Sign Languages / Shine a Light**

### **Gareth Foulkes**

The Chair provided the following summary of Mr Foulkes' agenda item:

The United Nations' International Day of Sign Languages is due to take place on 22 September 2023. In 2022, a group of passionate Welsh Deaf individuals worked together to ask various Welsh public buildings to 'Shine a Blue Light' to raise awareness of sign language around the world, and especially in Wales, where British Sign Language (BSL) is commonly used by members of the Deaf community and their allies.

The list of institutions who shone a light in September 2022 were as follows:

- Canolfan Alun R Edwards and The Bandstand in Aberystwyth, Ceredigion County Council
- Chapter Arts, Cardiff
- Faraday Tower, Swansea University
- Main Building, Cardiff University
- Athletics Wales
- Bangor University

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- Carmarthenshire Council
  - Powys County Council
  - Ty Crawshay, Treforest Campus, University of South Wales
  - Cyngor Sir Ynys Môn / Isle of Anglesey County Council

Mr Foulkes asks whether the Group would like to support this initiative for 2023.

All agreed that the Group is happy to support this initiative and to ask Gareth Foulkes to confirm what support we can provide.

***Action: Secretary to ask Gareth Foulkes what support the Group can provide for the Shine a Light campaign 2023.***

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### **Any other business**

Stephen Brattan-Wilson – an issue was raised in previous Group meetings regarding the use of unqualified unregistered translators being commissioned by Welsh Government to translate Welsh Government consultation documents. This is unfortunately still happening. He has raised the issue with Suki Wescott, the Welsh Government's Disability and BSL Policy Manager, and asked whether the Group could apply pressure on the commissioning side regarding this issue.

The Chair suggested that the Secretary capture these concerns in the Groups' letters to the Welsh Government.

***Action: Secretary to raise concerns regarding commissioning of unqualified unregistered translators for consultations with Welsh Government.***

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