

Cross Party Group on Disability

Minutes of the meeting held on
16th February 2023 (via Zoom)

Present: Mark Isherwood MS (Chair), Megan Thomas (Secretary), Rebecca Phillips (Minutes), Cllr Teresa Carberry, Marg McNeil, William Fawcett, Tracey Blockwell, Trevor Palmer, Jan Thomas, Andrea Gordon, Shaun Bendle, Kerry Bevan, Branwen Jones, Owen Williams, Lesley Clarke, Lee Parsons, Matt Innes, Gareth Marshall, Sarah Hughes, Bethany Handley, Shahd Zorob, Cath Lewis, Morvenna Richards, Becky Ricketts, Ian Bellin, George Lockett, Miranda Evans, Kirsty Rees, Kelly Stuart, Liz Williams, Zoe Richards, Leandra Craine, Kat Watkins, Sioned Williams, Cari Jones, Amanda Say, Rhian Davies.

Apologies: Louise Sweeney, Joanna Fashan, Jenny Carroll.

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes were approved as an accurate record.

Proposed: Marg McNeil

Seconder: Trevor Palmer

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Seeing Around Britain

Marg sought an update on the letter to Prince William's office.

The Chair said that a holding response had been received from Prince William's office stating that they were busy but that they will be taking it forward. MI's office has chased them for an update.

MI had also presented the details of SAB to the Archbishop of Wales in the summer, but no response has been received yet. MI will chase this also.

Marg asked Megan for an update on the Westminster All Party Parliamentary Group on Disability and the National Trust regarding volunteering initiatives in Wales.

Megan has not contacted the Westminster All Party Parliamentary Group on Disability but will do so. She will also chase up the National Trust with Disability Wales colleagues who are involved in the project.

Marg added that all the Warm Spaces, food banks and Citizens Advice are on their website.

3. CHAIR'S UPDATE

Since the last meeting, MI had his debate on proposing the BSL bill on a secured support from MSs of all parties with government abstaining. MI will continue bidding to introduce the bill.

He has raised several matters on behalf of disability groups and charities in the chamber and outside.

4. SECRETARY'S UPDATE

Megan proposed all future CPGD meetings take place on a hybrid basis. This was agreed by all.

5. PRESENTATION FROM DEPARTMENT OF WORKING AND PENSIONS

(Lesley Clarke, Disability Services Advocacy Manager for Wales and South England and Matthew Innes, Disability Services Advocacy Manager for Central England)

Lesley gave an overview of the work of the Disability Services Advocacy Team. The service was established in 2019 primarily to raise awareness of all the Disability Services products with stakeholders.

Their overarching aim is to underpin the government's aspiration to support disabled people into work and to retain work.

services are delivered by four main disability grants: Access to Work, Disability Living Allowance, Industrial Injuries and Disablement Benefit, and Personal Independent Payment.

Personal Independent Payment (PIP)

PIP is a tax free benefit which can help with some of the extra costs if you have a long term ill health or disability. It is made up of two components, daily living and mobility.

Their Visiting Officers service is now back up and running following the pandemic. Customers unable to access DWP by any other means can access this service.

Where appropriate, customers are invited to complete a new PIP claim electronically via an e-PIP2 process with the aim of moving to a fully online application process in the future.

Types of assessments include, Paper Based Review, Telephone Assessment, Face-to-Face, and Video Assessment. Customers can now request an alternative method of assessment to that allocated without the need for evidence.

The assessments are carried out by a qualified Health Professional with a minimum of 2 years' experience and have been exposed to a broad range of medical conditions.

Decision Making

For someone making a new claim, the average time scale is 22 weeks from application to decision.

New claims are now prioritised over award reviews and change in circumstances.

Following a period of delays, they have started processing award reviews and change in circumstances cases and to ensure people do not fall out of payment they have been extending awards.

Mandatory reconsiderations

A customer can request a mandatory reconsideration if they dispute their decision. Matt suggested asking for a verbal explanation and for a copy of the assessment report to help understand how their decision was made.

They welcomed feedback on the service which will then be passed on to the relevant department to help shape and improve services.

Questions/comments

Q. Why are applicants who have been awarded 0 points only to be awarded the enhanced rate following an appeal.

A. Decisions makers and assessment providers are bound by the PIP Assessment Guide and must make their decisions based on that. When it goes to appeal the judges do not have to. They can make a judgement based on what is presented to them on that day. Customers tend to come along with more evidence on the day. Lesley encouraged applicants to ensure all evidence is provided at the mandatory reconsideration stage.

Q. Explain the line on state pension age and the ten-year review period.

A. If a customer's review date is due when they are over state pension age, then their review date will automatically be extended to a ten-year review period.

Due to time constraints, MI suggested the questions posted in the chat box be sent to Lesley and Matt for subsequent answers.

In addition to inviting DWP back to speak about Access to Work, MI suggested inviting Capita to attend.

MI suggested asking the All Party Parliamentary Group what work they have done on this. In addition, MI suggested asking Scotland how the assessment process works since it was redesigned.

6. PRESENTATION – HABILITATION SERVICES FOR VISION IMPAIRED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Andrea Gordon, External Affairs Manager (Guide Dogs Cymru), Cath Lewis, Policy and Campaigns Manager (Guide Dogs Cymru), Sarah Hughes, Head of Visual Impairment Services (SENCOM and Chair of Welsh Association of Vision Impairment Educators) and Branwen Jones, Operations Manager for Children and Young People Services (Guide Dogs Cymru).

Habilitation Services for Vision Impaired Children

Branwen is a habilitation specialist with over 30 years' experience working with children and young people with sight loss.

What is habilitation?

Around 80% of a child's learning is through their vision. A qualified habilitation officer can provide support for parents/carers from early diagnosis. Habilitation is the provision of age-appropriate training to encourage and develop a child/young person's independent skills. The service supports children and young people from birth to 25 years.

When appropriate, relevant skills will be taught such as mobility and orientation, use of mobility aids, public transport, handling money and social intervention.

Branwen shared Nell's story with the group. Nell has received support from Guide Dogs since she was a baby. She starred in the Guide Dogs TV advertisement to promote the children's service and at 7 years old, she has been cast in an original Netflix series, due to air in spring 2023.

How Habilitation Works Through Education

Sarah spoke about the Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with a Vision Impairment (CFVI). The framework has been developed throughout the 4 nations of the UK. It is hoped that it will be adopted by the vision impairment services throughout the UK and that the relative government supports the

fact that there are certain skills that young people need to have developed by the time they are ready for work and adult life and need to be supported by the right professionals at the right time.

The CFVI has defined 11 areas of learning: **1.** Facilitating an Inclusive World, **2.** Sensory Development, **3.** Communication, **4.** Literacy, **5.** Habilitation (Orientation and Mobility), **6.** Habilitation (Independent Living Skills), **7.** Accessing Information, **8.** Technology, **9.** Health (Social, Emotional, Mental & Physical Wellbeing), **10.** Social, Sports and Leisure, **11.** Preparing for Adulthood.

The framework will help understand the support provided to children and young people with a vision impairment and their families, clarify roles and responsibilities, and identify targets and outcomes.

A copy of the presentation can be shared to those interested following the meeting.

Link Between CFVI, Habilitation and Legislation in Wales.

Cath highlighted the link between CFVI, habilitation and legislation in Wales:

- The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018
- Curriculum for Wales
- Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People Article 26 Habilitation and Rehabilitation
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 23 Children with a disability/disabled children

Current situation in Wales

- Postcode lottery
- Examples of good practise – Sensory and Communication Support Service – covers 5 local authorities in South East

Wales

- No local authority provision in Merthyr or Pembrokeshire

Importance of Habilitation

- Social model of disability and participation in society
- Rights, voice, choice and control
- Impact on employment prospects – only 1 in 4 working age vision impaired people is employed.

MI informed the group that the yesterday's motion (Habilitation training for sight impaired children) was defeated and the government's amendment to the motion was also defeated.

MI welcomed Andrea and Cath writing to the CPGD to take follow up actions.

ACTIONS:

1. Seeing Around Britain:

- Follow up letter to Prince William
- Chase up response from the Archbishop of Wales
- Contact the Westminster All Party Parliamentary Group on Disability
- chase up the National Trust with Disability Wales colleagues

2. Share questions raised during the DWP presentation with Lesley and Matt for responses.

3. Invite Capita to a future meeting.

4. Ascertain what work has been carried out regarding PIP assessments from the All-Party Parliamentary Group and how the assessment process is working in Scotland since the assessment process was redesigned.