

Cross Party Group on Disability

Minutes of the meeting held on
1st December, 2022 (via Zoom)

Present: Jessica Laimann, Kat Watkins, Leandra Craine, Louise Sweeney, Mark Isherwood MS (Chair), Miranda Evans, Owen Williams, Lee Parsons, Petra Kennady, Rhian Davies, Sam Williams, Tracy Brockwell, Trevor Palmer, Alix Roberts, Marg McNeil, Altaf Hussain MS, Amanda Say, Becky Ricketts, Cary Jones, Debbie Shaffer, Dee Montague, Gareth Marshall, George Lockett

Apologies: Peredur Owen Griffiths MS, Rebecca Phillips, Andrea Gordon, Maggie Hayes, Jenny Carroll, Bill Fawcett, Ben Cottam

1. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes were approved as an accurate record.

Proposed: Marg McNeil
Seconder: Amanda Say

2. Matters arising from the previous meeting

Seeing around Britain

Megan met with Seeing Around Britain colleagues to discuss some of the actions raised at the last meeting. It was agreed to put Seeing Around Britain in touch with various useful organisations and networks to help spread their message and increase support.

MI added that following a meeting with the Prince of Wales, he raised the Seeing Around Britain app and he agreed that Mark could send a letter to his private office for consideration.

3. Presentation - Citizens Advice Bureau (Alex Roberts)

Alex is the welfare benefits manager in Denbighshire. Alex gave an overview of the welfare benefits support provided by Denbighshire Citizens Advice Bureau.

Since Covid-19, their way of working has changed, most appointments take place over the phone or video with some home visits provided, if needed. All appointments are by appointment only.

To access the service, clients can refer themselves or they can be referred by stakeholders such as partners, GPs, Councils or Charities, at which the client will be triaged.

Alex informed the group that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has a phenomenal backlog. Personal Independent Payment (PIP) applications used to take approximately 8 weeks to complete, now it's months. Due to the delays, from December 2022, those who have not been re-assessed for PIP, their payments will be extended for another year.

When a child on Disability Living Allowance (DLA) reaches sixteen, they must apply for PIP, but this is on hold due to the backlog.

Denbighshire CAB will support clients from initial application through to disputes and appeals, which could take two years.

The DWP recently said mandatory reconsiderations are taking 2-3 weeks to complete. However, Alex stated that this is not true, they take approximately 6 months.

Denbighshire Citizens Advice Bureau have several support schemes in place such as prepayment meter vouchers and free sim cards for people on pay as you go.

They have received lots of requests for advice around energy and fuel debts and have specialists on hand to help.

3. AGM

Mark Isherwood MS was re-elected as group chair after being proposed by Altaf Hussain MS and seconded by Owen Williams while Megan Thomas was re-elected as secretary by Becky Ricketts and Altaf Hussain MS. No other nominations were received.

4. Group Discussion about experiences of the benefits system.

MI informed the group that the DWP have been invited to the next meeting and asked members for topics they wish to be discussed.

Topics for discussion included:

- DWPs attitude to long term conditions – why they continue to reassess people every few years.

- Address the issue of people being turned down for a benefit initially only to be awarded at appeal.
- People to be assessed by a professional in the field of the person's condition.
- Access to Work support for those working on a part time basis.
- Awards shouldn't automatically be reduced because there is a possibility a condition can be improved.
- DWP to consider the Social Model of Disability.
- DWP's refusal to publicise the stats on how many people have died whilst waiting for disability benefits.
- Blue Badge and concessionary bus passes.
- Access to Work support for people undertaking volunteering roles.

5. International Day of Disabled People – Discussion

MI informed members that the International Day of Disabled People is on 3rd December and a statement will take place in the Senedd chamber.

MI asked the group for their views and priorities going forward.

Members highlighted the following priorities for the next 12 months:

- Cost of living crisis.
- Direct payments – lack of uptake, lack of a strategic plan to encourage take up and lack of awareness.
- Commitment to the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People.
- Voice of disabled children.

Sam Williams from Learning Disability Wales informed members that they support two young disabled people in their involvement with the Welsh Youth Parliament and she welcomed issues they would like raised.

Rhian informed the group that Disability Wales are currently running a project to develop resources on the UNCRPD in schools. The project will be piloted in the new year.

It was also suggested that emergency evacuation procedures for disabled people in public places would be a useful topic for discussion at a future CPGD meeting.

Disability Rights Taskforce

Rhian updated the group on the Welsh Government's Disability Rights Taskforce.

The taskforce was initiated by the first minister in response to the findings and recommendations set out in the Locked-out report (the impact of covid on disabled people).

Governments everywhere reverted to the medical model of disability to respond to the pandemic.

The taskforce has been running for a year, co-chaired by the Minister for Social Justice, Jane Hutt MS and Prof. Debbie Foster from Cardiff Business School.

Several working groups have been set up to look at issues in more detail and they are open for people to express an interest in becoming involved. The idea is that a disability rights action plan will be produced that will embed the social model of disability across Welsh Government with clearly identifiable actions.

Rhian suggested inviting the minister for social justice to future meetings for updates and as a mechanism for the CPGD to hold government to account.

MI also suggested inviting Prof. Debbie Foster to a future meeting.

6. AOB

MI won the ballot to seeking an agreement to the principle of bringing forward a private member bill. He will be putting forward a British Sign Language Bill for Wales.

7. Date of next meeting:

Thursday, 16th February 3.30pm, via Zoom.

ACTIONS:

1. Invite the Minister for Social Justice, Jane Hutt MS and Prof. Debbie Foster to future CPGD meeting.