



## Cross-Party Autism Group

### Minutes

Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> September, 14:30 - 16:00 pm Microsoft Teams

Present: Mark Isherwood MS (Chair), James Radcliffe (Secretary - NAS), Nigel Morgan, Kerrie Hopwood, Alexander Still, Janine Cusworth, Julie Mears, Janis Griffiths, Lucy Binnersley, Sian Clarke, Liisa Antoila, Sophie Adlington, Sian Emlyn Edwards, Kirsty Rees

**Apologies:** Llyr Gruffydd, Denise Mckernan, Amy Gray

#### **1. Welcome**

Mark Isherwood (MI) welcomed everyone to this meeting of the Senedd's Cross-Party Autism Group.

#### **2. Minutes of previous meeting**

A decision was taken to approve the minutes of the last meeting. This was confirmed over the chat later in the meeting by Nigel Morgan (NM) after he had been sent a copy of the minutes

#### **3. Matters arising**

JR explained that he had not received correspondence from participants in a previous meeting over practices in Flintshire county council. MI indicated that his office was collating information to submit to EHRC and CIW but many submissions have been anonymised. He noted people's statements that they are afraid of repercussions. MI indicated that once they had finished compiling the information it would be shared with the group.

JR noted that Denise Mckernan (DM) asked to mention a meeting arranged with MI and North Wales Police on the failure to address concerns over the Local Authority. MI noted that a representative from Flintshire CC had been invited to that meeting

but there has been no response. DM has spent 30 years as a social worker working in this subject area, and her primary concern is how the council meet their legal obligations (or not).

JR also highlighted correspondence with the minister for social partnership and agreed to circulate the correspondence to the group.

JR also highlighted the recent call from the Equality and Social Justice Committee on disability and employment, and noted the National Autistic Society had responded to the consultation. MI explained that he had received correspondence to invite Robert Buckland to future meetings – JR explained that he was progressing that invite.

#### **4. Support for autistic people in the insurance industry**

Liisa Antolia (LA) on behalf of the Association of British Insurers (ABI) presented on the work of the ABI in supporting autistic customers and also on the role they are playing in supporting their members increase the employment rate of autistic people. She highlighted the recent publication of their good practice guide which highlighted good practice for the industry such as moving away from phone trees, staff training, and a particular example of a car insurance company ensuring a replacement vehicle was similar to the customer's own vehicle to ensure their child had routine.

She also highlighted how ABI members are encouraged to play their role in addressing the employment gap. This involves actions such as collecting data, employment charters, flexible working, and creating a diverse range of entry points such as apprenticeships. She noted that there had been a 10% increase in their members with appropriate policies since they had focused work on this area.

MI then stated it was encouraging that this industry was giving attention to this, and noted that "asd" is a medical term and autistic people prefer the term "asc". LA accepted this and that they would consider changing the terminology. JR confirmed NAS uses term autistic people.

MI then opened up the session for discussion and asked what can employers learn and what action could the group take to promote the guide. A discussion about the DWP's "access to work" scheme followed, with LA confirming that ABI members had been made aware of this scheme and the issues around it. Several members highlighted issues around length of time from application to outcomes, and MI noted that the Cross-Party group on Disability have invited the DWP to a future meeting on access to work.

NM then introduced Julie Mears of STAND in North Wales and highlighted their October event in Llandudno, and that representatives of "access to work" were attending. He then highlighted a lack of opportunities within the civil service in North Wales for internships and suggested encouraging them to engage. He asked if ABI were engaging with other sectors to support them in increasing employment.

LA said she worked with ambitious about autism and spoke about the insurers good practice and would speak to them about north wales. She also said they would promote their work with other sectors – starting with associate partners (legal sector for example). She hopes that positive stories from their sector will inspire other sectors to improve

MI asked about engagement with govts. LA said that she had sat with Robert Buckland on round table, and the ABI's good practice guide has been sent to devolved govts as well. MI asked if WG had responded, LA said they had not so the group agreed to write to the WG highlighting the report.

## **5. Update on Stolen Lives campaign**

MI introduced this item by noting the Cross-Party group on Learning Disability were also involved and interested in this campaign.

Janis Griffiths (JG) spoke to the meeting and started by telling the group about her son being sectioned a few years ago. He is now settled in the community, and this gives her freedom to speak on behalf of the campaign as many parents in similar positions are afraid to. The campaign wants to work with the Welsh Government as the changes needed will have to be made through legislation. Whilst the campaign recognises the financial challenges that exist, they feel sidelined as being too difficult. She highlighted a case where short staffing of a care company was leading to threats of being sectioned, and that the threat can be intimidating to families. The campaign does not want to be difficult, but notes existing legislation is ignored by LAs and care companies.

She noted the recent demonstration outside the Senedd and the campaign felt positive about the awareness it had raised. Jane Bryant (the then minister) met and was sympathetic to the campaign and said their demands were reasonable.

The campaign group was concerned about the statement issued in August regarding inpatient provision for Learning Disability. They noted the statement ignored autism, that the Welsh Government did not contact them about the statement, and were concerned that the 134 people mentioned were considered small and therefore not a problem.

The campaign group is disappointed about not hearing of any action being taken or accountability for mistakes. It notes Care Inspectorate Wales are not interested as they don't deal with individual cases. The Community Health Council says that this is not a medical issue so they can't get involved.

The campaign is however grateful that the August statement was subsequently deleted but feels the fact the statement was issued reflects disappointing attitudes from officials. JG also notes people feel threatened and intimidated, with parents being seen as difficult, and told it is a good thing that placements are miles away from a person's home. JG explained that some of these placements amount to years of horror for some people. Campaign wants support from other organisations.

Finally, JG notes there is lots of evidence that hospitals are dangerous for LD/autistic people. One reason for this can be because of unnecessary medication and its effects on physical health.

MI thanks JG and notes the cross party work on this campaign.

Alex Still (on behalf of Hefin David MS) updated the group that they have co-tabled a motion for debate in the Senedd, with cross party support, and it is a case of waiting for the ballot to be drawn to see if the motion will be debated in the Senedd.

The new minister's office has been in touch to offer a meeting with representatives of the campaign and cross party representatives on October 8<sup>th</sup>. This was welcomed by JG

MI asks if the campaign group can provide a briefing on the key issues ahead of the debate. JG agrees but notes families are threatened so won't come forward.

JR stated that the NAS is supportive of the campaign and will also send a briefing for the debate.

NM also spoke to support the campaign.

## **6. Any Other Business and closing remarks**

JR checked whether the provisional date for next meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> December at 3pm was suitable.

**JR confirmed the next meeting would take place on 12<sup>th</sup> December**