

MINUTES

Cross-Party Group on Deaf Issues

Friday 13 September 2024

12.00 – 1.30 PM

Meeting Held in Zoom – Online meeting.

Meeting sponsored by Mark Isherwood MS

Meeting chaired by: Mark Isherwood MS (Chair)

Secretary: Tom Lichy (BDA)

BSL Interpreter: Kate Furby

BSL Interpreter: Lydia Jones

Captioner: 121 Captions

Attendees: Mark Isherwood MS (Chair)

- Mike Hedges MS
- Sioned Williams MS
- Tom Lichy (BDA – Secretary)
- Noel Kenely (AVUK - presentation)
- Victoria Bishop Rowe (AVUK – presentation)
- Stephen McAndrew (Specsavers - presentation)
- Stuart Parkinson
- Ben Culleton
- Gareth Foulkes
- Lucy Vasiliou
- Cath Booth
- Rob Wilks
- Michelle Fowler
- Kieran Sawdon
- Ioan Bellin
- Sarah Angove
- Polly Winn
- Margaret Buchanon Geddes

Apologies:

Martin Griffiths

Nigel Williams

Carolyn Fox

Welcome & Introductions

- Apologies noted as above

Approve minutes of Group meeting on 19th July 2024

- **Mike Hedges MS** requested to add MS to names of MS attendees in the minutes
- **Approval** proposed by **Mike Hedges MS**
- **Seconded** by **Stuart Parkinson (Association of British Sign Language Teachers and Assessors (ABSLTA))**

Action: Secretary to amend the presence list to include "MS" as part of cross-party attendance.

Action: Secretary to send minutes to Table Office.

Matters Arising from the Previous Meeting

1. **January 4th minutes:** Confirmed that the Secretary had sent these to Table Office.
2. **RNID Wales Speaker:** Confirmed that the Secretary had added the speaker for the next meeting for Sept 13 2024.
3. **Polly Winn:** Will give updates on progress in the next meeting if time permits, and a further update will be provided at the next meeting if needed.
4. **Welsh Government Consultation on BSL Bill:** Meetings with the BSL Bill team have taken place. The meeting with the Cabinet Member responsible was delayed due to the member stepping down, but actions would be resumed following confirmation of the new Cabinet.
5. **Deafblind Tactile Language:** Consultations with the BSL Wales Bill team have taken place, and discussions about including Deafblind tactile language in the Bill are ongoing.
6. **Public Relations for BSL (Wales) Bill:** Rob Wilks and the BSL Wales campaign group have been active in developing the website and continuing PR efforts.
7. **Margaret Buchanan's Research:** The Secretary confirmed that research on Deafblind adults had been sent to the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice. The data showed that 0.5% of Wales' population is affected by deafness.

Presentations: Auditory Verbal UK (AVUK)

- **Speakers:**

- **Victoria Bishop-Rowe** (Head of Communications): Introduced AVUK and highlighted the need for early and effective support for Deaf children in Wales to bridge gaps in academic achievement and social inclusion.
- **Noel Kenely** (Lead Auditory Verbal Therapist): Provided an overview of auditory verbal therapy, explaining its core components:
 - Use of hearing technology (hearing aids or cochlear implants) to support spoken language development.
 - Play-based therapy sessions.
 - Parent coaching to encourage language development at home.
 - Auditory verbal therapy also supports children with additional needs.
 - Only 10% of Deaf children currently have access to AV therapy in Wales, with no public sector certified therapists.
- Q&A Session:
 - Concerns raised about funding AVUK as a commercial service, suggesting it might divert funding from essential NHS and education services.
 - Concerns raised that any service should include BSL support to avoid being overly focused on spoken language.
 - Response: AVUK emphasised that their goal is to work within existing services by training professionals already in the NHS.

Specsavers Presentation on NHS Adult-Onset Hearing Loss Services

- **Presenter: Stephen McAndrew** (NHS Service Director, Specsavers)
- Key Points:
 - Hearing Loss Statistics in Wales:
 - Over 430,000 people in Wales experience adult-onset hearing loss, with 183,000 not receiving services. Wales has a higher rate of hearing loss compared to the UK average.
 - NHS waiting times for hearing services have been growing, with longer waits due to aging population and increasing demand.
 - Impact of Hearing Loss:
 - Hearing loss in adulthood can lead to social isolation, withdrawal from the workforce, mental and physical health decline, and an increased risk of dementia.
 - Early intervention can prevent additional health burdens
 - Specsavers' Proposal:
 - Specsavers proposes to work with NHS Wales to alleviate waiting lists for hearing services, by offering hearing care in community settings like GP practices and Specsavers locations.
 - Provision of hearing aids and ongoing support free at the point of use under NHS contracts, similar to eye health services currently provided.
 - Service model aims to be more cost-effective than traditional hospital-based care, offering long-term care and support with lower overheads, without reducing the quality of care.

- Q&A Session:
 - Concerns raised about access for rural populations,
 - Questions asked about funding allocations and quality assurance.
 - Discussion on balancing use of independent providers like Specsavers with ongoing support for NHS audiology services.

Action: Mark Isherwood suggested drafting a letter to the new Cabinet Secretary for Health, highlighting the issue of underfunding in audiology services and exploring the potential for collaboration with independent providers like Specsavers.

British Sign Language (BSL) Wales Bill Update

- **Mark Isherwood (Chair)** updated CPGDI on progress of the BSL (Wales) Bill. A draft proposal and explanatory memorandum have been released, and the Bill passed the initial vote, moving to the next stage.
- Consultation documents for the Bill are being developed in BSL, Welsh, and English.
- Campaigning and PR efforts continue to build support for the Bill.
- **Rob Wilks** updated CPGDI on progress of the Wales BSL campaign group
- Campaign website is nearly ready, and resources will become available to the Deaf community. Call for more volunteers to join the group.

Action: Continue public relations and community engagement efforts to support the BSL Wales Bill.

Deaf Representation on Advisory Boards and Disability Equality Strategies

- Concerns raised about the lack of Deaf representation on the Welsh Interpretation and Translation Service (WITS) advisory board.
- Cardiff Council's Disability Equality Strategy was discussed, with a noted lack of BSL translation despite support for other languages.

Action: Secretary to draft a letter requesting WITS to include Deaf representation on its advisory board.

Action: Secretary to follow up on Cardiff Council's Disability Equality Strategy and report back.

Any other business

- **Polly Winn:** Mentioned an update from Specsavers regarding NHS services for adult-onset hearing loss. Concerns raised about long waiting times and underfunding in audiology services.

Action: Mark Isherwood suggested again that CPGDI write to the new Cabinet Secretary for Health to highlight the underfunding of audiology services and the potential for independent providers to support NHS Wales.

Action log

- Secretary to amend the presence list to include 'MS' as part of cross-party attendance.
- Secretary to send minutes to Table Office.
- Draft letter to the new Cabinet Secretary for Health, highlighting the issue of underfunding in audiology services and exploring the potential for collaboration with independent providers like Specsavers.
- Continue public relations and community engagement efforts to support the BSL Wales Bill.
- Draft a letter requesting WITS to include Deaf representation on its advisory board.
- Secretary to follow up on Cardiff Council's Disability Equality Strategy and report back.