

Cross Party Group on Disability

Minutes

Status: Approved by Co-Chairs

Date of meeting **11th March 2014, 6pm-8pm, The Pierhead, Cardiff Bay**

Present
Mark Isherwood AM (Welsh Conservative – Co-Chair)
Rebecca Evans AM (Welsh Labour – Co-Chair), Jeff Cuthbert AM (Minister for Communities and Tackling poverty – part meeting), Paul Swann (Disability Wales – Secretary), Rhian Davies (Disability Wales), Fiona McDonald (Disability Wales), Owen Williams (Vision in Wales), Rebecca Phillips (Vision in Wales – CPGD minutes), Tracey Good (NHS Centre for Equality & Human Rights), Andrea Wayman (Elite Supported Employment Agency), Dawn Gullis (Mencap Cymru), Wayne Crocker (Mencap Cymru), Will Evans (livingwithaspergers.co.uk), Deb Morgan (JobCentre Plus), Andrew Davies (Working Links), Cherry Stewart (Cardiff and Vale UHB), and external members.

Apologies

1. Welcome and introductions
MI welcomed everyone to the employment themed meeting of the Cross Party Group on Disability. The event consisted of a Ministerial Address from Jeff Cuthbert AM (Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty) plus presentations from representatives of the Employment and Third Sector.

2. Presentations:

Project Enable - Introduced by Tracey Good (NHS Centre for Equality and Human Rights) and Andrea Wayman (Elite Supported Employment Agency)

A video was played to showcase an internship employment project between the Health Board and the Elite Supported Employment Agency.

Personal experiences of seeking employment –

Presentations were delivered by Owen Williams, General Manager of Vision in Wales, Dawn Gullis, External Affairs Officer for Mencap Cymru and Will Evans, Founder of livingwithaspergers.co.uk

Owen Williams – Vision in Wales

OW spoke of the barriers faced by people with sight loss seeking employment. He focused on case studies received from individuals and visual impairment organisations across Wales. Some of the examples were around the Access to Work scheme. He emphasised that Access to Work is a good scheme but that it needs to be improved. Some of the experiences faced by people with sight loss and Access to Work included delays in allocating an advisor to an individual and upon speaking to the advisor, very little information had been passed to them about their needs. OW followed on by sharing some of the case studies. OW highlighted the key areas which included the need to raise awareness of visual impairment amongst staff, provision of accessible information and for assessments to be offered as a matter of right.

Dawn Gullis – Mencap Cymru

DG spoke of her employment experiences as a person with learning difficulties. DG shared her journey from a cleaning job to volunteering roles and then on to becoming the External Affairs Officer for Mencap Cymru.

Will Evans – livingwithaspergers.co.uk

WE presented an animated video about his experience of living with Aspergers Syndrome, created by a social media student. Following the video, WE spoke about the work of livingwithaspergers.co.uk and the help he had received from Access to Work to set up the organisation.

Employment in the Framework for Action on Independent Living – Jeff Cuthbert AM, Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty

The Minister covered three main points. He spoke about the background to the Framework and why employment has been identified as a key priority; what Welsh Government are doing; and how they are working with DWP and JobCentre Plus in Wales. He emphasised that employment is a key priority because it promotes independence, improves confidence, health and wellbeing and provides a route out of poverty. He highlighted the work being carried out by Welsh Government to tackle the employment issues faced by disabled people. Some examples included working with disability organisations to help maximise the numbers of disabled people that are able to use digital technology, additional learning support funding for post-16 work-based learning options to ensure disabled participants are supported to acquire the skills that they need. He also spoke about his experience of Dyslexia. The Minister highlighted the Want to Work programme, funded by the Welsh Government and Jobcentre Plus, which, since 2008, has supported some 12,500 people into work, many of whom are disabled people. He ended by adding that although there is much work to be done if disabled people are to compete on equal terms in the job market, Welsh Government are nevertheless taking positive steps in many areas. The Framework identifies that it is not only action on education and employment practices that are necessary to improve employment prospects for disabled people but also access to buildings and to public transport. The steps being taken in these areas with the Framework for Action on Independent Living will also contribute to the employment agenda.

Promoting Access to Work – Deb Morgan, JobCentre Plus Disability Advisor.

DM spoke what JobCentre Plus can offer to people with disabilities. The services currently offered include Disability Employment Advisors, Employment Support Advisors, Want to Work for those living in a Want to Work area, Get Britain Working and the Youth Contract for 18-24 year olds which include wage incentives, voluntary work experience and apprenticeships, work psychology team and Access to

Work. Partnership managers also work with partners in local communities in poverty areas to deliver specific tailored support that might not be covered within the package offered by JobCentre Plus. Examples of where this has worked well included the 'Get Well, Get Work' project in Merthyr. The project is grant funded and involves Community Health Workers and JobCentre Plus engaging with people to address motivation and self confidence issues to improve life chances and ultimately make the transition to work. DM highlighted another example involving JobCentre Plus working with large employers to offer work placements for customers with health conditions. DM drew attention to the 'Disability and Health Employment Strategy – the Discussion So Far'. This document has been developed by the Department of Work and Pensions and is accessible via <http://bit.ly/DWPdisemp> DM noted that the group were keen to hear from an Access to Work Specialist and offered to take back any questions or feedback.

Successes and challenges of delivering the Work Programme in Wales – Andrew Davies, Working Links

AD spoke about Working Links. The organisation has three owners, a charity (Mission Australia), a commercial organisation (Cap Gemini) and is part owned by the UK Government through Manpower. The work programme aims to move unemployed people into sustained employment and continue to support them during their employment. They do this by offering a wide range of bespoke opportunities based on their individual needs. Around 17% of their referrals have complex and in some cases, multiple health needs. They are seeing a high degree of referrals from disabled people who have recently been through work capability assessments. In the last year, 70% of the referrals received from people who are on disability related benefits have been designated as being unfit for work for at least 12 months.

Improving access to employment for people with mental health issues – Cherry Stewart, Mental Health

Occupational Therapist, Cardiff and Vale UHB.

CS introduced the project. It is a partnership between Mental Health Occupational Therapists and JobCentre Plus. Mental Health Occupational Therapists were seconded by the Cardiff and Vale LHB into JobCentre Plus to work frontline with JobCentre Plus Advisors working with individuals with mental health conditions in order to address their barriers to employment. Three Occupational Therapists then shared their experiences of working with individuals with mental health conditions, highlighting the barriers faced by the individual how they were overcome.

Due to time constraints, there was no time for a full discussion or questions. However one point was brought to PS's attention which he shared with the group. The issue was that Deaf people are unfairly losing or failing to gain employment on so-called "health and safety" grounds. PS encouraged Michelle Fowler and her colleagues to provide a short report to PS which he will then forward to both Co-Chairs of the Cross Party Group and to the Wales Disability Reference Group.

MI encouraged the group to forward any questions they may have for any of the speakers and he will ensure they reach the relevant person or organisation

MI thanked PS for organising the event and everyone for attending. The meeting was then drawn to a close.