



Cross-Party Autism Group

Minutes

Thursday 28 September 2023, 3.30-5pm
Tŷ Hywel, Cardiff Bay/ Microsoft Teams

Present: Mark Isherwood MS (chair), Chris Haines (secretary), Kyle Jamie Eldridge, Wendy Thomas, Donna Sharland, Shaun Bendle, Bill Fawcett, Daniel McNulty, Keith Ingram, Rachel Hazlewood, Ruth Rabet, Samantha Williams, Dr Sarah Broadhurst, Alexander Still, Yasmin Zahra, Ben Scott, Catrin Jones, Megan Thomas, Enya Morgan-Beattie, Victoria Morgan-Beattie, Elaine Jennings

Apologies: Claire Morgan, Sian Owen, Michal Blochowaik, Justice Hunt, Bill Powell, Clare-Anna Mitchell

1. Welcome and introduction

Mark Isherwood MS welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Senedd's Cross-party Autism Group and introduced the speakers.

2. Minutes of previous meeting

The [minutes](#) of the meeting held on Monday 17 April at Bangor University were agreed after being proposed and seconded as an accurate reflection.

3. Autism and politics

Kyle Jamie Eldridge spoke about his experiences since being elected to Abergavenny Town Council at the age of 25. He covered the strengths that autistic people can bring to public office, the barriers they face as well as the importance of increasing representation and participation.

Members listed a keen sense of right and wrong, honesty and integrity, thinking outside the box, extraordinary problem-solving skills and a difference perspective as just some of the many strengths that autistic people can bring.

4. National Neurodivergence Team

MI introduced Wendy Thomas, Head of Wales Neurodivergence Service, and Donna Sharland, Transformation Project Manager, and thanked them for

stepping it at short notice following a last-minute change to the agenda. WH provided an update on the work of the National Neurodivergence Team, explaining that her team's remit has been widened to include other neurodevelopmental conditions, such as ADHD and Tourette's syndrome. She assured attendees that the Welsh Government-funded team is still covering autism and it remains business as usual. WT told the meeting that the key focus of the National Neurodivergence Team is helping to deliver the Code of Practice on the Delivery of Autism Services.

WT highlighted that two e-learning modules – on understanding autism and effective communication – have been rolled out. She said the training has been co-produced with autistic people and shared by an advisory group. WT also highlighted communities of practice sessions aimed at upskilling professionals that the team has produced and are available at autismwales.org. DS outlined the group's work around ADHD including a scoping exercise to examine what good looks like. In closing, WT urged anyone who would like to get involved in the team's work to get in touch.

5. Equal Power Equal Voice

Shaun Bendle, Project Officer at Disability Wales, gave an overview of the Equal Power Equal Voice (EPEV) project. He explained that the mentoring programme aims to get more Black, Asian and ethnic minority people, women, LGBTQ+ people and disabled people into decision-making positions in Wales. SB told attendees that EPEV is a partnership between Disability Wales, Women's Equality Network Wales, Stonewall Cymru and Ethnic Minorities & Youth Support Team.

The programme aims to increase diversity of representation in public and political life in Wales by connecting those with experience with aspiring people. He raised concerns about the lack of disabled, ethnic minority and openly trans or non-binary members of the Senedd over the past 20 years. SB highlighted some of the successes of the programme, including the 2020 local elections which saw six community or county councillors elected. He said mentees have also gone on to hold board trustee roles, start their own businesses or community groups or become school governors. SB explained that the group is not currently recruiting but people can sign up for the mailing list to receive updates for next year.

MI said he has been a mentor on the EPEV project since it began, adding that participants with a variety of different protected characteristics have benefited from the programme.

6. Any other business and closing remarks

MI informed attendees that Chris Haines, will be standing down as the group's secretary when he leaves his role with National Autistic Society Cymru. He thanked him for his contribution. CH thanked everyone who had attended, spoken at or otherwise supported the group's meetings during his time as secretary. He said the charity hopes to appoint his successor in the coming months, with the aim of holding the group's next meeting in the new year.