



**Minutes / Cofnodion**  
**Cross Party Autism Group / Grŵp Trawsbleidiol Awtistiaeth**  
**December 14 Rhagfyr 2016**  
**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales**

**1 WELCOME / CROESO**

CPAG Chair Mark Isherwood AM, welcomed everyone to the first meeting of this new Assembly term in Cardiff. The meeting was attended by the following AMs: Hefin David; Dai Lloyd; David Rees; Mike Hedges, Angela Burns; Andrew RT Davies; and representatives were also there from the offices of Suzy Davies; Simon Thomas; and Nathan Gill.

**2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING / COFNODION A MATERION YN CODI**

The minutes were agreed to be an accurate account of the previous meeting.

**3 UPDATE ON THE WELSH GOVERNMENT AUTISM STRATEGY / DIWEDDARIAD AR STRATEGAETH AWTISTIAETH Y LLYWODRAETH**

NAS Cymru's Meleri Thomas informed the group that the new Welsh Government Autism Strategy has been published. Questions from the group were raised around progress of setting up Regional Partnership Boards and implementation of a Wales-wide adult diagnostic pathway. Members also asked about timescales and monitoring, given the commitment to keep specific autism legislation under review. Further questions arose around self-referral for children and support for secondary health conditions, often exacerbated by the long waits for support. Meleri Thomas informed the group that the Minister for Social Services and Public Health will be present at the next CPAG meeting. Mark Isherwood noted that evidence and experience of those from within the group will be crucial in monitoring the success of the new strategy.

**4 LAUNCH OF ABOUT ME APP / LANSIAD YR APP. ABOUT ME**

Professor Alka Ahuja of Aneurin Bevan University Health Board discussed the recent launch of the *About Me* app, a development of the autism passport already utilised within the Health Board. The aims are to improve communication between various professionals and families. It allows parents and children to access, 'hold' and share information. Members indicated a desire for consistency across Wales so that a diagnosis and support needs are recognised in different parts of the country.

**5 DISABLED LEARNERS IN FURTHER EDUCATION / DISGYBLION AC ANABLEDDAU YM MAES ADDYSG BELLACH**

Michael Imperato, a partner at Watkins and Gunn Solicitors, discussed proposed changes to the support available for pupils with autism wishing to move into further education (FE). It was suggested that the 'Review of Welsh Government Funded Post 16 Specialist Placements' published in October 2016 makes recommendations that could affect the learning of autistic pupils in FE, for example, we heard that current funding for specialist provision can be restricted to a maximum of two academic years, with three years only in exceptional circumstances, defined as being when a year is missed through illness. The idea that autistic pupils may need a longer placement to achieve their potential was evidenced by many of the group. Concerns were also raised about parity between disabled and non-disabled learners as well as colleges being seen to restrict progress of disabled learners by not

allowing them to move onto Level 2 or 3 courses. That parents and learners have to battle for appropriate support was also raised by several group members.

#### **6 UPDATE ON THE AUTISTIC WOMENS EMPOWERMENT PROJECT / DIWEDDARIAD AUTISTIC WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PROJECT**

Willow Holloway, founder of the Autistic Women's Empowerment Project, discussed the different presentation of autism in women and girls. As such, many females are left undiagnosed, misdiagnosed or without support. While autistic girls face many of the same challenges as autistic boys, it is said 'boys explode and girls implode'. This implosion, without appropriate support, can leave autistic girls and women vulnerable to further development of low self-esteem, low self-worth, anxiety and depression. Willow also described the particular societal barriers faced by autistic women and girls and the lack of professional and public understanding of the way autism can manifest itself in females

#### **7 UPDATE ON THE AUTISM DIRECTORY / DIWEDDARIAD THE AUTISM DIRECTORY**

Nadine Honeybone, founder of the Autism Directory updated the group on the development of new software, allowing users to locate autism friendly services, searching by area, service and various other parameters. The update also allows for ratings and reviews of businesses and services.

#### **8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS / UNRHYW FATER ARALL**

Lisa Phillips raised concerns relating to cuts in staffing hours for teaching assistants working in specialist units in Powys. Ann Fowler also raised concern over emergency respite for when carers fall ill. Other comments were made about autism understanding in schools, a lack of mental health hospital beds in North Wales, support for autistic people accessing public transport, with particular mention of airports, as well as the UK Government's commitment to reduce the disability employment gap. It was agreed to consider these points for future business.

#### **9 ACTIONS / CAMAU GWEITHREDU**

- Write to the Minister for Lifelong Learning and the Welsh Language to raise the particular concern surrounding the length of FE placements offered to learners with SEN.
- Write to the Minister for Social Services and Public Health raising concerns about support for autistic women and girls and asking her to ensure that as the new integrated autism service is rolled out across Wales, specific attention will be given to the needs of autistic women and girls.
- Write to Powys County Council Chief Executive for clarity on the reduction of staffing hours within specialist units.
- Write to the Minister for Social Services and Public Health to seek details on what emergency respite provision is available and what is being done to ensure carers are made aware of the support.

The next CPAG meeting will be in the Pierhead Building, at the National Assembly Wales, on February 8<sup>th</sup> 2017 12:15pm-13:15pm. The meeting will be the CPAG Annual General Meeting.