



**Minutes / Cofnodion**  
**Cross Party Autism Group / Grŵp Trawsbleidiol Awtistiaeth**  
**February 8 Chwefror 2017**  
**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales**

**1 WELCOME / CROESO**

CPAG Chair Mark Isherwood AM, welcomed everyone to meeting, which was attended by Officers Hefin David AM and Dai Lloyd AM, as well as Lee Waters AM, Jeremy Miles AM and David Rees AM.

**2 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING / CYFARFOD BLYNYDDOL**

Mark Isherwood was formally re-confirmed as Chair and announced Hefin David, Dai Lloyd and Jayne Bryant as group Officers.

**3 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. It was also agreed that following correspondence from the previous meeting, the Minister for Lifelong Learning and the Welsh Language, Alun Davies AM, would be invited to contribute to a future meeting of the group to discuss Further Education provision for autistic learners.

**4 PRESENTATION FROM BASW CYMRU**

Carol Davies of the British Association for Social Workers Cymru (BASW Cymru) informed the group of the work of the organisation in Wales and, more generally, how social workers can support autistic people and their families. Concerns were raised by the group around autism training, access to support in different parts of Wales, stress in the workforce, parent/carer advocacy for non-verbal individuals and pressure from local authorities to limit service availability. Carol recognised many of the issues raised and advised that BASW Cymru was there to support social workers in ensuring that everyone has access to the support they require to meet their needs.

**5 AUTISM AND EMPLOYMENT**

Christine Trevett, a daughter of, and parent of, someone on the autism spectrum discussed how her personal experiences have led to her concluding that far more targeted research and specific interventions are needed to improve employment prospects of autistic people in Wales. Christine noted that the National Autistic Society estimate of just 16% of autistic adults in full time employment in the UK is likely to be optimistic for Wales and that much needed projects, such as Engage to Change, aren't autism specific. Christine suggested that employers have a role to play in making work accessible too and discussed how 'employability jargon', much used in interviews and adverts, often puts autistic people at a disadvantage. The role of the Welsh Government autism employment ambassador was also raised, with Christine suggesting rather than being abolished, this role should be expanded.

**6 UPDATE FROM WELSH GOVERNMENT ON AUTISM STRATEGY AND INTEGRATED AUTISM SERVICE**

The Minister for Social Services and Public Health, Rebecca Evans AM, updated the group on how the Welsh Government is supporting autistic people and their families in Wales. The Minister set out the main priorities of the refreshed Autism Strategy which are assessment and diagnosis, meeting support needs and information and training. The Government are aiming to address these areas through the new integrated autism service that is currently being rolled out in Cardiff and Vale UHB, Cwm Taf UHB, Aneurin Bevan UHB and Powys THB.

The Minister advised that progress was being made in setting up an advisory group to monitor and evaluate the success of the integrated service and that she hopes they will first meet next month before starting work on the first annual progress report.

The Minister acknowledged that while many people present are in support of specific autism legislation, she is confident that the autism strategy and existing social services legislation and proposed additional learning needs legislation will be sufficient to meet existing needs. The Minister said that Government will legislate if gaps continue to exist but advised that introducing legislation is very difficult for them to do and can take a lot of time.

Questions over a lack of adult services in Pembrokeshire were raised. The Minister responded by saying that all Local Authorities have a duty to provide support if it is needed and where that is not happening, she would like to know.

Members of the group also highlighted the inclusion of autistic people and service users on Regional Partnership Boards as a priority. It was suggested that service user forums would help to fill gaps in knowledge and experience that currently exist.

The Minister said that when she meets with Regional Partnership Boards she regularly emphasises that autism should be a priority. Mark Isherwood noted that a lack of engagement with the autistic community remains an issue across Wales.

Another question was raised concerning the impact on social services of the forthcoming additional learning needs Bill. The Minister said she will continue to have discussions with colleagues across Government to ensure appropriate consideration is given to the impact of legislation in this area.

Another group member queried the referral process to the new integrated autism service and the Minister advised that this would usually be through a GP or Social Services.

More general concerns about the ALN Bill were raised. Hefin David advised that scrutiny is ongoing through the Children, Young People and Education Committee and many of the points raised were familiar to that committee.

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

Willow Holloway, of Autistic UK and the Autistic Women's Empowerment Project informed the group of ongoing consultation with autistic adults in collaboration with Men's Shed. Common themes emerged and they will continue to update the group as consultations continue.

Ann Fowler updated the group on an issue raised at the previous meeting regarding emergency respite. People can use carer's emergency cards where available. Ann added that people should also be aware of the role that hospital liaison nurses can play following an admission to hospital.

David Malins raised the issue of autism knowledge within emergency services and wider professionals who have a responsibility to support autistic people. This was supported by other members of the group who said that more need to be done to ensure professionals are equipped with skills and knowledge appropriate to their role.

## **9 ACTIONS / CAMAU GWEITHREDU**

The group will write to the Minister for Lifelong Learning and the Welsh Language to invite him a future meeting to discuss recent issues raised through the group.

The next CPAG meeting will be in at the National Assembly Wales, on June 14<sup>th</sup> 2017, 12:15pm-13:15pm, with the exact location yet to be confirmed.