

Cross Party Group on Disability

Minutes of the meeting held on 15th March 2017, Media Briefing Room,
Y Senedd, Cardiff Bay.

Present: Zoe Richards, Joe Powell, Kelly Stuart, Cat Jones, Alicja Zalesinska, Karen Warner, Heather Patterson, Rebecca Williams, Haqeeq Bostan, Rebecca Papanicolas, Jim Crowe, Rhian Davies, Patrick Mcnamara, Owen Williams, Rebecca Phillips, Katie McMahon, Mark Isherwood, Wendy Ashton, Mandi Glover, Trevor Palmer, Natasha Hirst, Jan Thomas, Rhian Nowell-Phillips.

Apologies: Peter Jones (Guide Dogs Cymru), Eleanor Williams (Human Rights Commission), Simon Thomas AM, Sian Gwenllian AM, Michelle Brown AM, Lynne Neagle AM, Janet Finch-Saunders AM, Sara Mosely (Mind Cymru)

1. Welcome and introductions.

Mark Isherwood AM, Acting Chair, welcomed everyone to the 1st Meeting of the 5th Assembly.

2. Election of Officers.

The group's first responsibility was to appoint the Secretary and Chair for the forthcoming year.

One nomination was received for the position of Secretary from Zoe Richards, Learning Disability Wales.

The nomination was accepted.

Proposed: Owen Williams

Seconded: Rhian Nowell-Phillips

Zoe Richards AM put his name forward as Chair.

The nomination was accepted.

Proposed: Owen Williams

Seconded: Rhian Davies

Although not present, the Secretary confirmed that Sian Gwenllian AM of Plaid Cymru, Michelle Brown AM of UKIP and Lynne Neagle AM of Labour are also officers of the group.

It was recognised that Wales Council of the Blind will continue to

produce the minutes of the meetings.

3. Presentation from CAPITA on Personal Independence Payments. (Haqeeq Bostan, Communications Director, PIP and Rebecca Papanicolas, Communications and Stakeholder Manager).

Haqeeq began by explaining DWP and Capita's roles in relation to the PIP process. The roles are clearly split. DWP set the policy, manage the application process, make the award decision, decide the monetary consideration and receive and control all client data.

Capita's responsibility is to manage and process the assessments and submit them to DWP.

Capita work in line with the DWP's PIP Policy Guide to carry out holistic assessments. The document is publicly available and any changes to this Guide are put out to consultation first.

Capita's remit is east and west Midlands and the whole of Wales. In his view, Capita work in an open and transparent way and they believe in the importance of putting the claimant at the heart of the process.

Rebecca then spoke about her role. She organises the stakeholder forums, one of which is held in Wales and welcomed those present to attend. Rebecca also deals with issues or concerns raised by stakeholders about their individual cases.

Rebecca continued to explain the assessment process in more detail. She stressed that anytime during the process, the claimant or advocate can contact them to discuss any queries they have. They may also submit a complaint and since the complaint process is separate from DWP, it won't impact their Decision.

In relation to further evidence, Rebecca confirmed that this does not need to be from a medical professional. This should come from the person who knows the claimant best. They also accommodate claimants who would find attending a centre too difficult by offering home assessments.

The Disability Assessors are registered health professionals including nurses, paramedics, physiotherapists and occupational therapists. They

are trained by Capita to carry out functional assessments, and approved by the DWP's Chief Medical Officer.

Rebecca reported that 540,000 assessments have been carried out so far, with over 61% being carried out in claimants' homes. They expect to carry out a further 760,000. 15% are paper-based the rest are face-to-face. 96% of assessments are completed under the 'normal rules' with 4% being for those with a terminal illness. They have a target of 2 days to complete SRTI claims, of which 93% are completed in this time. 90% of claims under the normal rules are completed within 40 days of referral.

Capita informed the group that they have received complaints from 1% of claimants.

Rebecca ended her presentation by quoting claimant experiences of the process from those who were happy with the service.

The presentation sparked lively questions and comments which include personal experiences. The first being around the inaccessibility of the presentation for people with sight loss, which consisted of Powerpoint slides. Rebecca agreed to circulate the document following the meeting:

Action: Rebecca Papanicolas to circulate presentation.

Other comments included:

- instances of clients with disabilities scoring zero on their PIP application, causing undue stress.
- clients feel tricked into answering in a particular way.
- people too scared to complain in case they lose their benefit.
- instances of assessors not recording client responses to questions correctly.
- assessors not sticking to schedule, changing assessment times and dates.
- instances of deafblind people's needs not being catered for at their assessment.

Capita admitted that sometimes they get it wrong and offered to investigate the individual queries raised at the meeting.

The Chair questioned Capita on the meaning of Holistic. Noting that any constituents who get in touch are on the autistic spectrum and therefore have little medical evidence to back up their claims and a holistic assessment process is needed to define support needs in a whole life scenario.

Questions were also raised around the quality of the training given to the Assessors, which was triggered by the amount of issues relating to assessors not understanding the various disabilities. After some discussion, recommendations were made to Capita to hold more meaningful stakeholder group meetings in Wales and disability organisations to be involved in the assessor training process.

Action: Group to write to UK Minister regarding issues raised in item 3.

4. Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People in England and Wales, Shadow Report. (Rhian Davies, Disability Wales)

Rhian Davies launched the Wales report and Welsh issues which forms part of the GB Alternative Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of Disabled People. The report features recommendations to Welsh Government on actions to take to improve how disability rights are addressed in Wales.

The report is structured around the Articles in the Convention.

The key articles within the report include:

Article 4: Government taking all necessary steps to ensure the human rights and fundamental freedom of disabled people are upheld.

Article 9: Disabled people having equal access to fully participate in society.

Article 13: Access to justice. To ensure people have the right advice and access to support services.

Article 16: Strengthen strategies to end Violence, exploitation, abuse and hate crime.

Article 19: The right to live independently. An opportunity to strengthen the Framework for Action on Independent Living.

Article 24: Equal access to education. An opportunity to look at the Welsh Government's Additional Learning Needs Bill in relation to what the UN Convention says.

Article 27: Equal access to employment opportunities.

The Report was distributed to those present and is also available on Disability Wales' website.

Action: Group to outline recommendations to Welsh Government on actions to take forward how disability rights are addressed in Wales.

5. AOB

Further comments were received around PIP.

Fiona McDonald reported that at a recent PIP forum meeting, it was apparent that people are not complaining about the PIP process and decisions because they are too afraid.

Lynda Dixon from Social Services was concerned to report that some PIP applications were getting lost in the post and not reaching the DWP. She cited incidents where completed forms had travelled across the country before landing on her desk.

6. Future Dates and Themes

The next meeting will be held in north Wales. The date and theme are to be confirmed. Any suggestions for themes were welcome.

7. Close

MI thanked those who attended and set an action for the group to connect with the relevant officers and newly appointed Assembly Members to champion disability rights.

He also stressed the importance of submitting complaints to Capita and welcomed claimants doing so under the auspices of the CPGD. In addition, he advised people to inform their AM's.

The group thanked MI for his continuing support of the CPGD.