

# **CROSS PARTY GROUP ON DEAFNESS (CPGD)**

Notes of the Cross-Party Group on Deafness meeting (CPGD) and 2019 AGM held in the Scottish Parliament, Holyrood, Edinburgh in Committee Room 3 (TG.60-CR3 The Fleming Room) on Wednesday 4 September 2019 at 1.00pm.

**PRESENT: Mark Griffin MSP - Convenor**  
**Colin Beattie MSP - Vice Convenor**  
**Alison Johnstone MSP**

Janis McDonald - Secretariat  
Lois Drake - NDCS Scotland  
Avril Hepner - BDA Scotland  
Alan Dalziel – Action on Hearing Loss Scotland  
Enrique Canton – D.E.A.F  
Elizabeth Adam – Tayside Deaf Hub  
Jean McAllister – BATOD Scotland  
Sheila Mackenzie – Scottish Sensory Centre  
Rachel O’Neil – University of Edinburgh  
Alana Harper – Deaf Links  
Adam Hillhouse – N.E.S.S.  
Liz Kraft – RCSLT  
Sally Shaw – Ideas for Ears  
Gillian Mitchell – Sight Action  
John Mitchell – Individual member

## **IN ATTENDANCE:**

Derek Todd, deafscotland; Alex Dunn and Annie Milovic, Scottish Government Equalities Unit; Charlene Johnstone, Deaf Links (Student); Gillian Baxter, BATOD Scotland

## **LANGUAGE SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS:**

Andrew Dewey (BSL / English Interpreter)  
Helen Dunipace (BSL / English Interpreter)  
Gail Richardson (Electronic Note-taker)  
Linda Wilson (Electronic Note-taker)

## **1. WELCOME:**

Mark Griffin MSP, Convenor welcomed everyone to the meeting. Everyone introduced themselves for the purposes of communication

support and information. Mark explained the meeting would be suspended in favour of the AGM as the Minister for Older People and Equalities, Christina McKelvie MSP, was running late. We will resume the general meeting when she arrives.

## **2. APOLOGIES:**

Teri Devine, Action on Hearing Loss Scotland; Lorna Armstrong, Hearing Link Scotland; Denise McClung, SISG; Isabella Goldie, Deafblind Scotland; Donald Richard, deafscotland; Jill Bradshaw, ATLA Scotland; Amanda Wilson, Highland Council SHHELS; Kim Hartley-Kean, RCSLT; Philip Gerrard, Deaf Action; Mags Grieg, SRLPDC (ex SASLI).

Mark Griffin MSP closed the AGM – note is separate.

### **Minister for Older People and Equalities**

Christina McKelvie MSP, Minister for Older People and Equalities was welcomed by the Convenor and asked to speak, noting she was standing in for her colleague.

The Minister apologised for delays in returning to Edinburgh from Dumfries and she agreed to pass good wishes from the group to Clare Haughey, MSP, Minister for Mental Health. She stated she had noted communications, briefings and recommendations provided by the secretariat. She stressed the need to use the social model of disability, the need for society to change and the need to develop policy to address barriers such as inaccessible communication, low expectations and discrimination.

She expected policy changes would support the reduction of negative attitudes, breaking down of barriers and improving design to support inclusion, access and participation. The Minister gave an example from her own local area of a new Councillor who is a BSL user and how it is reasonable to consider being a policy maker as well as an influencer, utilising funds in place to support access to democracy. She listed “Fairer Scotland for Disabled People”, which outlines 5 ambitions covering support services, decent income, fair working lives, accessible places and right to take part. Some progress has been made but there is much more to do. A plan has been published (2016) and the Scottish Government (SG) is committed to the principles enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The Minister then moved on to human rights noting her responsibilities and the SG view, formed after extensive engagement, that A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People was not ambitious enough. The Employment Action Plan was created to strengthen opportunities for those affected by disabilities through its three key themes: supporting employers, supporting those with disabilities into work; and supporting young people make transitions from school. Leading by example, the SG has just published a recruitment and retention plan.

Covering the See Hear Strategy, the Minister noted the aim of improving care and opportunities through the strategy launched in 2014. It provides a framework across sensory impairment arguing for seamless provision through care assessment, support and access. £14 million was provided to develop this partnership approach and deliver changes in a flexible way. Following up with the topic of social isolation and loneliness, the Minister highlighted links with deafness across the spectrum.

“Connected Scotland”, an initiative with £1M attached, is designed to reach people living with loneliness. That it is ground breaking work that has tangible outcomes was particularly important to the Minister. She also mentioned the approach where the implementation group are stakeholders and many disability groups are involved, reinforcing the need for good quality communication. The funds need to attract new ideas and the Befriending Network has already presented a good one.

The social security system was informed by the principles of inclusive communication and it was noted that CPGD Convenor was particularly good at challenging the government in this area. The underpinning values include dignity and respect. The experience panels, charter of rights and accessibility are all using learning from “communication for all” and that will be taken into other policy areas. By early 2021, the Scottish system will be welcoming new claims for working age people, young people and older adults. From April 2020, any family living in Scotland with a child getting the higher rate of Disability Living Allowance will be eligible for a winter heating allowance. Caring responsibilities and roles were also mentioned. The Minister concluded her remarks to take questions remarking on her pride in the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 and work being taken forward on Inclusive Communication through her association with Motor Neurone Disease.

Q1: Highland has seen tangible benefits from rolling our training with nursing staff. Is there a way and/or an appetite to make deaf/sensory awareness training mandatory for professionals?

Response: Supporting training as social worker by profession, I'm not sure how we could currently commit to mandatory training. We are keen to see both BSL Classes and SQA/relevant qualifications develop. The Highland work with nurses is a great example that I will pass on to colleagues. Funding has been committed to teacher training. I will take back the mandatory aspect.

Q2: Tayside

The See Hear strategy is a great innovation and well respected however the response across Scotland is variable. How can it be evaluated and improved, particularly in areas that are less advanced?

Response: We plan to review, identify challenges and share good practice and hope that everyone has the opportunity to feed into that approach. Once the gaps and recommendations are identified, we will make progress with and through COSLA. The Action Plan is scheduled to be updated next year (2020).

In addition we are conducting a full review of the public sector equality duty and where the duty is working, where its not and where it could be strengthened. That may provide another opportunity for you and the Cross Party Group membership to feed in improvement ideas.

Q3: Central Belt

I agree and was heartened by your view that many difficulties for those with hearing loss are easily fixable and ask about resources in certain areas. Problems common in community halls and other common meeting spaces are caused by acoustics, noise levels and audio equipment examples being. Most people affected by deafness are not BSL users and need other solutions including good environments which are not right at the moment: there are links between deafness and dementia and age related hearing loss is a great example of the daily difficulties in lunch clubs and suchlike. The infrastructure could and should be fixed for social, public consultation and leisure purposes. Those **not** participating cannot be measured. What plans are there to support and resource equality "access in English" for the considerable amount of people affected by deafness, isolation and not BSL users?

Response: This takes us to technical matters, planning buildings and developing understanding. We have been through a mega planning bill about accessible buildings and there are many amendments but they do not cover the things you are raising.

It was noted that buildings too were an issue as well as "communication

access” supports such as hearing loops, PA systems, lighting, audibility and reverberation.

Q4: National

Related to the See Hear review, is there an opportunity to have hearing screening programmes developed? For example in care homes and other areas?

Response: A good idea. I will raise this with colleagues in Health and Social Care. It could be looked at for people in care for example. I have an example of the benefit of more general screening approach with a relative who did benefit from being persuaded to take a hearing test at their optician’s appointment. We are keen to look at prevention and effective interventions so let me come back to you.

Q5: National

I note that dementia can be delayed with improved hearing however BSL users need communication too. We are looking for future care placements to be “BSL ready”. We ask again about training, upskilling care staff in communications and language, budgets for Sign Language Interpreters (and other communication support).

Response: As Minister for Older People I have responsibilities that include hearing loss, mobility loss and dementia. We are looking to the future as we will have more over-70s soon and future proofing is important. With the Stirling University Iris Murdoch Centre, we are looking at an inspiration centre.

It was noted that the Iris Murdoch Centre was not especially deaf or BSL aware and the Minister would take that up with centre staff.

Q6: Central Belt

The point about screening is just as critical for younger children and educational attainment. As a parent and mother of a child with glue ear, I note we have lost the testing at age four and a half. Can I ask about a response to the NDCS Report: specialist teachers of the deaf being replaced by other general teachers, the squeeze on specialist services, an aging profile of specialist teachers, the lack of opportunities and support for teachers to increase and improve skills, and meeting the needs of our young people currently not attaining as well as hearing peers?

Response: General Teaching Council are updating their competency

standards. The Scottish Sensory Centre is being funded to support local authorities teacher development and we want to join things up, including workforce planning and create a CPD route for teachers coming in and for retraining. I will take details and talk to you more. There was money for young people with additional support needs (ASN) which might help in some way. The mental health task force and work on CAHMS that was announced yesterday may help too. We will get that information to you all.

It was noted that there is a dilution of expertise when working across a range of needs and there was a growing gap, lack of expertise and experience across deafness.

At this point the Convenor ended the questions and thanked the Minister for her time and excellent contribution to the meeting across a range of topics.

An attendee requested some blinds be closed to remove distractions.

### **3. MINUTES of the LAST MEETINGS:**

The Minutes of the previous meetings were passed.

### **4. New Undergraduate Degree for BSL Users:**

Rachel O'Neill from Moray House introduced the topic and explained her job, the focus is on training teachers of deaf children in Scotland. It is half a masters course and quite demanding, not just CPD.

She spoke to a paper on the undergraduate degree which was developed following a survey carried out in 2016.

The survey found out that 50% of teachers of deaf children needed to work with children who sign and only half of them had the level of fluency needed. Her proposal was to look at a course in place for fluent Gaelic speakers who come on the course and train to be a primary school teacher and do their third year out in a Gaelic speaking school.

This course will run parallel teaching people in SCQ level 6 in BSL and they would become primary school teachers and do placements in English medium spoken language environments using interpreters or speech. In third year, they will be in a deaf school and in fourth year write their dissertation.

The plan is going through committee stages at the moment and Moray House need to negotiate with placement providers, the General Teaching Council and others. It is not proposed that all teachers of deaf

children need to be fluent in sign language because not all children use BSL but Scotland needs teachers who are using sign either BSL or SSE. It is hoped the university will be appoint two members of staff to support this course. Rachel has a development role and will also do a pre-enrolment course in English to help people get their English level up.

The Convener invited questions/discussion. Discussion considered levels of BSL fluency and qualification; consultation; ability and capability to learn; replacing an aging workforce; trying new approaches; increasing standards of competency; placement and learning opportunities; frequency of intake (every two years); modern language teacher development; parity with other language teaching; changes in deaf education and for those with additional support needs; and age related learning.

Overall the initiative was welcomed and everyone was invited to contribute to the consultation.

## **5. AOCB**

There was no time for AOCB.

## **6. DATE of NEXT MEETING**

Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2019.