

Cross Party Group on Disability

Chaired by: Mark Isherwood MS

19th May 2020, 4pm-5pm

virtual meeting

Present: Mark Isherwood MS (Senedd Cymru), Melanie Andrews (Motor Neurone Disease Association), Chris Bennett (Motor Neurone Disease Association), Karen Berrell (Joining the Dots), Tracey Blockwell (Disability Advice Project), Dave Bracher (Spinal Injuries Association), Carmel Condon (Senedd Cymru), Lorraine Cosgrove (Versus Arthritis), Monique Craine (Monique's Coaching and Consultancy Services), Wayne Crocker (Mencap Cymru), Tony Crowhurst (Disability Advice Project), Nathan Davies (Individual), Rhian Davies (Disability Wales), Kripen Dhrona (British Polio Fellowship), Irina Erchova (Cardiff University), William Fawcett (Individual), Sara Flay (Legacy International Group), Mandi Glover (Disability Wales), Simon Green (Bridgend Coalition of Disabled People), Tom Hall (BLESMA), Annette Hewitson (Wrexham County Council), Willow Holloway (Autistic UK), Ceridwen Hughes (Same but Different), Julian John (Delsion Delsion), Megan John (Disability Wales), Debbie Johnson (PSS), Gary Jones (Wales Mobility and Driving Assessment Service), Susanne Jones (Adra), Petra Kennedy (Merthyr Tydfil Institute for the Blind), Grace Krause (Learning Disability Wales), Maureen Lee (First Choice Housing Association), Cath Lewis (Children in Wales), Louise McGrath (Wales Council for Deaf People), Shelley McGuire (Newport Arthritis Support), Terry Mills (Unite the Union), Nathan Owen (RNIB), Trevor Palmer (Disability Wales), Tessa Polniaszek (Thinking Diversity CIC), Joe Powell (All People First), Grace Quantock (Individual), Sarah Rees (Senedd Cymru), Zoe Richards (Learning Disability Wales), Angharad Roberts (Grwp Llandrillo Menai), Tricia Roberts (Flintshire Disability Forum), Karen Robson (Action on Hearing Loss), Simon Rose (Learning Disability Wales), Adele Rose-Morgan (Joining the Dots), Deborah Shaffer (Fair Treatment for the Women of Wales), Stephanie Shobiye (Autistic UK), Kelly Stuart (All Wales People First), Alison Tarrant (Individual), Jan Thomas (Flintshire Disability Forum), Megan Thomas (Disability Wales), Folkert Veenstra (Accessibility Powys), Jill Wadley (Individual), Melanie Warburton (Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council), Andrea Wayman (Elite Supported Employment), Kat Williams (Autistic UK), Owen Williams (Wales Council of the Blind), Rachel Williams (Parkinson's UK - Cymru), Mark Wilson (UCU Wales), Rebecca Phillips (Wales Council of the Blind - Minutes).

Apologies: Vin West

1. Welcome and Introductions.

The Chair welcomed the group to the first virtual meeting of the Cross Party Group on Disability.

MI informed the group that he had received the Adult Social Services Covid-19 Pandemic guidance from Jane Hutt MS - guidance about the changes made to the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 by the Coronavirus Act 2020.

PRESENTATIONS:

1. Roadmap out of lockdown & disabled people – Rhian Davies, Disability Wales.

RD highlighted the importance of ensuring disabled people are involved in the planning as Wales eases out of coronavirus lockdown to ensure disabled people are not further discriminated against. RD

specifically referenced two Welsh Government documents, '**Leading Wales out of the Coronavirus Pandemic**' and '**Unlocking our Society and Economy**'.

In terms of the 'Leading Wales out of the Pandemic' document, RD reported that Welsh Government does make a commitment to ensuring equality issues and considerations are taken into account. However, it mainly refers to the Future Generations Act. In order to fully support disabled people, equality and human rights need to be taken into account, in particular, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People. RD also highlighted the language used within the document, referring to people as being 'vulnerable', 'disadvantaged', 'marginalised'. Disabled people want to remove such terms and instead focus on the barriers that society creates.

RD reported the inconsistencies of the shielding letters. Some received them but felt they didn't need to be shielded and visa versa. She also reported that there was a lot of fear and anxiety around shielding and being seen as vulnerable.

In terms of easing out of lockdown, the current tone seems to favour supporting the young and fit back to work whilst continuing to shield older people and those with underlying conditions. RD expressed her concern that disabled people will be last out of lockdown, creating further concern around the sustainability of keeping people shielded. The new measures need to take into account different impairments and how people interact with the environment and society in general.

RD felt that the Welsh Government's cautious approach out of lockdown gives people time to get involved in the planning. Disabled people need to be fully involved in informing and influencing policies.

Disability Wales has long been lobbying for Welsh Government to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People into Welsh law and policy and now is the time to be doing that. Ensuring disabled people's rights are taken into account and delivered.

RD concluded by highlighting some of the priority areas of work as Wales eases out of lockdown:

- restore the duties local authorities have under the Social Services and Wellbeing Wales Act
- tackling digital exclusion
- access to shopping
- ensuring disabled people can work from home.
- unemployment in Wales has doubled - employment schemes that support people back into work must be inclusive of disabled people.
- ensure social distancing measures are put in place in terms of transport, education, sport, leisure, culture and tourism - taking into account people's lived experiences and how different impairments interact with others.

RD added that the issues will also be discussed at the Disability Equality Forum, Chaired by Jane Hutt MS, Deputy Minister and Chief Whip.

2. £500 Care worker payment – Rhian Davies, Disability Wales.

RD highlighted the lack of clarity around Welsh Government's announcement of a £500 bonus for care staff. Disability Wales believe that PAs recruited via direct payments should also receive the bonus and have raised the issue with Welsh Government. No decision has been made, as yet.

3. The effect of the coronavirus pandemic on people with learning disabilities - Joe Powell, All Wales People First.

JP informed the group that they have been asking their members and the people they support about their experiences of the coronavirus pandemic.

They asked 4 questions:

1. What the effect of the situation has had on the organisation and staff
2. What effect the situation has had on the people they support
3. What strategies and activities that have implemented
4. Any other shielding issues

Key findings included:

- most people felt isolated and lonely
- struggling to remember the reason for the lockdown
- suicide attempts
- support worker assault
- lack of clarity around the £500
- mixed experiences of support workers, some entering homes and some not
- difficulty accessing shopping online
- confusion around the statements from Welsh Government and Westminster
- reports of people developing new IT and leadership skills

JP reported that there was nothing substantive being reported in terms of shielding. All Wales People First will release a report at every phase of the crisis and JP agreed to share with the group.

He added that the full report is available on their website.

4. Shielding and Accessible information - Zoe Richards, Learning Disability Wales.

ZR firstly informed the group that Learning Disability Wales, Disability Wales, All Wales People First, All Wales Parent's Forum and Mencap Cymru initially wrote to the First Minister to outline concerns around the inaccessibility of the shielding letters sent to people with a learning disability.

ZR highlighted some of the supporting issues presented in a joint letter to the Minister for Health and Social Services:

- No logic behind those who receive a shielding letter and those who don't and there is confusion around who is vulnerable and who should be shielding, with both having different elements of support.
- Some parents of disabled children have not received a shielding letter causing a particular problem for parents who are working as they are unable to access some of the support being offered or take time off work.
- Many people with a learning disability have moved away from their registered address to stay with friends or a relative who are better able to support them during this time. However, this has resulted in them losing eligibility to the support being offered in the shielding letter such as priority shopping or local authority food boxes.
- Understanding your rights as a person with a learning disability if you are living with other people who are shielding and how that impacts on your life, particularly in a group home or a supported

living situation. If you cannot exercise your rights because of the people you are living with.

- Support for mental wellbeing during the 12 weeks. What is available for people who are shielding and what is the status of those who are shielding in terms of rapid access to vaccines. When vaccines are produced will people with a disability be in the priority group to receive the vaccinations.

ZR ended by informing the group that they are still awaiting a response to the letter and for an EasyRead version of the shielding letter.

5. Comments and Questions.

MI reported that he had received a lot of correspondence from people highlighting the problems they are experiencing such as people with sight loss struggling with social distancing and accessing online shopping, and parents of children with severe and complex needs still not receiving support and denied access to hubs.

1. Which local authorities have actively implemented the easement on the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act?

RD responded: She was not aware of the information being available. Welsh Government emphasised in their modified guidance that they wanted local authorities to go as far as possible to continue to implement the act. RD agreed to find out if there is a plan.

2. Unemployment projects facing huge challenges due to the disabled people they supported into work having to compete more than ever. Important to hold Access to Work accountable during the return to work. During the lockdown, Access to Work has not processed any new claims for disabled people and the whole department has been moved to deal with Universal Credit applications. There are a number of people carrying out their jobs but are not being supported through the grant.

ZR responded: Learning Disability Wales is carrying out work for the Engage to Change project, looking at what employment will look like as Wales moves out of covid. They will be writing to Ken Skates MS. ZR welcomed input from the group.

3. RNIB and Guide Dogs are calling for the introduction of a Coronavirus Courtesy Code to enable safe social distancing.

MI suggested sharing the document with WLGA and Council Leaders.

4. Concerns that cancer treatments are being postponed leaving people feeling anxious and creating a backlog.

5. Concerns raised around the mental health impact on service users. Particularly those who have been encouraged to live independently and have now had this taken away from them. They need to re-build their confidence

6. There is concern that the volunteers who have been supporting people in their communities will disappear after lockdown. Need to look at ways of encouraging them to remain.

MI suggested the group pursue this with WCVA and the CVCs.

7. People with dyslexia, dyspraxia or ADHD are often self employed and can have difficulty claiming financial support and may get behind on paperwork There is concern they will not be able to claim assistance without support.

ZR responded: Public Health Wales have a new campaign around mental health in Wales during covid.

8. Children in Wales are keen to collect the experiences of parents with disabled children and organisations who support them to help inform their response to the Children and Young people in Education Committee.

MI is currently writing to the Education Minister. He agreed to copy Children in Wales into the email.

9. The UK Government is looking to enshrine working from home as a right after coronavirus. Perhaps this is something that could be achieved in Wales.

RD responded - working from home should be covered under reasonable adjustments but this has often been refused. Given the collective experience of working from home during this time it will be less difficult for them to argue.

10. A large portion of disabled children have one-to-one support. If staff have to continue safe distance, how are children going to access education? Online education isn't always accessible. Is there a risk that Wales will follow England in moving funding support out of legal obligation?

6. Agreed actions:

- RD to seek clarity around which local authorities have implemented the easement on the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act and whether there is a plan in place.
- contact WCVA and CVCs to encourage community volunteers to remain after lockdown.
- write to DWP to highlight the concerns around the Access to Work process, ensuring the service will properly support disabled people as Wales eases out of lockdown. ZR to also include in her letter to Ken Skates MS.

6. Next Meeting.

The next meeting will be scheduled to take place within a month. Date and time to be confirmed.

The next meeting will feature a presentation from Jane Hutt MS, Deputy Minister and Chief Whip.