

All Party Parliamentary Group on Deafness

Meeting | 11.30am 15 September 2015

Room U, Portcullis House

Agenda

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of the last meeting
3. A common purpose for the deaf sector
4. Subtitle!
5. Action plan on hearing loss and hearing screening
6. Regulation of communication and language professionals
7. Hearing aid provision
8. Any other business
9. Next meeting

Minutes of the last meeting

Extraordinary General Meeting | 11am 30 June 2015

W1, Westminster Hall, Houses of Parliament

Present

- Neil Carmichael MP, Conservative
- Kate Green MP, Labour
- Lilian Greenwood MP, Labour
- The Rt. Hon. the Lord Hunt of King's Heath OBE, Labour
- The Rt. Hon. Sir Gerald Kaufman MP
- Ian Mearns MP, Labour
- Teresa Pearce MP, Labour
- The Lord Shipley OBE, Liberal Democrats

Apologies

- Peter Aldous MP, Conservative
- Sir Peter Bottomley MP, Conservative
- Jim Fitzpatrick MP, Labour
- The Lord Rennard MBE, Liberal Democrat
- The Lord Swinfen, Conservative
- Eilidh Whiteford MP, Scottish National
- The Baroness Wilkins, Labour

In attendance

- Jim Edwards, Chair, UK Council on Deafness
- Dan Sumners, Senior Policy Adviser, Signature (minutes)

Election of a chair and officers

1. In the absence of a chair, Lord Hunt opened the meeting and asked for nominations for a chair. Lilian Greenwood MP was nominated by Kate Green MP and seconded by Neil Carmichael MP. Lilian Greenwood MP was unanimously returned as chair.
2. The following Members were returned as vice chairs:
 - a. Neil Carmichael MP
 - b. Ian Mearns MP
 - c. The Lord Shipley OBE

A common purpose for the deaf sector

3. Jim Edwards informed the group that, over the past year, the UK Council on Deafness had led an initiative to find a statement of common purpose for organisations concerned with deafness and hearing loss. After consulting a wide range of organisations and individuals it produced that statement.
4. The task force that had overseen the process was identifying chairs to lead the various strands of work that were identified. They would form the bulk of a steering group that would oversee progress towards the vision and mission.
5. The task force was asking organisations and individuals to become founder signatories to the statement. The statement would be launched at a public event in the autumn.
6. The Group agreed to become a founder signatory. A detailed presentation of the initiative would be made at the next meeting by the chair of the task force, Craig Crowley MBE, chief executive officer of Action Deafness.

Work programme

7. Dan Sumners presented a suggested work programme for the year based on the previous work of the Group and recent developments. Following discussion, the Group agreed it would focus on the following, in order of priority.

Subtitles

8. Lilian Greenwood MP had introduced a Private Members' Bill. It was 12th in the ballot and received its first reading on 26 June. The Bill aimed to amend the 12 year old Communications Act (2003) and introduce regulations for subtitles, audio description and signing on video-on-demand services.
9. In July 2013 the Government promised to consider legislation on subtitles in 2016 if progress had not been made. Progress so far had been slow. A recent report from regulator ATVOD found that some platforms, including BT and Virgin, provided no access services and over 96 per cent of Sky On Demand content was without subtitles.
10. The Group agreed to work on the issue of subtitles as a matter of priority. Action on Hearing Loss, which was leading the campaign, would be asked to make a presentation at the next meeting.

Provision of hearing aids

11. In the past year, some clinical commissioning groups had proposed rationing the provision of hearing aids via the NHS. North Staffordshire CCG approved such rationing on 4 March. Organisations concerned with deafness and hearing loss had been opposing these developments.
12. The Group agreed to support the campaign to retain full NHS hearing aid provision. Action on Hearing Loss would be asked to make a presentation at the next meeting.

Awareness of deafness and hearing loss

13. Neil Carmichael MP said there needed to be better awareness of deafness and hearing loss. Often it was a hidden disability and some were reluctant to tell others about their hearing loss.
14. The Group previously supported the Hearing Screening for Life campaign. It was a coalition of charities who were calling on the government to introduce a hearing screening programme for everyone at the age of 65.
15. One of the strands of work under the common purpose initiative was awareness of deafness and hearing loss. Signature would chair the group that would lead it.

16. The Group agreed to support the hearing screening campaign. Action on Hearing Loss would be asked to make a presentation at the next meeting. Signature would support the group to explore other ways of raising awareness.

Adult education and employment

17. People who were deaf or had a hearing loss were enjoying better access to employment, but they were still less likely to be employed than hearing people.

18. The Access to Work scheme - which provided financial support for aids, adaptations and support workers – had helped many deaf people into work. However, changes to the scheme over the past two years had effected deaf people disproportionately.

19. Many people still reported employers not fulfilling their duties under the Equality Act. Some were unwilling to make reasonable adjustments, or change their working practices in anticipation of recruiting more disabled people.

20. Employment prospects were of course closely linked with access to education. Level of education affected someone's ability to get a job, and the types of job they were suitable for.

21. Over a fifth of working age people with difficulty hearing had no qualifications, and only around a quarter were educated to degree level. Whilst these figures were improving, if people who were deaf or had a hearing loss are to have the same opportunity as hearing people, access to education must be improved.

22. Ian Mearns MP asked about provision of education for deaf adults. If deaf young people were leaving school without qualifications, did they have the opportunity to gain them as adults?

23. The Group agreed education and its impact on employment was an area that needed to be explored. The secretariat would speak to education providers, the National Deaf Children's Society, the Royal Association for Deaf People and others, and arrange a presentation for a subsequent meeting.

24. The secretariat would also keep the group informed of developments relating to Access to Work.

Inquiry into the cost of minority language recognition for BSL

25. Although it was indigenous to the United Kingdom and the first language of thousands of people, the government had not ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages with respect to British Sign Language (BSL).

26. Perceived financial cost was possibly the main reason BSL had not been recognised as a minority language. The Group's previous Chair therefore asked the secretariat to plan an inquiry that would estimate the economic, social and individual costs of recognition. The inquiry report would help politicians, policy makers and campaigners form a strategy for providing better access for people whose first or main language is BSL.

27. The Group agreed the inquiry needed to be done in this Parliament. However, it would be wise to wait for the BSL (Scotland) Bill to be enacted and monitor its impact.

Next meeting

28. The Group would meet after the summer recess. The secretariat would arrange a date.

A common purpose for the deaf sector

1. At the last meeting, Jim Edwards informed the Group the UK Council on Deafness had facilitated the development of a statement of common purpose for the deafness and hearing loss sector. The Group agreed to be a signatory to it.
2. Since the meeting we have identified the six chairs of the mission groups:
 - a. awareness: Signature (Jim Edwards);
 - b. education: NatSIP (Lindsey Rousseau);
 - c. employment: RAD (Jan Sheldon);
 - d. information: Hearing Link (Lorraine Gailey);
 - e. prevention: Action on Hearing Loss (Paul Breckell); and
 - f. services: Deafblind UK (Jeff Skipp).
3. The chairs form the bulk of a steering group that will oversee progress towards the vision and mission. They are joined by Jane Cordell of Getting Equal and the chair, Craig Crowley of Action Deafness.
4. Over 50 organisations have already signed the statement, with the aim of 80 before the launch in October/November. Most are concerned exclusively with deafness, deafblindness or hearing loss, but the list of other types of organisations is growing.
5. Craig Crowley will attend to update Members on the latest developments and answer questions.
6. Members are asked to consider how they and the Group could help to increase the list of signatories.
7. Signatories to the statement are
 1. Action Deafness
 2. Action for Deafness
 3. Action on Hearing Loss
 4. ADEPT
 5. appa
 6. APPG on Deafness
 7. Association of Lipspeakers
 8. Association of Sign Language Interpreters
 9. Association of Verbatim Speech to Text Reporters
 10. BID Services

11. Brian Archbold
12. British Association of Teachers of the Deaf
13. British Deaf Association
14. Cambridgeshire Hearing Help
15. Chief Officers' Group of Third Sector Deaf Organisations
16. Clarion Interpreting
17. Cochlear Implanted Children's Support Group
18. Cumbria DeafVision
19. Deaf Direct
20. Deafblind UK
21. Deafconnect
22. Deafness Cognition and Language Research Centre, University College London
23. Deafness Support Network
24. deafPlus
25. Department of Languages and Intercultural Studies, Heriot Watt University
26. The Ear Foundation
27. Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education
28. Gloucestershire Deaf Association
29. Gwen Carr
30. HearFirst
31. Hearing Link
32. Hearing Loss and Deafness Alliance
33. Hertfordshire Hearing Advisory Service
34. Home Counties Cochlear Implant Group
35. Jane Cordell
36. Louise Tonks
37. Manchester Deaf Centre
38. National Association of Deafened People
39. National Cochlear Implant Users Association
40. National Community Hearing Association
41. National Deaf Children's Society
42. National Sensory Impairment Partnership
43. NHS Grampian
44. Nottinghamshire Deaf Society
45. Phonak UK
46. Reablement Team, Social Services, Southampton City Council
47. Royal Association for Deaf People
48. Scottish Council on Deafness
49. Sense
50. Sign Solutions
51. Signature
52. SignHealth
53. Social Research with Deaf People, University of Manchester
54. South Wales Cochlear Implant Support Group
55. StageTEXT
56. UK Deaf Sport
57. Visual Language Professionals

Subtitle!

1. At the last meeting the Group agreed to work on the issue of subtitles as a matter of priority.
2. The 2003 Communications Act led to huge improvements in the provision of access services such as subtitles, allowing people with hearing loss to gain equal access to traditional linear television. But the equal access to television services granted by Parliament has been taken away by technology outpacing legislation as it does not cover 'catch-up' or 'on-demand' services. This means that 80 per cent don't offer any subtitles.
3. At the last meeting Members were informed Lilian Greenwood MP had introduced a Private Members' Bill which aimed to amend the 12 year old Communications Act (2003). It will compel the regulator, currently the Authority for Television on Demand (ATVOD), to consult with the public and ensure that a code is created to provide mandatory levels of access services on Video-on-Demand. The Bill will receive its second reading on 20 November.
4. The Bill is in line with the Government's direction of travel. In July 2013, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport published 'Connectivity, Content and Consumers', which stated that if enough progress was not being made by 2016 they would consider legislation.
5. Parliamentarians can discuss the Bill and the wider campaign in detail at a drop-in on 14 October in Room U, Portcullis House, 10am-12pm.
6. Members are encouraged to engage with the Minister of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Ed Vaizey MP, to urge the Government to adopt the content of the Bill. We can also facilitate meetings with people who are deaf or have a hearing loss if a first-hand discussion about the impact of this issue would be beneficial.
7. Action on Hearing Loss is leading the [Subtitle!](#) campaign. They will attend to update Members on the latest developments and answer questions

Action plan on hearing loss and hearing screening

1. In March 2015, NHS England and the Department of Health published the Action Plan on Hearing Loss. It was developed with a number of organisations, including Public Health England. The deafness and hearing loss sector was heavily involved with the production of the plan via the Hearing Loss and Deafness Alliance, chaired by Brian Lamb.
2. The plan commits NHS England to work with the sector to produce a new commissioning framework. We hope the framework will be in place in time to influence commissioning decisions in the later half of 2016.
3. The aim of the plan is to address the growing challenge of hearing loss “by promoting prevention of hearing loss, improving both the commissioning and integration of services, providing innovative models of care and ensuring that people of all ages with hearing loss are actively supported and empowered to lead the lives they want for themselves and their families in the best possible health”. One of the main ways it will do this is by “encouraging early awareness, diagnosis and management of hearing loss”, a recognition that earlier detection is necessary to support people with hearing loss.
4. There is broad agreement across the hearing loss sector that earlier detection is necessary. In the last Parliament the Group was instrumental in the establishment of the Hearing Screening for Life coalition. You will remember that at the last meeting the Group agreed to continue supporting it.
5. In late 2014 the UK National Screening Committee (NSC) published its long awaited review of the evidence for a programme of screening for hearing loss in older adults. It concluded more research was necessary.
6. The Hearing Screening for Life coalition made sure there was a consultation on the outcome of the review. In its response to the consultation, which is now closed, the coalition pointed out that the review excluded relevant evidence. It was conducted in 2012 and is therefore out-of-date.

7. Brian Lamb will attend to update Members on how the implementation of the action plan is progressing and answer questions about the NSC review.
8. Members are asked to consider how they and the Group can practically support the aim of introducing hearing screening.

Regulation of communication and language professionals and recognition of BSL

1. The National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD) is a voluntary regulator. It protects the public by upholding standards of competence and conduct. It is part of the charity Signature.
2. NRCPD is seeking statutory regulation of communication and language professionals. They will soon be speaking to stakeholders about a statement of regulatory intent.
3. The aim of statutory regulation is supported by an increasing number of agencies and public services making registration a requirement.
 - a. SCCI1605 Accessible Information now requires all providers of NHS care and publicly funded adult social care to meet the communication needs of patients and service users (and carers and parents) who are disabled or have a sensory loss. Communication professionals working with deaf and deafblind people should be registered with NRCPD.
 - b. The Crown Commercial Service framework agreement for language services will require suppliers to supply professionals who are registered with NRCPD or the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI).
 - c. The DWP Access to Work scheme requires sign language interpreters to be registered with NRCPD.
4. It is also supported by developments with respect to British Sign Language (BSL). In particular, the BSL (Scotland) Bill will increase awareness of the language. That will hopefully lead to increased access for people whose only or first language is BSL, and an increase in the use of sign language interpreters.
5. In its evidence to the Lords Equality Act 2010 and Disability committee, Signature called for the Government to ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in respect of BSL and establish a British Sign Language Commissioner.
6. Jim Edwards will answer questions. Members are asked to offer advice on seeking statutory regulation and minority language status for BSL.

Hearing aid provision

1. At the last meeting the Group agreed to support the campaign to retain full NHS hearing aid provision. The campaign is a response to some clinical commissioning groups proposing to ration the provision of hearing aids via the NHS. North Staffordshire CCG approved such rationing on 4 March.
2. Hearing aids have been available on the NHS since 1948. From 1 October, the majority of people in North Staffordshire who need hearing aids will no longer be eligible for NHS provision. This is despite strong clinical evidence of the effectiveness of hearing aids and clear opposition from both the audiology profession and local patients.
3. Earlier this year Action on Hearing Loss published 'Under Pressure', a report based on the findings of a Freedom of Information request which was sent to every NHS Trust which provides audiology services (as well as their counterpart organisations in other parts of the UK). 53 CCGs are or will soon be carrying out some kind of review of audiology commissioning. Of these, 22 provided no definitive reassurance that they will not consider decommissioning as part of the review.
4. Action on Hearing Loss and its partners are working at a national level to protect the long term provision of NHS hearing aids. NHS England must meet the Action Plan on Hearing Loss commitment to intervene where services do not improve or CCGs make decisions contrary to the evidence.
5. Members are encouraged to
 - a. table a debate on this issue;
 - b. meet with the responsible Minister, Alistair Burt MP; and
 - c. write to the chair of their local Health and Wellbeing Board to ask if hearing loss appears in their Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, and if not what action they will take to ensure that the JSNA reflects the need for hearing loss to be reflected in the provision of health services (Action on Hearing Loss can provide draft letters).
6. The campaign is being led by Action on Hearing Loss. They will attend to update Members on the latest developments and answer questions.

Next meeting

1. The next meeting will be in November. Dan Sumners will be in touch about a date.
2. In addition to updates on the above issues where appropriate, the agenda provisionally includes
 - a. lipreading classes, presented by the Association of Teachers of Lipreading to Adults; and
 - b. adult education and employment.