

All Party Parliamentary Group on Deafness

AGM and Meeting | 20 July 2020 | Minutes

Meeting held via Zoom (details circulated via Whips papers in advance).

Present

- Lilian Greenwood MP (elected Chair)
- Lord Bruce
- Stella Creasy MP
- Alex Davies-Jones
- Mary Foy MP
- Barry Gardiner MP
- Ian Mearns MP
- Stephen Timms MP
- Chris Hawkins, Office of Catherine McKinnell MP
- Avril Hepner, BDA Scotland
- Dr Fatin Izagaren
- Linda Richards, BDA
- Lynn Taylor-Stewart
- James Watson-O'Neil, SignHealth and UKCoD

Apologies

- Peter Aldous MP
- Marian Fellows MP
- Christina Rees MP
- Alison Thewlis MP

In attendance

- Craig Crowley, UKCoD
- David Buxton, Action on Disability
- Sally Etchells, NDCS
- Rob Geaney, Action on Hearing Loss (minutes)
- Gary Harding, Office of Adam Holloway MP

1. Annual General Meeting

Barry Gardiner MP proposed that Lilian Greenwood become Chair of the APPG Deafness. Alex Davies-Jones seconded. Nobody opposed and therefore Lilian Greenwood was elected chair.

Prior to the meeting the following MPs had put themselves forward as Vice-Chairs:

- Ian Mearns MP
- Mike Penning MP
- Tommy Sheppard MP
- Lord Shipley

In addition Rosie Cooper MP offered to stand as a Vice-Chair. Barry Gardiner proposed that all these parliamentarians become a Vice-Chair. The motion was seconded by Alex Davies-Jones and was not opposed. The Vice-Chairs were therefore elected as a single block.

No other matters were raised as part of the AGM.

2. A discussion on the impact of Covid on people living with deafness and hearing loss

James Watson-O'Neil led a discussion on the impact of Covid and lockdown on the deaf community and those living with hearing loss. He said that UKCoD are aware from its members of the very significant impact on deaf people as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, and that this discussion would consider four of these in detail.

Lynn Stewart-Taylor, Update on Where Is The Interpreter

Lynn introduced herself as a deaf individual (without the backing of any organisation) who had started the Where Is The Interpreter campaign – calling for a BSL interpreter to be included on the platform at Government press conferences during the Covid Pandemic. She stated that Deaf people have wanted information in order to keep themselves and their families safe and protect the NHS – but without the same access to information as

everyone else many BSL users have had to search for alternative source of information and have had delays in getting the information they need to stay safe.

Lynn called for the Government to provide an in-person interpreter so that Deaf people could access information on a range of channels, not just BBC News, and so that social media clips of the briefing sessions included the BSL interpreter.

Dr Fatin Izagaren, PPE facemasks in health and social care settings

Dr. Fatin introduced herself as a paediatric nurse who leads a team within her hospital department. She stated that she is deaf and is reliant on lipreading to communicate. Fatin has worked with a group of deaf healthcare professionals to campaign for the provision and use of clear facemasks within the NHS – noting the impact on both staff and patients across the NHS where facemasks prevent effective communication.

Fatin highlighted a number of problems that she has encountered. This includes the misunderstanding that clear masks are needed for deaf people to wear, whereas it is actually for other people and in her role she would need all of her team to wear a clear mask. She also pointed out that the UK Government is currently importing clear masks from America at a high cost and in low numbers. She called on the Government to consider creating incentives for domestic production – as they had done with ventilators. She also highlighted the poor current levels of deaf awareness that exists across the NHS and said that more should be done to provide deaf awareness training as a routine part of people's induction or training.

Lord Bruce asked about the difference in cost between the clear masks and the opaque masks that is more commonly used across the NHS. In response Dr Fatin said that if you buy the clear mask as an individual that the price can be around £30-£50 per unit, but that this figure should be as low as £1 for NHS England, this compares to around 25p per unit for the regular version.

Action – Lilian Greenwood agreed that as Chair of the APPG she would write to Ministers and press them on the two issues of PPE and the interpreter and Government briefings.

Avril Hepner, BDA Scotland – BSL Covid Updates in Scotland

Avril spoke to set out the current situation in Scotland and the work that the BDA has been doing in Scotland – noting the different perspective that Scotland has because it has adopted British Sign Language in legislation. She highlighted the provision of a BSL interpreter at the First Minister’s briefings – in contrast to the situation for the UK Government – was an example of the impact that sign language legislation has had. Because of this provision the BDA has been able to focus on creating materials that provided information in a culturally appropriate way.

She said that a big focus for the BDA has been the need to provide accurate information and counter some of the myths that have developed online.

Sally Etchells, NDCS – Impact of Covid on the educational chances of young deaf people

Sally started by saying that deaf children and young people face significant educational barriers in life and unfortunately the Coronavirus crisis has created a number of significant additional challenges. She highlighted that this was a small group of people and that the combination of isolation and moving to potentially inaccessible online platforms.

Based on a survey of 150 families NDCS have identified three key areas of concern. They are:

- reduced access to specialist education support equipment and therapies
- the inaccessibility of online learning
- the lack of access to audiology, cochlear implants and ENT services

Sally said that the NDCS had a briefing and said that this would be circulated with the minutes of this meeting.

3. Update from UKCoD’s Working Group on BSL legislation

David Buxton provided the group with an update on behalf of UKCoD on the progress made by UKCoD’s special interest on BSL. He said that this group last updated the APPG Deafness in 2016 and wanted to proitise the work that has been going on since then. He said that the work of the Group was leading up to the Private Members’ Bill ballot which is scheduled to take place in September 2021. He said that the group wanted to create a substantive draft Bill in this time and create something which the deaf community can rally

behind and ask their local MP to sponsor in order to maximise the chance that such a Bill is introduced. He said that there was growing political support for BSL legislation and that more parties have indicated that they support such a piece of legislation.