

All Party Parliamentary Group on Deafness

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 (Appendix 1).
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.

Appendix 1 | The statement of common purpose

This statement is the basis for collective work by organisations concerned with deafness or hearing loss.

The organisations listed below are committed to the vision, mission and values. Any organisation concerned with deafness or hearing loss may join us as a signatory.

We use 'deafness' and 'hearing loss' to encompass people who are deaf, Deaf, deafblind, deafened and hard of hearing, whatever their chosen mode of communication or response to their deafness and hearing loss.

Vision

A world that benefits from people who are deaf or have a hearing loss being able to fulfil their potential.

Mission

To realise our vision we will work with people who are deaf or have a hearing loss to make sure they have equal access to all aspects of society by

- making sure access is available in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual;
- making sure people who are deaf or have a hearing loss can access all public services, giving special attention to education, health and social care, policing and justice;
- making sure government and others fulfil their obligations under legislation such as the Equality Act 2010 and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- making sure people who are deaf or have a hearing loss are central to discussions about issues affecting their lives, in particular the development of services;
- raising public awareness of deafness and hearing loss, the challenges faced by people who are deaf or have a hearing loss, the needs they have and the contribution they make;

- making sure the education of people who are deaf or have a hearing loss is delivered in environments which maximise linguistic, academic and social development and attainment;
- improving the education and training available to professionals providing services to people who are deaf or have a hearing loss;
- making sure people who are deaf or have a hearing loss can access employment and training in environments which maximise professional and social development and attainment;
- improving the quality and availability of information, advice and guidance for people who are deaf or have a hearing loss, and parents and carers of children who are deaf or have a hearing loss;
- improving the quality of services for people who are deaf or have a hearing loss, including assisting the research and development of technologies that improve access for and to people who are deaf or have a hearing loss; and
- preventing avoidable deafness and hearing loss by educating the public about the value of hearing and how to protect it.

Values

In carrying out our mission we

- **collaborate**: work together;
- are **creative**: explore new ideas and approaches;
- use **evidence**: base our work on the best research and the experiences of people who are deaf or have a hearing loss;
- are **inclusive**: seek to involve all interested organisations and individuals in our work;
- have **integrity**: be open and honest about our work; and
- demonstrate **respect**: have due regard for the different views of individuals and organisations involved in our work.

Steering group

A steering group oversees progress on the following elements of the mission:

- making sure access is available in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual;

- making sure people who are deaf or have a hearing loss can access all public services, giving special attention to education, health and social care, policing and justice;
- making sure government and others fulfil their obligations under legislation such as the Equality Act 2010 and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and
- making sure people who are deaf or have a hearing loss are central to discussions about issues affecting their lives, in particular the development of services.

Mission groups

The following groups develop work on the elements of the mission:

- **awareness:** raising public awareness of deafness and hearing loss, the challenges faced by people who are deaf or have a hearing loss, the needs they have and the contribution they make;
- **education:** making sure the education of people who are deaf or have a hearing loss is delivered in environments which maximise linguistic, academic and social development and attainment; and improving the education and training available to professionals providing services to people who are deaf or have a hearing loss;
- **employment:** making sure people who are deaf or have a hearing loss can access employment and training in environments which maximise professional and social development and attainment;
- **information:** improving the quality and availability of information, advice and guidance for people who are deaf or have a hearing loss, and parents and carers of children who are deaf or have a hearing loss; and
- **services:** improving the quality of services for people who are deaf or have a hearing loss, including assisting the research and development of technologies that improve access for and to people who are deaf or have a hearing loss; and
- **prevention:** preventing avoidable deafness and hearing loss by educating the public about the value of hearing and how to protect it.