

Disability Equality Forum

9.00 a.m. Wednesday 27 March 2019
Conference Room B, Ty Hywel, Cardiff Bay

Minutes of the Meeting

Present:

Chair

Jane Hutt AM Deputy Minister and Chief Whip

Members

Rhian Davies	Chief Executive, Disability Wales
Ross Thomas	Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Tai Pawb
Joanna Fashan	Head of Services South & Employability, Whizz-Kidz
Zoe Richards	Learning Disability Wales
Daisy Cole	Director for Wales, Action on Hearing Loss
Rhian Stangroom-Teel	Policy and Public Affairs Manager Wales, Leonard Cheshire
Danni Richards	Development Officer (Disabled Children), Children in Wales
Peter Jones	Guide Dogs Cymru
Owen Williams	Director, Wales Council of Blind People
Martyn Jones	Representing Equality & Human Rights Commission - Wales Committee

Welsh Government

Alyson Francis	Deputy Director Communities Division
Paul Dear	Head of Equality Branch
Lisa Pollard	Equality Branch
Eryl Loring	Equality Branch

Apologies:

Daniel Hurford	WLGA
Catherine Lewis	Children in Wales

1. Welcome and Introductions

1.1 The Deputy Minister and Chief Whip (DMCW) welcomed Forum members to the meeting, individual introductions were made and apologies were noted.

2. Minutes and Actions from Last Meeting

2.1 The minutes of the last meeting held on 27 June 2018 were agreed as an accurate record.

2.2 The Action Point in Section 6 of the minutes, which required the Forum secretariat to liaise with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to collate information on the provision of habilitation for children with sight loss had not been actioned until the

preparation for today's meeting. Paul Dear (PD) apologised for this oversight. Daniel Hurford from the WLGA had sent his apologies for this meeting, but provided the following update:

The WLGA Policy Officer for Social Services and Health recently attended the Wales Vision Strategy meeting chaired by RNIB. Similar issues relating to reducing support services were highlighted in the Wales Council of the Blind 'State of the Nation reports', which have also been considered at the Welsh Government All Wales Eye Care Steering Group in February and will be presented at the March Cross Party Group on Vision. It was agreed that the reports will also be considered at the next Social Services Policy Group meeting with local authority social services cabinet members in April.

3. Update on 'Action on Disability: the Right to Independent Living'

3.1 The Welsh Government's new Framework 'Action on Disability: the Right to Independent Living' has recently been out for consultation. The DMCW said she was pleased to hear that 67 responses had been received and invited Lisa Pollard (LP) to outline some of the key findings from the analysis of those responses.

3.2 The consultation ran from 22 October 2018 until the 18 January 2019, although an extension was given to those requesting it until 31 January. 67 responses were received – 42 by e-mail, 20 online and 5 in hard copy.

3.3 Analysis of the responses has been undertaken by Stephen Macey, Welsh Government Social Research Officer. He has provided an extensive summary, at 107 pages long. This has yet to be seen by the DMCW but officials are currently reviewing the summary and will be submitting it for her consideration shortly. The summary will then be circulated to the Forum and subsequently published online.

3.4 Key Findings

- Social Model of disability – many respondents welcomed the references and definition of the Social Model. However, some said there are inconsistent uses of the Social Model language throughout the document as well as instances of non-Social Model language being used.
- United Nations Committee on the Rights of Disabled People (UNCRDP) – references were welcomed on the whole but some respondents were disappointed that the UNCRDP has not yet been made part of Welsh law. There is also a call for greater awareness of UNCRPD across Welsh Government.
- Indicators, Timescales and Targets – many felt the framework would be strengthened with the inclusion of targets and timescales.
- Welsh Independent Living Grant – a number of respondents asked why this had not been referenced in the Framework and Action Plan.
- Advocacy – a number of respondents said there was a lack of reference to advocacy services in the Framework and that the importance has been under emphasised.
- A number of respondents endorsed the work of, and consultation responses, by Alison Tarrant and Dr Simon Hoffman at Cardiff University on behalf of the Wales Human Rights Stakeholder Group.

- Supporting a range of disabilities – a number of respondents called on Welsh Government to ensure all types of disabilities are reflected, including those with hidden disabilities and those who are doubly disadvantaged.
- Legislation – some respondents want further clarification of how the new Framework would align with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act.
- Alignment with other Welsh Government plans – broad support for the Framework being aligned to Prosperity for All. However a few respondents felt there was too much of a shift towards the priorities of Welsh Government and away from the priorities of disabled people. There were calls for the Framework to be viewed in parallel with other Welsh Government strategies and plans.

3.5 Themes under Prosperity for All

- Prosperous and Secure – respondents welcomed the acknowledgement of the obstacles disabled people face when accessing employment but raised concern that not all disabled people are in a position to work; calls for Welsh Government to set targets for accessible homes and to make it mandatory that each local authority regularly maintains and publishes a local Accessible Housing Register.
- Healthy and Active – concern about the lack of actions regarding the role of social care within the revised document; concern that sporting opportunities for disabled people are limited and vary greatly depending on where people live.
- Ambitious and Learning – concern about the cost and availability of sign language courses being a barrier to families of young deaf children; call for funding issues to be addressed to ensure learners with learning disabilities can access post 16 education.
- United and Connected – support for the petition around access certificates for all premises in Wales; concern about the lack of accessible public transport preventing disabled people from living independently; concern disabled people are being excluded from tourism sites.

3.6 LP concluded by outlining the next steps. Officials will now be reviewing the responses and making the necessary changes to the Framework and Action Plan. The first draft will be submitted to the Independent Living Steering Group for consideration at their next meeting on 3 May. It is anticipated the final version of the Framework and Action Plan will be published in summer 2019.

3.7 The DMCW said it was unsurprising to hear some of the responses, particularly those around incorporating the UNCRDP into Welsh law and confirmed that Welsh Government is actively looking for opportunities to take this forward.

3.8 Rhian Davies (RD) welcomed the Welsh Government's commitment to the Social Model on disability and that Welsh Government is looking practically at how the UNCRDP can be taken forward, this is something Disability Wales and the Steering Group have long called for.

3.9 The DMCW confirmed she would either issue a Written Statement or will write to stakeholders highlighting the intentions of Welsh Government in relation to the new Framework and Action Plan. It is important this work is endorsed by all Welsh Ministers and this provides an opportunity for it to be embedded across the whole of Welsh Government.

3.10 Finally, RD noted that employment was one of the key focuses in the Framework. This was welcome but it is important this isn't interpreted as being the sole concern when other issues such as social care, education, transport, and housing are also very important. RD thanked Welsh Government officials for encouraging stakeholders to respond to the consultation, which has been evident by the number of responses received.

4. Impact of Brexit on Disabled People

- 4.1 A lot of work is being done right across Welsh Government to prepare for Brexit and the DMCW recognises that if Brexit does result in disruption to services, there is likely to be a disproportionate impact on disabled people, and this is a particular risk that needs further consideration. The DMCW handed over to PD to explain further.
- 4.2 PD said that Disability Wales are working with Cardiff University looking specifically at the impact of Brexit on disabled people in Wales and have produced a paper which identifies some of the key issues of concern. Welsh Government have consulted with colleagues across various Departments to obtain a response to each of the key issues raised. This work relates back to the new Framework - it is important to make the necessary links and identify any potential join-up. Officials are in the process of drafting a response to the concerns raised by Disability Wales, which will be circulated to Forum members shortly.
- 4.3 The DMCW thanked Disability Wales for the work they've been doing on this and agreed that it is a priority that must be considered. She informed members that the Counsel General and Brexit Minister was invited to today's meeting but was unfortunately unable to attend; however, he has indicated that he is keen to meet with disability stakeholders. The DMCW pointed out that an EU Cabinet Committee was also meeting this morning and that she would be making it a priority to look at the impact of Brexit with both the First Minister and Brexit Minister following this.
- 4.4 The DMCW opened the discussion out to members to ask for any comments.
- 4.5 Daisy Cole (DC) asked whether employment rights had been raised as one of the key issues, PD confirmed that it had. DC also asked about future funding, there has been considerable use of the Shared Prosperity Fund to support disabled people and the continuation of funding streams post Brexit is a concern.
- 4.6 The DMCW agreed that future funding was a concern and welcomed members' views on the Shared Prosperity Fund. Following consultation last year, a partnership arrangement is currently being considered as an option. WCVA have a forum on Brexit which also provides an opportunity to feed in concerns about funding.
- 4.7 The DMCW recently issued a letter highlighting how Welsh Government are using money from the European Transition Fund to boost its community cohesion programme and National Hate Crime Report and Support Centre during the Brexit period. For those who have not had sight of the letter, officials will circulate.

Action: Welsh Government officials to circulate the Deputy Minister & Chief Whip's letter on the use of the European Transition Fund.

4.8 The Hate Crime Criminal Justice Board Cymru is concerned that in the last year the number of disability hate crimes reported to the police has fallen. Members of the Board are investigating why this is the case, including whether it is because the disability hate crime legislation is not fit for purpose and therefore confidence in reporting may have declined. The UK Government has asked the Law Commission to conduct a review which will include the consideration of disability hate crime legislation. The Board are looking to engage in this review to ensure Wales' views are incorporated. The DMCW will be attending the next Hate Crime Criminal Justice Board Meeting which is being held in Llandudno Junction on the 11 April; PD added that if any Forum members would like to attend the meeting, they are welcome to do so.

4.9 RD recapped on the work Disability Wales is doing with Dr Charles Whitmore and as part of this, there will be a round table event held at the end of May to discuss the paper they've developed. RD said that she had invited the DMCW to attend, to which she had agreed, and had also extended the invitation to the Brexit Minister.

4.10 PD confirmed the Welsh Government's response to the concerns raised by Disability Wales would be finalised in readiness for the round table event at the end of May.

Action: Welsh Government to finalise their response to the concerns raised by Disability Wales and circulate to Forum members ahead of this event, once the date has been confirmed.

5. Review of the Strategic Equality Plan Objectives

5.1 PD explained that Welsh Government is currently reviewing and renewing its current Strategic Equality Plan which runs up until March 2020 so a new Plan will need to be in place by April 2020. This timeframe also coincides with the current Equality and Inclusion funding programme and it's important that both are well aligned.

5.2 Officials are keen that the development of the Plan is informed by a wide range of views on what the priority areas of inequality are for protected groups. The engagement is being undertaken in two stages – firstly a series of informal engagement events with key stakeholders, which have recently taken place, followed by formal consultation later this year.

5.3 Officials are currently looking at the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) report 'Is Wales Fairer? 2018' to form the basis of the new Plan. This has received support from stakeholders at the engagement events; however, there are concerns about losing a clear focus on protected characteristics. Officials will shortly be advising the DMCW on the new Plan, prior to formal consultation.

5.4 The DMCW asked members if anyone had attended the engagement events and if they had any feedback. Danni Richards (DR) provided positive feedback; it was good to see the way forward would support voluntary organisations in making minority groups more mainstream and help break down barriers. RD agreed the

event she attended was worthwhile and it was good to see such a wide representation of organisations present. RD went on to say much had changed since the current plan e.g. the increase in poverty due to austerity which has had an impact on people's wellbeing and equal rights. There is now more awareness around intersectionality e.g. Disability Wales are currently working with DWP on issues affecting disabled women. Overall, RD feels it will be a challenge given the depth of issues that need to be addressed and the funding available. There is a growth in extremism which hasn't always been on the agenda; however, resources will be needed to tackle this.

- 5.5 The DMCW agreed these issues need to be reflected in the Plan going forward, and once again, these are all cross-Government issues. She added that there will be more opportunities to contribute to this review and asked the Forum to consult with their members and feed in their views.
- 5.6 Zoe Williams (ZW) agreed with the thematic approach which could pick up on the cumulative impact. People can develop more complex conditions with time, e.g. older people, so it would be good to look at equality across the life course, some of the big issues like social care and population increase can cause situations where older disabled people will face discrimination.
- 5.7 PD agreed and confirmed this was raised at the engagement events, as was intersectionality. It is envisaged that policies such as the socio-economic duty will make it easier to recognise these issues and the impact they have on people's lives. It will be important to look at the different ways of approaching the review, there are currently 8 key objectives, it needs to be determined whether this structure should be maintained or whether there should be more focus on actions. There will also be a move towards plainer language to ensure the Plan and its objectives are accessible to all.

6. Employability Plan – Disability Employment

- 6.1 The DMCW informed members that she had recently met with the Minister for Economy and Transport, who has the lead for the delivery of the Welsh Government's Employability Plan, to discuss what more can be done towards closing the disability employment gap in Wales. The DMCW then handed over to LP to provide an update.
- 6.2 There are two new commitments in the new Framework to help support the work around closing the disability employment gap. One of the commitments is around establishing a network of Disability Champions to engage with different employers across Wales to ensure they are able to access the assets, skills and entrepreneurship of disabled people; adopt an inclusive approach in their recruitment processes; and to help employers understand the barriers faced by disabled people. Officials are currently looking into a number of options around this and will provide a further update as soon as possible.
- 6.3 The other commitment is to develop a Welsh disability award scheme for employers which might either build on Disability Confident or be a new scheme to encourage employers to aspire to be more supportive of disabled people.

- 6.4 To progress this action, officials recently met with officials from DWP to discuss their current Disability Confident scheme. In advance of the meeting Disability Wales provided feedback from the sector. DWP acknowledged there are areas where the scheme could be improved; however, they are keen to work with Welsh Government to improve the current scheme in Wales rather than developing a brand new additional Welsh Government scheme which it was felt could be too onerous on employers.
- 6.5 DWP said they would consider the points raised by Disability Wales in more detail and suggested a further meeting should be arranged within the next few weeks which would involve additional officials from DWP to consider the matter further. The DMCW encouraged the involvement of Forum members in these meetings going forward.
- 6.6 DW commented on the need for a change in employer attitudes. There are a number of reasonable adjustments that could be made in the workplace which are not being provided at the moment, not just assisted technology but low cost environmental changes that can make a big difference. There is also potential to pool support resources as opposed to providing one-to-one support which can be costly.
- 6.7 Joanna Fashan (JF) agreed with the preferred option, i.e. to build on the existing DWP programme. LP confirmed officials will also be working with Skills, Higher Education and Lifelong Learning colleagues on this going forward.
- 6.8 The DMCW thanked Disability Wales for raising their areas of concern with DWP and suggested they continue to be involved in future discussions. ZW, DC and JF offered to represent their organisations – Learning Disability Wales, Action on Hearing Loss and Whizz-Kidz respectively, at future discussions. The DMCW welcomed this and requested that a further meeting is arranged with DWP which will involve the Forum members mentioned above along with RD on behalf of Disability Wales. The DMCW also asked RD to circulate the issues she raised with DWP to Forum members.
- 6.9 The DMCW went on to emphasise that, whilst it is important to work in partnership with DWP, what is done in Wales must be done correctly and suggested that the new initiatives could be piloted in the first instance and its development built upon members' experience. Martyn Jones (MJ) suggested that the EHRC should also have an involvement as they have recently launched an apprenticeship scheme. Owen Williams (OW) asked if any additional support such as Access to Work would be available for apprenticeships, PD offered to raise this with Welsh Government colleagues to obtain the answer.

Action: 1. Welsh Government officials to arrange a further meeting with DWP to include Rhian Davies, Zoe Williams, Daisy Cole and Joanna Fashan.

2. RD to circulate the points Disability Wales raised with DWP regarding their Disability Confident scheme.

3. Equality officials to liaise with colleagues regarding the availability of additional support provision for Apprenticeships.

7. Promoting the Social Model of Disability

- 7.1 The DMCW recalled her commitment to promoting the Social Model in 2001 when she was Health Minister and is pleased to be able to revisit it. It is important that the Social Model is reflected in everything Welsh Government does going forward.
- 7.2 The DMCW informed members of a series of stakeholder events that are going to be held throughout Wales in the spring. The outcome of these events will help inform the development of a training package on the Social Model of disability which will be delivered to all Welsh Government staff.
- 7.3 LP went on to explain that officials are working with colleagues in Health to arrange these events, which are likely to take place in May and will be held in North, Mid and South Wales. Dates have yet to be confirmed but it is hoped invitations will be issued within the next few weeks.
- 7.4 Officials from Welsh Government's HR Department, Equality Branch and some members of the Disability and Awareness Support Network have set up an internal group to address promoting the Social Model throughout Welsh Government. The group is currently looking at developing a training course and/or an on-line e-learning package for all Welsh Government staff. It is envisaged the outcome of the stakeholder events will help inform the content of this training.
- 7.5 PD added that whilst there are concerns about the language used within the sector which will be looked at, it is also important to consider the wider implications and we now have the opportunity to push forward on this. The training for civil servants will be an ongoing process and officials will also be looking at particular policy areas where it's shown the Social Model is being put into effect. There are currently three policy areas under consideration for this – Housing, Culture & Museums, and VAWDASV (Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence) who are all in the process of developing new policies.
- 7.6 ZW made a request to also include a focus on Education, where the redistribution of school resources using the Social Model could be considered. DR agreed there is a need for the terminology to be addressed when it comes to student support, less so with the younger years but there are instances when older learners can only access support once a medical diagnosis has been given resulting in not all students, particularly at University, have the support they need. The DMCW agreed that this is something the Minister for Education would be very interested in and whilst it's encouraging to have some policy areas to make a start on this, there will be a need for commitment across the whole of Welsh Government.
- 7.7 The DMCW requested members to engage as much as possible on this, and to encourage their own networks to become involved and attend the stakeholder events to help inform how this work is taken forward. PJ added that his organisation, Guide Dogs Cymru, had done previous work on this which he will feed in.

8. Accessibility in Public Places: 'Scores on the Doors' Campaign

- 8.1 The DMCW acknowledge that many members would already be aware of this campaign which has been developed by the Bridgend Coalition of Disabled People (BCDP) and which has been subject of a petition to the National Assembly. The DMCW is supportive of the principles behind this campaign and is very pleased that it is being taken forward. RD was then invited to provide an update.
- 8.2 RD confirmed that Simon Green from the BCDP has been leading on this initiative which has been discussed a number of times at the Senedd and has received wide support. Disability Wales and the BCDP met with Welsh Government officials to discuss how it can be taken forward. Disability Wales are currently developing a scoping exercise, engaging with stakeholders in public, private and third sectors, looking at a wide range of issues e.g. physical accessibility and communication. It is important to engage as much as possible, particularly with businesses, and organisations such as the Federation of Small Businesses and Trade & Commerce to ensure buy in. Disability Wales and BCDP are working together to organise a series of engagement events in the near future, along with plans for a launch event at the Senedd.
- 8.3 PD said that it was always a challenge with this sort of initiative to take it from the area where it had been developed and implement it in other places. He asked that, if members were aware of any similar models which it could be compared to and learned from, suggestions would be welcome. JF commented that Whizz Kidz are running something similar in London through the Mayors Fund and offered to speak with RD about it outside the meeting. This suggestion was welcomed.

Action: JF to discuss the Whizz Kidz accessibility project in London with RD.

9. Membership of the Disability Equality Forum

- 9.1 The DMCW explained that today's meeting provided an opportunity to review the membership of the Forum with a view to potentially merging the group with the Independent Living Steering Group once the new Framework has been published later this year. It is important that disabled people are able to feed in their views and reviewing membership offers an opportunity for Welsh Government to take evidence from those involved in equality issues. The DMCW asked members for their opinions on the suggested merger.
- 9.2 DC suggested that if the two groups were to merge perhaps there could be three yearly meetings rather than two to allow more opportunity to discuss emerging issues. The DMCW agreed she was happy for the new group to meet three times a year and added that separate meetings could be held alongside for specific themes e.g. the Employability Plan. The DMCW concluded that as it is likely that the next Forum meeting wouldn't be held until early autumn, it would be sensible to look at putting the new arrangements in place from next year onwards.

9.3 RD suggested revisiting the Terms of Reference and looking at membership and representation. The DMCW agreed this would be an opportune time to do so and added that once the Steering Group has met in May, which is likely to be their last meeting before publication of the Framework, there should be a standing Agenda item for the merged group to allow for regular updates on the framework.

Action: Officials to review the Terms of Reference and bring draft revisions to the next meeting.

10. Any Other Business / Date of Next Meeting

10.1 RD informed the meeting that Disability Wales are currently working with Welsh Womens Aid on a survey to reach women with learning difficulties and to providers who support victims of domestic abuse. The outcomes will be discussed at the cross-party group on the 1 May, a notice has already gone out, RD will ensure this is circulated to members. Alyson Francis (AF) asked if there were any initial findings that could be shared, RD was able to say that access to funding for shelters had improved but there was still a long way to go; there have been instances where women and families are being relocated out of their communities; and there is still a lack of understanding of what counts as domestic abuse against disabled women – there are instances of individuals not being believed. RD will circulate the report once it has been finalised.

Action: RD to circulate notice of cross-party group meeting on 1 May and the final outcomes report once it has been finalised.

10.2 OW of Wales Council of the Blind provided the following update:

- He informed the group that the sight loss sector in Wales has campaigned as a single voice against Newport's decision to withdraw from SenCom. He said the sector are delighted that the Gwent authorities have decided to commit jointly to the continuation of the best practice SenCom regional service until 2022.
- Sector-wide State of the Nation reports - Services for Adults (Rehabilitation) and Children and Young People (Habilitation) for people with sight loss in Wales have been published and sent to each of the Regional Partnerships Boards (RPBs) and WLGA, with a request to meet.
- Wales Council of the Blind have raised concerns that sight tests are being carried out as part of the PIP assessment and by assessors who are not qualified to do so. OW is working with the sector to build evidence.

10.3 PD sought members' views on two consultations that are currently underway and asked if they'd be content for officials to circulate the links to enable them to respond. The first is on work being carried out by Burdus Access and Applied Wayfinding who are working with Welsh Government on website font styles; and the second is on a Welsh Government Deposit Return Scheme where officials are keen to obtain views from disabled people. Members confirmed they were happy to receive both consultations.

Action: Welsh Government officials to circulate further information and links to the above consultations.

- 10.4 The date of the next meeting is likely to be in the early autumn and officials will be in touch with further details in due course.
- 10.5 The meeting closed at 10.30 a.m. The DMCW thanked everyone for their attendance and contributions and is looking forward to seeing members at other events in due course.