

All Party Parliamentary Group on Deafness

Meeting | 7 December 2015 | Minutes

Room R, Portcullis House

Present

- Neil Carmichael MP (vice chair)
- Jim Fitzpatrick MP
- Lilian Greenwood MP (chair)
- Tommy Sheppard MP
- Lord Shipley (vice chair)
- Ruth Smeeth MP

Apologies

- Rosie Cooper MP
- John McDonnell MP

In attendance

- Molly Berry, Association of Teachers of Lipreading to Adults
- David Buxton, Director of Campaigns & Communications, BDA
- Jim Edwards, Chair, UK Council on Deafness
- Robert Geaney, Senior Public Affairs Officer, Action on Hearing Loss
- Brian Lamb, Chair, Hearing Loss and Deafness Alliance
- Ross Matthewman, Parliamentary Manager, Sense
- Terry Riley, Chair, BDA
- Jean Straus, Hearing Link
- Dan Sumners, Senior policy adviser, Signature (minutes)
- Roger Wicks, Director of Policy & Campaigns, Action on Hearing Loss

Minutes of the 15 September 2015 meeting

1. No Members commented on the minutes when they were circulated. They were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.
2. Lilian Greenwood informed the last meeting she would have to step down as chair due to her Shadow Cabinet role. Jim Fitzpatrick had put his name forward to take up the position permanently. An EGM would to elect a new chair would be held at 1pm on Wednesday 16 December in Room R, Portcullis House.
3. At the last meeting, it was agreed that provisional items for this meeting would be lipreading classes and adult education and employment. These items would be considered at the first meeting of 2016.

Update on the Action Plan on Hearing Loss

4. At the last meeting, Brian Lamb, chair of the Hearing Loss and Deafness Alliance, spoke about the publication of the NHS England and Department of Health Action Plan on Hearing Loss. He informed Members the Alliance would meet with NHS England in September to discuss how the joint commissioning framework would be produced.
5. The Commissioning Guidance Advisory Group, which included representatives of the Alliance and the UK Council on Deafness, would meet for the first time on 10 December. The draft guidance would be completed by mid-April 2016 and presented to the Hearing Loss Summit on 20 April.
6. The guidance would be non-binding advice for clinical commissioning groups. It would be informed by the Alliance principles on commissioning.
7. One of the discussion points for the advisory group was how the guidance upheld quality standards. The Group noted the [Improving Quality In Physiological Services \(IQIPS\)](#) Programme was still in place.
8. The Alliance was encouraging NHS England to make a strong statement that it was inappropriate for CCGs to make decisions about funding for hearing aids before the guidance was published.

Update on hearing aids

9. At the last meeting, Paul Breckell, chief executive of Action on Hearing Loss, spoke about NHS provision of hearing aids, following the decision by some CCGs to ration it. Paul said they would present an update to the next meeting, including detail of the incompatibility of CCG decisions with the action plan on hearing loss.
10. Roger Wicks, Director of Policy & Campaigns at Action on Hearing Loss, said the picture was mixed. The decision by North Staffordshire CCG to ration funding had not led to others following suit. Four CCGs in South Staffordshire had paused their consultation processes.
11. On 22 September the North Staffordshire CCG appeared before the Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee. The Committee supported a motion that it was “unable to accept the CCG proposals as they stand”. The Committee subsequently held an inquiry day on 25 November.
12. CCGs in Cornwall, Devon and Essex had abandoned their plans. North East Essex CCG acknowledged the clinical evidence showed their proposals would adversely impact on the quality of life for a large proportion of people living with mild hearing loss.
13. The Group agreed to
 - a. submit applications for a 90 minute Westminster Hall adjournment debate in the week commencing 11 January;
 - b. write to their local CCGs, using a letter drafted by Action on Hearing Loss, regarding CCG decisions about hearing aid provision prior to the publication of the commissioning guidance; and
 - c. discuss the issue with Alistair Burt, Minister of State for Community and Social Care.

Minority language recognition for BSL

14. Terry Riley and David Buxton of the BDA recently [gave evidence](#) to the [Lords Equality Act 2010 and Disability Committee](#). They had called for a BSL Act that would

- give legal status to BSL as a UK minority language;
- require public bodies to prepare and implement action plans on BSL;
- enable families of deaf children to learn BSL;
- guarantee access in BSL in the criminal justice system;
- guarantee the availability of sign language services;
- make television on all platforms accessible;
- introduce statutory regulation of communication and language professionals such as BSL/English interpreters; and
- establish a BSL Commissioner.

15. A BSL Act was required because

- the Equality Act did not protect deaf signers adequately because it only provided protection against disability discrimination rather than on the basis of language;
- it would create a positive duty to promote the use of BSL;
- deaf parents of hearing children did not have a right to access their child's schooling, eg parent's evenings, in their own language;
- deaf people were routinely denied access to health and social care and the criminal justice system in their own language;
- unqualified or under qualified people were often used in place of interpreters;
- BSL was expensive to study and the future supply of interpreters was unsure;
- there were only two producers of programmes in BSL in the UK; and
- it would give BSL equity with other UK minority languages.

16. Minority language recognition for BSL was moving up the agenda following

- the BDA's March 2014 report [Legal status for BSL and ISL](#);
- the BSL (Scotland) Act; and
- the announcement by the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for the North of Ireland that she would introduce a draft BSL/ISL Bill.

17. The BSL (Scotland) Act required the Scottish Ministers “to promote, and facilitate the promotion of, the use and understanding of the language known as British Sign Language”. They were required to produce a national plan, and authorities were required to respond with their own plans.

18. The Group agreed to

- wait for the publication of the Lords Equality Act 2010 and Disability Committee report and make sure Lords took part in the debate;
- open a discussion with the Cabinet Office about establishing a BSL working group;
- identify opportunities to make amendments to legislation in furtherance of the aims;
- invite MSPs to brief Parliamentarians on the Scottish experience; and
- submit Private Members Bills to the ballot for 2016/17.

19. The BDA would draft ideas for the content of a Bill.

Any other business

20. Lilian Greenwood informed Members her Private Members’ Bill which aimed to amend the 12 year old Communications Act (2003) would not have a second reading.

Next meeting

21. The next meeting would be in February/March. Dan Sumners would contact Members.

Actions

1. Members to submit applications for a 90 minute Westminster Hall adjournment debate on the provision of hearing aids in the week commencing 11 January.
2. Action on Hearing Loss to provide Members with a template letter to CCGs about provision of hearing aids.
3. Members to write to their local CCGs about provision of hearing aids.
4. Chair to open a discussion with the Cabinet Office about establishing a BSL working group.

5. Chair to invite MSPs to brief Parliamentarians on the BSL (Scotland) Act.
6. The BDA to draft ideas for the content of a BSL Bill.