

All Party Parliamentary Group on Deafness

Meeting | 19 July 2016

4pm, Boothroyd Room, Portcullis House

Agenda

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of 23 May meeting (for approval)
3. 30 June debate (for information)
4. Priorities for 2016/17 (for agreement)
5. Any other business

Minutes of 23 May meeting (for approval)

Committee Room 21, Palace of Westminster

Present

- Jim Fitzpatrick MP (chair)
- Baroness Howe
- Lilian Greenwood MP
- Lord Shipley
- Sir Peter Bottomley MP

Apologies

- Baroness Randerson
- Debbie Abrahams MP
- Eilidh Whiteford MP
- Kate Green MP
- Lord Rennard
- Nigel Dodds MP
- Peter Aldous MP
- Rose Cooper MP
- Ruth Smeeth MP
- Stephen Phillips MP
- Stuart Donaldson MP
- Teresa Pearce MP
- Tommy Sheppard MP

In attendance

- Dan Sumners, Senior policy adviser, Signature (minutes)

Minutes of 21 March 2016 meeting

1. No Members commented on the minutes when they were circulated. The Group accepted them as an accurate record of the meeting.

2. The chair and vice chair Neil Carmichael MP met with the Minister of State for Community and Social Care on 27 April to discuss early identification and treatment of deafness and hearing loss.
3. Also present were Fiona Carragher, NHS England Deputy Chief Scientific Officer, Sonia Fleming, the NHS England hearing loss project lead, and Dan Sumners of Signature.
4. The discussion took place in the context of the [NHS England action plan on hearing loss](#). The plan made it clear that “early awareness, diagnosis and management of hearing loss” were essential to avoid “the enormous personal, social and economic impact of untreated hearing loss”.
5. In particular, the chair and vice chair raised the issues of
 - a. the provision of hearing aids: the Minister was concerned by CCG moves to limit provision, and was glad most had decided to wait for NHS England’s audiology service commissioning guidance;
 - b. lipreading classes: the Minister knew provision was patchy and that was a concern – he urged the chair to submit a written question in June as a follow up to [Rosie Cooper's question of 10 March](#); and
 - c. adult hearing screening: the Minister asked if the sector felt the decision of the National Screening Committee not to recommend a programme was a missed opportunity.
6. The chair told the Minister the decision of the National Screening Committee was a missed opportunity. The challenge and the costs to the taxpayer were too great to wait the five or so years it would take to conduct a randomised control trial of screening. A programme would also
 - a. add to the data on the effectiveness and uptake of hearing aids;
 - b. add to the data about people who were deaf or had a hearing loss;
 - c. help to determine the best method of screening, as the newborn hearing screening programme did; and
 - d. increase awareness of deafness and hearing loss, and their impact.

7. The Minister was aware there was variation in the quality of audiology services across the country. In developing the commissioning guidance, NHS England had considered good and bad models of practice. Involving patients in the development of services led to success.
8. But the NHS needed to collect more and better data to help it improve services. It needed better data about the population of people who were deaf or had a hearing loss. Most national data simply referred to everyone as 'hearing impaired', whether they were profoundly deaf or had a mild hearing loss.
9. NHS England also needed more and better measures of the quality of audiology services. Fiona Carragher and Sonia Fleming would make sure there was an assessment of what was already collected and identification of the gaps.
10. The Minister asked when there was last a Parliamentary debate about deafness and hearing loss. He suggested the chair propose a debate to coincide with the publication of the commissioning guidance in July. The proposal should have an NHS focus. Fiona Carragher and Sonia Fleming would make sure the chair knew when the guidance would be published.
11. The chair would also support Sonia Fleming to organise a Parliamentary event to mark the publication of the commissioning guidance. It was provisionally scheduled for 2pm on Tuesday 19 July in Committee Room 14.

Adjournment debate

12. The chair had written to the Speaker regarding a 90 minute adjournment debate to coincide with the publication of the commissioning guidance in July. He would tell the Group as soon as he had a response.
13. The Group agreed it would be useful to arrange a briefing event for MPs before the debate. The UK Council on Deafness would help to arrange it and provide briefing materials.

Review of progress

14. At the extraordinary general meeting on 30 June 2015, the Group agreed its work programme for the Parliament. It would focus on the following, in order of priority:

- a. subtitles;
- b. provision of hearing aids;
- c. awareness of deafness and hearing loss;
- d. adult education and employment; and
- e. an inquiry into the cost of minority language recognition for BSL.

15. The Group agreed

- a. more needed to be done regarding subtitles on video-on-demand services, given the Government's belief enough progress was being made to improve them;
- b. the imminent publication of the audiology service commissioning guidance meant the provision of hearing aids was for now generally protected, and it should help raise the quality of audiology services;
- c. more needed to be done to raise awareness of deafness and hearing loss and its impact, particularly given the National Screening Committee's decision to not recommend an adult hearing screening programme;
- d. more needed to be done in 2016/17 with regard to adult education and employment; and
- e. the inquiry into the cost of minority language recognition would be considered later in the Parliament.

Public health campaign

16. The common thread in all the issues the Group had discussed in 2015/16 was awareness. Government and others needed a better understanding of the lived experience of people who were deaf or had a hearing loss. People who were deaf or had a hearing loss needed better awareness of the services and other support available to them, and their rights. Hearing people needed better awareness of how to protect their hearing and what to do if they start to experience a hearing loss.

17. Dan Sumners had been consulting colleagues in the sector about the prospect of a nationwide public health campaign about deafness and hearing loss. It had been suggested by the UK Council on Deafness common purpose awareness mission group, and endorsed by the common purpose steering group.
18. Dan had received confirmations of support from RAD, The Ear Foundation, Auditory Verbal, Signhealth, NADP, ATLA, Scottish Council on Deafness, Action on Hearing Loss and Action Deafness. Nobody had disagreed with the idea, although some said they felt it was an ambitious aim that could be difficult to achieve. Members of the UK Council on Deafness would discuss the idea in more detail on 22 June.

Next meeting

19. The chair suggested the scheduled meeting on 11 July be moved to follow the launch of the NHS England commissioning guidance for audiology services on 19 July. It would be scheduled for 90 minutes to allow for an open discussion with the deafness and hearing loss sector about the Group's work plan for 2016/17. A representative of NHS England would be asked to address the meeting about further plans to meet the aims of the Action plan on hearing loss.

30 June debate (for information)

1. On 30 June MPs debated the NHS England action plan on hearing loss and the adult hearing service commissioning framework. The framework will be launched in Parliament at 2pm on 19 July in the Boothroyd Room, Portcullis House.
2. The debate highlighted the need for action in terms of
 - a. the impact of untreated deafness and hearing loss on individuals and society as a whole, particularly the economy;
 - b. North Staffordshire clinical commissioning group's decision to cut funding for hearing aids, and similar proposals by other CCGs;
 - c. the National Screening Committee decision not to recommend an adult hearing screening programme; and
 - d. the fact these proposals and decisions contradict the recognition of the action plan that hearing loss has an enormous personal, social and economic impact, and more needs to be done on prevention, early diagnosis and support for those who had permanent hearing loss.
3. In its briefing for MPs, the UK Council on Deafness urged the Government to work towards a nationwide public health campaign about deafness and hearing loss. By raising awareness it will help to limit the economic, social and personal impacts of acquired hearing loss, particularly as it affects older people.
4. A campaign would encourage people to take control of their life by having their hearing tested by their GP or provider of audiology services. It would thereby urge them not to let deafness and hearing loss become a barrier to them being involved in education, employment, politics, community activity – all elements of society.
5. Deafness has been put firmly on the agenda by the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act and the announcement by the Northern Ireland Executive that it plans to bring forward legislation related to British and Irish Sign Languages. A public health campaign would also demonstrate the UK Government's concern to make sure people who are deaf or have a hearing loss are provided with equal access to society.

Raising awareness

6. Lilian Greenwood MP asked the Minister for Community and Social Care if “there is a role for raising public awareness to empower patients not just so that we improve GPs’ understanding - that might be the issue - but so that people are a bit more demanding and recognise that hearing loss is not an inevitable consequence of growing old that has to be put up with but something that can be addressed.”
7. The Minister responded, “there may be more to be done through charities, the third sector, the Royal College of General Practitioners and perhaps the British Medical Association, certainly about the thing that people have in the back of their mind and do not always raise”.

Priorities for 2016/17

1. Following the review of progress on 23 May and the debate on 30 June, the suggested priorities for 2016/17 are
 - a. make sure the provision of subtitles on video-on-demand services continues to increase;
 - b. monitor the impact of the adult hearing service commissioning guidance on the provision of hearing aids;
 - c. secure a nationwide public health campaign on deafness and hearing loss; and
 - d. develop work on adult education and employment.

2. An inquiry into the cost of minority language recognition should be kept on the Group's agenda. The Group should monitor developments elsewhere to take advantage of any opportunities to conduct a high profile and effective inquiry.

Action

3. The Group should discuss the suggestions and agree its priorities for 2016/17.