

# **Cross Party Group on Deafness**

**Meeting, Wednesday 10 September 2025 at 6pm.**

Via Zoom (an online video conferencing platform)

## **Minutes – Present**

### **MSPs**

Convenor – Colin Beattie MSP (Scottish National Party)

Roz McCall MSP (Conservative)

Carol Mochan MSP (Labour)

### **Invited Guests**

Kaukab Stewart MSP

Erin Hall (Scottish Government)

Kavita Chetty (Scottish Government)

Jenny Gray (Scottish Government)

Scott Steele (Scottish Government)

Kevin McGowan (Scottish Government)

### **Individual Members**

Janis McDonald

Donald Richards

Danny Sweeney

### **Group Members**

Secretariat and Assistant: Hannah Tweed, Amy White (the ALLIANCE)

Kirsten Abioye (Lothian Children's Deaf Club)

John Brownlie (Sign Language Interactions)

Philip Gerrard (Deaf Action)

Allan Graham (Scotland Audiology Heads of Service)

Ruth MacLeod (RNID)

John Whitfield (Deafblind Scotland)

Rachel Mapson (QMU)

Christine Johnson (QMU)

Adele Goman (Edinburgh Napier University)

Lyn Pornaro (Disability Equality Scotland)

Mona Vaghefian (NDCS)

Deborah Innes (Scottish Mental Health Service for Deaf People)

Avril Hepner (BDA)

Anita Grover (AVUK)

Rachel O'Neill (University of Edinburgh)

Rosemary Oldfield (Deaf Links)

Jayne Brown (Forth Valley Sensory Centre)  
Nicholas Orpin (Hearing Link)  
Julie Ferguson (EIS)

### **Language Service Professionals**

Andy Gardiner and Roy Thomson (BSL/English Interpreters)  
Gail Richardson and Mel Coulter (ENT)

### **Apologies**

Karen Adam MSP  
Jeremy Balfour MSP  
Annabelle Ewing MSP  
Douglas Bryce (Disability Equality Scotland)  
Deirdre Aitken (Blindcraft Sensory Services)  
Denise McClung (SISG)  
Teri Devine (RNID)  
Carla Marchbank (NESS)  
John Ravenscroft (Scottish Sensory Centre/University of Edinburgh)  
Alana Harper (Deaf Links)  
Isabela Goldie (Deafblind Scotland)  
Jill Bradshaw (Lipread Scotland)  
Amanda Wilson (SHHELS)

### **Agenda item 1 – Welcome, apologies, members and approval of minutes from the last meeting**

The Convenor welcomed everyone to the meeting and reminded people to say who they were and what organisation they represented before making contributions. Attendance and apologies noted in the minutes.

Minutes of meeting on 28 May 2025 were approved.

### **Agenda item 2 - Kaukab Stewart MSP, Minister for Equalities, on Deafness, Deafblindness, and the Disability Equality Plan.**

The Disability Equality Plan was launched on 20 June 2025. The Minister acknowledged concerns around the decision not to refresh the See Hear Strategy and the disbanding of the Sensory Loss in Social Care Advisory Group. She offered reassurance that officials engaged with stakeholders, delivery partners and people with lived experience to assess progress. This highlighted successes and gaps and informed the

decision to focus on strengthening delivery rather than refreshing the See Hear Strategy.

Scottish Government are working closely with a broad range of organisations to ensure voices and lived experience are embedded within policy design, delivery and evaluation. This commitment is backed by £2.5 million in investment supporting vital services and initiatives including a new £1 million access fund which supports projects that address key challenges from the COVID 19 pandemic and cost of living crisis.

The plan sets out key actions across critical areas including:

- Mental health
- Independent living
- Digital inclusion and energy costs
- Governance and accountability.

A progress report in 2026 will inform the next phase of work. Minister stated that SG want to improve BSL, tactile, and inclusive formats as fundamental to equality. SG would like to acknowledge the acceptance of the new definition of Deafblindness, and the importance of this milestone in recognising the needs of Deafblind community. SG looks forward to continued collaboration with both CPGs (Deafness and Visual Impairment) to ensure this commitment translates into meaningful change.

The Convenor asked if the Minister could outline to members what is being considered for the sensory workstream in the next stage of the plan. The Minister advised that actions will be delivered through local partnerships and annual funding. There will be regular engagement to draw on expertise to deliver relevant actions. Scottish Government are also developing a mainstream strategy across Scotland focusing on leadership, accountability, regulation, evidence, capability and capacity. An inclusive communication toolkit will launch later this year and we recognise the need for strategic direction and for sensory to be embedded in the plan with a dedicated strand co-led by DPOs and accountability across health, education, transport, digital platforms.

Ruth MacLeod (RNID) asked if there was any more specific detail that could be shared on how Deafness and Deafblindness are considered in the plan, and whether Scottish Government were thinking of an Accessible Communication Standard equivalent to help meet duties under the Equality Act when providing health and social care.

The Minister said she is happy to follow up with further information in more detail. The work to embed the definition of Deafblindness across policy and services is still at an early stage, discussions are underway to agree the best way forward. The Minister has responsibility for the Public Sector Equality Duty - officials explored and advanced the use of regulation 11 and chose carefully which areas to use that under. We have the contract to develop the Inclusive Communication Toolkit and that work is currently on its way. Local Authorities will have the resource to make sure they can advance the work on inclusive communication for consistency across all 32 Local Authorities.

Kevin McGowan (Scottish Government BSL Team) stated that the BSL National Plan has a commitment and actions in relation to accessibility. The BSL Implementation Advisory Group discussed how to embed that point for BSL within the public sector. There is an action looking at how Government embeds BSL as a language.

Philip Gerrard (Deaf Action) raised concerns over the social equality systems and cuts to services. He asked how Deaf people and Deaf services can make their concerns and feedback known if the See Hear Strategy is not in place.

Kavita Chetty (Scottish Government) acknowledged Philip's concerns about not refreshing See Hear Strategy. Officials from her team have met with many CPGD members and are committed to maintaining regular meaningful engagement. The disability equality strategy is very much evolving over the next 18 months and SG want to make sure people's needs are reflected across future iterations.

### **Agenda item 3 - AGM business**

- Convenor's report (incl. statement of purpose) – circulated to members in advance of the meeting.
- Election of office bearers: Colin Beattie MSP was nominated for an accepted the role of Convenor. Carol Mochan MSP and Roz McCall MSP were nominated for, and accepted the role of Deputy Convenors. Hannah Tweed was nominated for, and accepted the role of Secretariat at the ALLIANCE.

### **Agenda item 4 - BSL updates**

Hannah Tweed provided the BSL update on behalf of Karen Adam MSP who gave apologies. Karen shared a written update to the CPGD on a

range of Deaf and Deafblind work she has been involved with (circulated to members in advance of meeting).

BSL Implementation Advisory Group: Kevin McGowan (Scottish Government BSL Team) updated that they are anticipating the publication of the report from the EHRCJ Committee's inquiry soon and will respond to comments and recommendations.

The BSL IAG met in June, discussion included:

- Accessibility - producing guidance to improve and encourage BSL translations within the public sector.
- Promoting awareness of Listed Authorities responsibilities under the BSL Act to embed good practice.
- Data – how it is used to inform policy, identifying data gaps and filling those gaps.

Contact Scotland BSL contract: Kevin McGowan acknowledged the CPGD has an active interest in the new contract. New supplier identified as Sign Solutions however Scottish Government are still in the standstill period for the contract which ends on 14 September 2025. Once the standstill period ends, the contract will be formally awarded and will move into a mobilisation period. The next step once the standstill period ends will be to formally distribute messaging for the community in BSL.

Rachel Mapson (QMU) asked about the BSL IAG and whether there had been discussions around provision and teaching of BSL at higher levels – these do not currently exist in Scotland. Kevin advised the group had discussed this at a high level but there have been more detailed conversations internally with education colleagues. They are keen to take provisions within the Act forward, and are meeting with QMU about work in this area.

Rosemary Oldfield (Deaf Links) asked about the standstill period and concerns about the timeframe before communications go out to the BSL community. She asked if a Contact Scotland BSL service would continue while this takes place. Kevin gave reassurance that BSL users can continue to use the service with no gap in service provision.

John Whitfield (Deafblind Scotland) raised concerns about limited reference to Deafblindness on Sign Solutions' portfolio. John also raised that there are different dialects in Scotland and asked whether that will be reflected in their signing services. Kevin acknowledged these

concerns and gave reassurance that Deafblindness was included as a requirement in the contract, as well as Scottish dialects.

Hannah Tweed asked about the item in Ms Forbes' letter to the BSL IAG which was shared with members. There was an invitation to set up a meeting between Sign Solutions and members of the CPGD. Hannah asked about the timing of this meeting and whether to do it sooner or wait until the next CPGD meeting in December. Kevin advised waiting until December may be too long a gap, and the new supplier would be keen to meet with relevant stakeholders.

The Convenor suggested there be either an additional meeting of CPG, or a meeting with those who express an interest. He highlighted a full meeting costs about £500 which is contributed by the ALLIANCE and asked whether Scottish Government would pick up the cost. Kevin said it may be possible for Scottish Government to meet the cost and would have to check parliamentary rules. A stakeholder meeting separate from the CPGD would be easier to organise. Agreement was reached for an informal, non-minuted meeting for stakeholders to be arranged.

**Action: Kevin and Hannah to discuss arrangements and communicate details of meeting to stakeholders.**

**Agenda item 5 - Mona Vaghefian, NDCS, on campaign for need for further progress in audiology, two years after the publication of the Independent Review of Audiology Services in Scotland.**

In April 2025, the Scottish Government published an update on actions against recommendations of the Independent Review of Audiology Services in Scotland. The Minister attended the last CPGD meeting.

NDCS have concerns, along with other organisations, about the actions and scope. NDCS and other organisations came together to raise awareness of our concerns and wrote an open letter to Ms Minto. The letter was published in The Herald and covered in BBC Scotland media. More activity is planned in the coming months to ensure the Scottish Government takes the actions and we see real progress.

The Convenor suggested the CPGD write to the Minister for an update which was met with agreement.

Avril Hepner (BDA) raised concerns about over lack of accessible information from audiology services, use of BSL by staff, and understanding of BSL culture.

Allan Graham (Audiology Heads of Service Group) advised that Heads of Service would welcome input into the letter to the Minister. The issue audiology services still have is lack of staff, lack of training, and lack of funds. Audiology services want to implement the recommendations but are struggling with staffing and funding.

**Action: Hannah to draft a letter for Jenni Minto MSP and share with any interested CPGD members for feedback to ensure concerns raised are appropriately reflected.**

### **Agenda item 6 - Updates from working groups**

Deafblindness and workforce (Isabella Goldie). Hannah provided an update on Isabella's behalf who gave apologies. The first meeting of the short life working group is around guide communicator work and will meet in October. Isabella has been working with Deafblind UK on job descriptions. On the definition of Deafblindness, the group are still struggling to find the lead contact with Scottish Government to work on that guidance - following up with the Minister for Equalities would be useful.

**Action: Isabella Goldie to contact Ms Stewart.**

Dementia and sensory care (Amy White and Roz McCall MSP). Members of the working group met with the Senior Manager of SIGN at Health Improvement Scotland in August to discuss the best way to integrate sensory good practice within the dementia SIGN guidelines. Agreement was reached for the working group to submit an application for an evidence review around sensory. The group will report back at the next CPGD if that application has been successful and next steps.

### **Agenda Item 7 – AOCB**

Update on Lipread Scotland launch (Jill Bradshaw). Hannah provided the update on behalf of Jill Bradshaw who gave apologies. Lipread Scotland is due to launch online on 4 October 2025 Please email [jbradshawlipread@gmail.com](mailto:jbradshawlipread@gmail.com) with queries. The Convenor suggested that lipreading may be a consideration for future CPGD into workforce.

**Action: Lipreading to be added to agenda for next CPGD meeting on 10 December 2025.**

Update on ALLIANCE “More than Words: Communication for All” campaign (Hannah Tweed and Amy White). The ALLIANCE had a successful parliamentary photocall on 4 September 2025 with a good turnout of MSP support. This campaign aims to prioritise awareness and legislative change on inclusive communication in the broadest sense. The ALLIANCE are drafting proposals for legislative asks. If anyone wants to partner on that please e-mail [sensory@alliance-scotland.org.uk](mailto:sensory@alliance-scotland.org.uk). We aim to be in a position to take key suggestions to parliament in the near future.

Future areas of work for the CPGD: The Convenor suggested holding an event around Autum 2026 to showcase the different stakeholders across Deafness and Deafblindness, and highlight the depth and breadth of expertise to members of the new parliament.

Hannah advised that a list of future areas of work for the CPGD has been compiled from feedback at previous meeting. This running list will be available for the CPGD to take forward after election season.

The Convenor raised the topic of increasing numbers of Qualified Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People. Karen Adam MSP has put forward a motion for Member’s Business.

**Action: The Convenor will follow up with Karen Adam MSP on her plans for a member’s debate.**

Meetings for 2025:

- Wed 10<sup>th</sup> Dec (6-7.30pm)

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