

Cross Party Group on Deafness

Meeting, Wednesday 28 May 2025 at 6pm.

Via Zoom (an online video conferencing platform)

Minutes – Present

MSPs

Convenor – Colin Beattie MSP (Scottish National Party)

Roz McCall MSP (Conservative)

Karen Adam MSP (Scottish National Party)

Invited Guests

Jenni Minto MSP (Scottish National Party)

Kevin McGowan

Andrew Godfrey-Meers

Scott Steele

Group Members

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

Amanda McNamara (BATOD)

Kirsten Abioye (Lothian Children's Deaf Club)

Rachel O'Neill (Scottish Sensory Centre/University of Edinburgh)

Jacquie Winning (FVSC)

Lauren Gilmour (FVSC)

Andrew Dewey (Sign Language Interactions)

Beth McLean (Health in Mind)

Mona Veghefian (NDCS)

Jill Bradshaw (Lipread Scotland)

Rachel Mapson (QMU)

Christine Johnson (QMU)

Isabella Goldie (Deafblind Scotland)

John Whitfield (Deafblind Scotland)

Teri Devine (RNID)

Adele Goman (Edinburgh Napier University)

Avril Hepner (BDA)

Linda Sharkey (Scottish Audiology Heads of Service)

Deirdre Aitken (Highland Blindcraft)

Carla Marchbank (NESS)

Brogan Ferguson (RCSLT)

Philip Gerrard (Deaf Action)

Deborah Innes (Scottish Mental Health Service for Deaf People)

Victoria Bishop-Rowe (AVUK)

Language Service Professionals

Linda Joyce and Yvonne Waddell (BSL/English Interpreters)

Gail Richardson and Mel Coulter (ENT)

Apologies

DFM Kate Forbes

Annabel Ewing MSP

Carol Mochan MSP

Julie Ferguson

Denise McClung

Janis McDonald

Lois Drake

John Ravenscroft

Katie Edwards

Stephanie Rose

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.

The group approved a proposal to add Janis McDonald, Lipread Scotland, and Health in Mind to the CPGD.

Minutes of meeting on 5 February 2025 were approved.

Agenda item 2 – Update from Jeni Minto MSP on Contact Scotland BSL service

Jenni Minto MSP gave an update on behalf of the Deputy First Minister who gave her sincere apologies for not being able to attend the meeting in person.

Following the First Minister's commitment to continue the Contact Scotland BSL service, Scottish Government has taken the following actions to prepare for the new contract:

- Extended the current contract until 30 November 2025 to allow the current service to operate while the new service is procured.
- Consulted with Deaf and Deafblind communities to determine what they need and want for the new service.

- Held an industry day with suppliers to feedback on how BSL users use the service and what they would like to see from a future service.

The Deputy First Minister thanks BDA for facilitating community engagement sessions. It was made clear people value the free service as enabling independence. People reported that medical and customer service calls are the most common reason to use the service, calls are most accessed via smartphones, and people expect high quality calls and interpreters with confidentiality as standard. This information is extremely useful, helping shape the specification for the new service.

Scottish Government are finalising the specification for the new contract and will soon issue an invitation to tender via the online procurement portal. The successful supplier will deliver the new contract from December 2025. The Deputy First Minister will keep the CPGD updated on this work.

Hannah Tweed asked if there are plans for making the consultation responses public. Ms Minto advised she would take this question to the DFM for more information and report back to CPGD.

Linda Sharkey asked what the length of the new contract will be and highlighted the need for safeguarding within the tenure to prevent a retendering crisis. She also asked if the name of the service will change. Ms Minto agreed that factoring in safeguarding was an important point that Scottish Government officials were aware of. Kevin McGowan advised the Contact Scotland BSL name is licensed and owned by Scottish Government so this name will continue.

Action: Ms Minto to report back to the CPGD on whether consultation responses will be made public.

Agenda item 3 – Update from Jenni Minto MSP, Minister for Public Health and Women’s Health, on the National Audiology Improvement Programme.

Ms Minto joined the meeting following [a debate in Chamber on the importance of audiology services](#), and recommended members watch the recording of the discussion if possible. She reiterated the Scottish Government’s commitment to improving audiology services in Scotland. Ms Minto advised the audiology update report was sent to the Health,

Social Care and Sport Committee slightly later than hoped. [This is now published on the website.](#)

Scottish Government met with Chief Executives of Health Boards and are working with them on the business case for Improving Quality in Physiological Services (IQIPS) accreditation for all audiology services. It is currently being considered by NHS Scotland's Planning and Delivery Board - a route to funding is being explored by finance directors. Ms Minto also met with Primary Care and underlined audiology is a priority.

Linda Sharkey asked if local board finance directors would be looking to seek funding for IQIPS, or if it would be done at Scottish Government level. She highlighted that local boards will struggle to find the costs involved to gain accreditation, particularly to meet clinical standards for acoustic environments. Ms Minto agreed that these issues need to be part of the conversation on how best to progress with IQIPS. A meeting has taken place with Chief Executives and Scottish Government have approached local board finance directors and await a response.

Rachel O'Neill asked if the update report included Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) or education services. Ms Minto advised there has been a lot of discussion with officials about the importance of involving education, she will report back to the CPGD for information on the inclusion of SLT.

Hannah Tweed asked about recommendation 27 which pertains to starting up audiology undergraduate programmes again. In 2005, a BSc Audiology was funded by Scottish Government in response to a previous national shortage of audiologists. However, the recent update report states that funding for a BSc Audiology is outwith the control of Scottish Government. Ms Minto advised she has spoken with officials about how we ensure Scottish Government are giving the right leadership to move forward, to have the right service whether in NHS or in community of audiology.

Action: Ms Minto to report back to the CPGD on the role of Speech and Language Therapy within the audiology update.

Agenda item 4 – Update on the Education (Scotland) Bill and amendments around BSL

Hannah Tweed provided an update on behalf of Lois Drake from NDCS. Good progress has been made since June 2024 when the Education (Scotland) Bill was introduced. As of 7 May 2025, all BSL amendments put forward have been approved. The Bill is currently proceeding to Stage 3 for consideration - it is hoped this will be before the summer recess. NDCS and other organisations including Deaf Action, BDA and the ALLIANCE are ensuring the amendments continue to be scrutinised.

Action: Hannah to circulate written update from NDCS on the BSL amendments to members.

Agenda item 5 – Update from working group on Sensory Care and Dementia

Amy White updated members on progress of the working group. Their research report on [dementia assessments for people with Deafness, Deafblindness or Visual Impairment](#) was published on 7 April 2025. The report contains 26 recommendations for improvements to dementia assessment and post-diagnostic support pathways for integrated sensory care. [A Third Force News article based on the working group's report](#) was also published on 22 May 2025 and calls for mandatory sensory assessments as part of dementia assessments.

The working group received a positive response to their first research report generating interest from a number of stakeholders with possible avenues for developing or influencing changes to processes. This includes discussions with Health Improvement Scotland on their [SIGN 168 national clinical guideline for the assessment, diagnosis, care and support for people with dementia and their carers](#). The next working group takes place 25 June 2025 to discuss and agree options for next steps.

Roz McCall MSP raised the report findings during the audiology debate in Chamber which took place immediately before the CPGD meeting. In response to Roz's comments, Ms Minto advised her to contact the Minister for Social care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport whose portfolio covers Dementia. Roz suggested to CPGD members that we follow up on this by writing to Maree Todd and this was met with agreement.

Action: Roz McCall to draft a letter to Maree Todd from the CPGD on implementing the recommendations from the sensory care and dementia working group's report. Note: following June reshuffle, Tom Arthur most relevant recipient.

Agenda item 6 – Proposed new working group on Deafblindness

Isabella Goldie met with Alice Hall from Scottish Government about the definition of Deafblindness. They are looking at a launch, likely around Deafblind awareness week (22-28 June 2025).

A paper was circulated to CPGD members on a proposed new working group on Deafblindness which features a second phase of the working group focusing on the workforce supporting people who are Deafblind. This work should align with implementations from the Cabinet Office at Westminster. Isabella highlighted there may be people who were not part of the original short life working group who now want to be involved in this next phase looking at training, registration and workforce development.

Rachel O'Neill asked if more Deafblind people can join the group and would they be compensated for their time. Isabella said that there are currently four Deafblind people on the group and more are welcome. Unfortunately there is no finance available, at this time.

Colin proposed to the CPGD that the Short Life Working Group on Deafblindness is reformed with Annabelle Ewing MSP and Julie Ferguson as co-chairs and members agreed. Isabella welcomes interest from anyone who would like to join the group.

Agenda item 7 – AOCB

Update on meeting with Maree Todd, Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport, about See Hear Strategy

Colin Beattie, Hannah Tweed and Isabella Goldie met with Maree Todd in April to discuss the CPGD's concerns over the decision not to refresh the See Hear Strategy. The Minister noted that communication with stakeholders about the decision could have been better, and she is keen to progress formal adoption of the definition of Deafblindness.

The CPGD has been invited to meet with officials involved in the Disability Equality Plan (DEP) to discuss where sensory will sit in terms of policy. It was suggested we invite them to attend the next CPGD in September.

Equalities, Human Right and Civil Justice Committee – Impact of the BSL (Scotland) Act

Karen Adam MSP is the Convenor of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice (EHRCJ) Committee. The Committee are exploring the actions taken by the Scottish Government and public bodies to tackle the barriers faced by BSL users 10 years on from the BSL (Scotland) Act being passed. Following the public consultation which closed on 2 May 2025, the Committee have invited several CPGD members to [give evidence on the Inquiry at the Scottish Parliament on 3 June 2025](#).

The next scheduled CPGD meetings are:

- Wednesday 10 September (6-7.30pm) – **AGM and meeting**
- Wednesday 10 December (6-7.30pm)
- Wed 4th March 2026 (6-7.30pm)
- June 10th June 2026 (6-7.30pm)

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