

Cross-Party Group on Autism

Minutes from initial meeting - 14 November 2017, The Scottish Parliament, Room TG20/21

Attendees:

Annie Wells	MSP for the Glasgow region
Fulton MacGregor	MSP for Coatbridge & Chryston
Alexander Burnett	MSP for Aberdeenshire West
Sophie Castle	Office of Annie Wells MSP
Tony Curtis	Office of Annie Wells MSP
Elaine Ward	Office of Annie Wells MSP
David MacKenzie	The National Autistic Society Scotland
Kirstie Cusick	The National Autistic Society Scotland
Prof Jean MacLellan	Autism Network Scotland
James Fletcher	Association for Real Change
Catriona Stewart	SWAN
Charlene Tait	Scottish Autism
Richard Ibbotson	The Richmond Fellowship Scotland
Cathy Steedman	Autism Initiatives
Kabie Brook	Autism Rights Group Highland
Sonya Hallett & Alyson Macdonald	AMASE (Autistic Mutual Aid Society Edinburgh)

1. Welcomes and apologies:

Annie Wells welcomed everyone and said that she was pleased to be asked to set up this CPG. There was one apology for absence received from Catherine Steedman of Autism Initiatives.

2. Election of office bearers:

Fulton MacGregor nominated Annie Wells to be Convenor of the Group and this was seconded by Alexander Burnett. Annie wells nominated Graeme Dey MSP to be Deputy-Convenor and this was seconded by Fulton MacGregor.

It was agreed that The National Autistic Society Scotland and Scottish Autism would hold the Joint-Secretariat of the CPG.

3. Non-MSP Membership:

It was explained that The National Autistic Society Scotland had invited all the organisations who had attended the round-table event held last year at Dynamic Earth, as well as the organisations who receive funding through the Autism Innovation and Development Fund, to hold Non-MSP Membership of the CPG. The 23 organisations who had expressed an interest in becoming members were listed in a hand-out.

There was agreement that it was important to continue to consider how the CPG can get other organisations and individuals involved in order to ensure that autistic people's voices are heard.

In addition, PASDA were invited to join CPG as the only carer-led organisation.

4. Name and purpose of the CPG:

It was agreed that the Group would be called the 'Cross-Party Group on Autism'.

There was a discussion about what the stated purpose of the Group should be. As part of this discussion, the stated purposes of the various cross-party parliamentary groups in the other regions of the UK were read out and discussed. It was agreed that this CPG should incorporate elements of both the Welsh and Northern Irish CPGs, which would ensure that the Group would not only be a forum to raise awareness and promote the interests of autistic people, but also act as an influencer of government policy.

5. Topics for discussion at future meetings:

There was a discussion about what topics the CPG would discuss at future meetings. Annie Wells stated that as an MSP, the most common issues she hears from autistic constituents, their families and carers are around education, diagnosis waiting times, and employment. Other issues that were raised as possible topics for discussion were: access to mental health services, autistic parents, gender issues, housing, criminal justice, 2018 the Year of the Young Person, the One Stop Shops, and specialist v's generic service provision.

It was agreed that there was a need to be flexible so that the CPG could be responsive to opportunities to influence Government policy that would affect autistic people, their families and carers.

Alexander Burnett and Annie Wells suggested that the Secretariat consider the suggested topics for discussion and decide the work programme for the first year of the CPG.

6. Dates and times of future meetings:

It was agreed that initially the CPG would hold quarterly two hour meetings.

Annie Wells stated that once the registration of the CPG was agreed by the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, the Secretariat would circulate possible meeting dates for 2018. There was also a discussion about the possibility of holding the CPG meetings outside of the Parliament in locations across Scotland.

7. Any other business:

There was further discussion about how the voices of autistic people, their families and carers would be heard in the Group. It was highlighted that potential vehicles for this in the future could be an annual survey, or the creation of an advisory group. It was agreed that this wouldn't be necessary at this stage but could be revisited at the end of year one.

It was agreed that the meetings would be held publicly and that Members could email the Secretariat with any thoughts on how to involve autistic people and carers in the CPG. It was highlighted that a helpful and important way of doing this would be to ensure that advocacy groups are represented within the CPG Membership.

There was a discussion about the importance of ensuring that information on the CPG is accessible to people, and that there are mechanisms in place so that people can contribute to the CPG without having to be there in person, if that is something that they would not be comfortable doing. It was highlighted that the CPG would have its own web page on the Scottish Parliament website and that the relevant paperwork would be shared in good time before each meeting.

Action Points:

Action	To be taken by
Complete registration form and submit to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.	Annie Wells MSP
Agree possible dates and topics for discussion for year one of the CPG and share with membership.	Secretariat

