

**Disability Equality Forum
COVID-19 Meeting**

2.00 p.m. Tuesday 23 June 2020 via Video Link

Minutes of the Meeting

Present:

Jane Hutt MS, Deputy Minister and Chief Whip (Chair)

Forum Members

Rhian Davies	Disability Wales
Kate Young	All Wales Forum of Parents and Carers
Catherine Lewis	Children in Wales
Ross Thomas	Tai Pawb
Nicola Hollister	Wales Council for Deaf People
Owen Williams	Wales Council for the Blind
Karen Robson	Action on Hearing Loss
Rhian Stangroom-Teel	Leonard Cheshire
Emma Burke	Leonard Cheshire
Nathan Owen	RNIB
Ruth Fabby	Disability Arts Cymru
Jan Thomas	The FDF
Zoe Richards	Learning Disability Wales
Andrea Gordon	Wales Vision Forum / Guide Dogs Cymru
Joe Powell	All Wales People First
Wayne Crocker	Mencap
Daniel Hurford	WLGA

Welsh Government Officials

Deputy Chief Medical Officer

Jon Luxton

NR

Alyson Francis

NR

Professor Chris Jones
Specialist Policy Adviser
COVID19 Shielding Response
Deputy Director Communities Division
Disability Policy, Equality Branch
Equality Branch
Equality Branch
Knowledge and Analytical Services

External Speaker

Dr Simon Hoffman

Swansea University

Apologies

Jo Fashan

Fiona Reid

Geraint Rees

Whizz Kidz
Disability Sport Wales
EHRC

1. Welcome and Introduction

- 1.1 The Deputy Minister and Chief Whip (DMCW) welcomed members and thanked the Deputy Chief Medical Officer (DMCO) for Wales, Professor Chris Jones, for joining the meeting.

2. Use of Face Coverings

- 2.1 The DMCO referenced the recent announcement on the use of face coverings and the recommendation that, following updated advice from the World Health Organisation, three layer face coverings are recommended in certain situations, but are not mandatory.
- 2.2 He reiterated that the evidence remains clear the most effective way to protect from infection is to follow social distancing rules, and adhere to good hand hygiene. However, in some circumstances where it might be difficult to stay 2 metres away from others, Welsh Government is advising the use of three-layer, non-medical face coverings.
- 2.3 The following issues were raised by Forum members which the DCMO addressed:
- PPE for unpaid carers – the DMCO confirmed that this has been discussed with the Minister for Health and Social Services and whilst medical masks can't be provided to members of the public in order to protect stocks, they are being issued to carers via local authorities.
 - Clear masks – of the 260,000 for UK medical settings, it is anticipated that Wales will receive a proportionate share of this, around 13,000. The DMCO confirmed that Health and Social Care officials have discussed the use of clear masks and relevant guidance will be issued shortly.
- 2.6 The DMCW referenced the DMCO's statement published on the 22 June which confirmed there are no changes to advice to those who are shielding in Wales. There had been some confusion in the media in light of the announcement that the UK Government is making changes to the advice it will be issuing to people who are shielding in England from July. The DMCW asked for comments from the Forum.
- 2.7 Rhian Davies (RD) thanked Welsh Government for issuing advanced notice to the Forum before the statement was published, this was welcomed. RD also commented on an action from the previous meeting for officials from the Shielding Branch to engage with Forum members in the lead up to the next review in Wales on the 16 August but members have yet to be contacted. NR confirmed she is working with shielding officials on setting up this meeting and members will be notified of the arrangements shortly. The DMCO agreed it was important that this engagement happens.

Action 1: **NR** to continue to liaise with shielding officials on arrangements for engagement sessions.

2.8 The DMCW thanked the DMCO for attending, to which he confirmed he would be happy to attend future meetings if that would be useful.

2.9 Wayne Crocker (WC) raised a separate point about parent carers via the chat facility. Mencap have had a number of parent carers contact them as police have been stopping them when outdoors as there are usually two parents or parent and sibling with a family member with a learning disability. WC asked the DMCW if this could be brought to the attention of the Police and Crime Commissioners and Chief Constables in Wales, reminding them that two members of support is allowed for people with a learning disability who may face behavioural challenges. The DMCW agreed.

Action 2: Officials from Welsh Government's Community Safety Branch to draw the concerns raised to the attention of the Police and Crime Commissioners of Wales.

3. Agenda Item 3: Future development of the disabled people's movement

3.1 Jon Luxton (JL) provided some background to this agenda item and asked members to reflect on the progress made over recent years; but also to look beyond the here and now and consider where the disabled people's movement in Wales needs to be and how that can be achieved.

3.2 RD agreed it was important not to lose sight of everything that's been achieved as there is a danger the disabled people's movement could take a backwards step. RD sees this as an opportunity to reflect, take stock, re-group and become impassioned once again. Grassroots organisations are very important – these are often the hardest hit and investment is needed to allow them to continue to support people on the ground, and for their voices to be heard by public bodies as we move towards post Covid recovery.

3.3 Owen Williams (OW) supported RD's comments and also made reference to a document produced by Wales Council of the Blind on behalf of the Wales Vision Forum on Covid-19 measures and their impact on people with sight loss. There is a risk that key issues may be lost e.g. employment and education. OW referenced the Access to Work scheme as an example of how the disabled people's agenda is not progressing as the scheme follows the medical model of disability rather than the social model.

3.4 The DMCW confirmed the points raised by OW can be looked at when the Action on Disability Framework is revisited as part of the recovery phase.

Action 3: **NR** to circulate the Wales Vision Forum document provided by OW.

3.5 The DMCW referenced Public Appointments. The work Welsh Government has been doing on this has now been un-paused and whilst a mentoring

scheme is not in place at the moment, this is something that needs to be looked at to allow disabled people equal access to public appointments.

- 3.6 Andrea Gordon (AG) also supported the comments made by other members and reiterated the importance of managing people's right to freedom. As an example, AG highlighted Cardiff Council's proposal to separate wider pedestrian areas by visual indicators which is not a good solution for people with sight loss.
- 2.7 Nathan Owen (NO) agreed with Andrea's point. He added that although it was good to see the Welsh Government's recently published guidance on 'creating safer public spaces' is very clear that the needs of disabled people must be considered in the early planning stages, this currently isn't translating into a material difference on the ground in terms of accessible design. The speed of implementation as more measures are relaxed means equality considerations are not prioritised.
- 3.7 The DMCW thanked members for their comments and agreed there is a need to consider the impact of Covid-19 on disabled people as a whole, bringing together the different sectors, to enhance the work towards recovery. The DMCW suggested issuing a position statement from the Disability Equality Forum in response to the evidence collated by the various organisations across Wales on the impact of Covid-19 on disabled people. The paper could follow a similar model of the statement produced by the Race Equality Forum and include examples from across Government policy e.g. Health; Transport; Employment; Education; Housing; Digital Inclusion; etc. to demonstrate what's happening on the ground and capture lived experience. This can be used to support discussions and decision making across Government.
- 3.8 The DMCW asked JL to lead on this piece of work in partnership with Disability Wales.

Action 4: Jon Luxton to work in partnership with Rhian Davies, Disability Wales, to draft a position statement on behalf of the Disability Equality Forum in response to evidence collated on the impact of Covid-19 on disabled people.

- 3.9 A number of members had examples evidence that could be used to feed into this paper – Emma Burke (EB) explained that Leonard Cheshire have undertaken a UK wide survey which has been broken down by region so data for Wales can be provided. Ruth Fabby (RF) of Disability Arts Wales highlighted their social media campaign #wewillnotbeforgotten, which trended at number one in Wales the previous week.
- 3.10 The DMCW welcomed these suggestions and was pleased to hear about the success of Disability Arts Wales' media campaign. A request was made for any surveys, discussions, reports to be submitted to officials so this can be pulled together in one place and used to inform the position statement.

Action 5: Forum members to provide details of their evidence / data collection to NR or the Equality Branch mailbox: Equalitybranch@gov.wales

4. Agenda Item 4: Research into strengthening and advancing equality and human rights in Wales

- 4.1 The DMCW welcomed Dr. Simon Hoffman (SH) from Swansea University who is the lead investigator on the research into strengthening and advancing equality and human rights in Wales.
- 4.2 SH provided some background on the work his team is doing and set out their intentions for a series of online interviews with stakeholders and 6 online workshops that will be held over the coming weeks. As these sessions won't have the capacity to reach everyone, they have also developed an in depth questionnaire to engage further. SH would like to use the Disability Equality Forum to discuss further and asked to join a second meeting where a longer time slot could be allocated. The questionnaires would be circulated in advance and the responses discussed in greater detail.
- 4.3 Due to time constraints, the DMCW welcomed this and suggested that a further official level meeting is held to discuss SH's research work, and the development of the position statement (Agenda item 3).

Action 6: An official-led meeting to be arranged with two items Agenda items – Research into Strengthening and Advancing Equality and Human Rights; and the Covid-19 position statement.

Additional Comments captured on Chat Facility

Ruth Fabby: Are any unions helping the care sector to set standards such as imposing masks?

Rhian Davies: Reasonable Adjustments under the EA should apply. Could contact the EASS.

Ruth Fabby: I feel safer using a face mask when using the communal lift as they are smaller than the two meters...should the environment make a difference?

Catherine Lewis: I know some local authorities are already providing PPE to unpaid carers but many are not.

Kate Young: Yes Cath, it's not consistent at the moment.

My only comment is as I've said about shielding families having the confidence to go out, following up the letter to those shielding with the information about accessing

PPE from Councils would help address and support the shielding position in Wales. Grateful to Dr Jones for his time and thoughts.

Catherine Lewis: It's all getting very complicated for people, especially the general public, to differentiate accurately between what is English only advice and what is Wales only. I know that this is because of the broadcasters but it is getting confusing. Is England not welcoming engagement from Wales or Scotland on these issues?

Kate Young: This a real concern for families across Wales - many feel that the ground gained for equality is under threat. Health leading creates a natural push towards medical model working, and we need to push against that slip! UP for another mini revolution if needed.

I think a cross group report on the impact of covid -19 would be really useful.... many of us have done individual reports to be pulled together. Perhaps we could have a rights checklist from that which helps ensure recovery plans don't drive us backwards?

Emma Burke: We have conducted a survey around the impacts of covid on disabled people and social care and we are happy to share these learnings with this group

Rhian Davies: Disabled Artists have a vital role to play in progressing rights & exploring issues around identity!

Simon Hoffman: It would be very welcome if forum members who have surveys, reports, research available about the impact of Covid-19 on disabled people could forward these to us to inform our research for the Welsh Government. I am happy for my email to be shared for this purpose.

Rhian Davies: We've got a survey out & have been running focus groups. Also the issues raised through our project #LockdownLife

Ruth Fabby: we are launching an arts exhibition and creative word prize of work based on the theme 'Outdoors:Indoors' - please let me know if you would like an invite to the zoom launch. Some disabled artists can help design accessible environments

Jan Thomas: BCUHB are currently running a survey re access to health provision during Covid and we have lots of examples of disabled people unable to access health provision I will try to get that shared with yourselves

Zoe Learning Disability Wales: We are seeing an increasing culture of protectionism from planners, change makers about not creating accessible environments, situations etc in case the non-disabled public abuse the situation. For example, no easy read shielding letter available for organisations to support people because it would be used for fraudulent activity. Park benches not available to anyone because if they were only available for people with disabilities it would be abused.