

Cross-Party Group on Mental Health

Wednesday 8th November 2023 at 6:00pm

Minutes

Present

MSPs

- Audrey Nicoll MSP (in-person)
- Beatrice Wishart MSP, Co-convener (in-person)
- Oliver Mundell MSP, Co-convener (in-person)

Non MSP Group Members

- Agnieszka Morrisons, Feniks (online)
- Aidan Mitchell, Change Mental Health (in-person)
- Alison Rankin, REH Patients Council (in-person)
- Barry Gale, Mental Health Rights Scotland (in-person)
- Billy Burke, SAMH (in-person)
- Brian Magee, COSCA (online)
- Bruce Smith, Salvation Army (online)
- Carol Murray, Herriot-Watt University (online)
- Chloe Campbell, SAMH (in-person)
- Ciara Ryan, Edinburgh Napier University (online)
- Claire Muir, Psychiatric Rights Scotland (in-person)
- Dawn Fyfe, Wise Women (online)
- Emma Wood, Salveson Mind Room (online)
- Erin Slaven, Paul Sweeney MSP's office (online)
- Ewan Carmichael (in-person)
- Georgina Ruth, With Kids (online)
- Harriette Campbell (online)
- Helen Auld, the NASUWT (in-person)
- Helen Forrest, Children's Mental Health (online)
- Jim Dorman, St Andrew's First Aid (online)
- June Dickson, Environmental Health CIC (online)
- Katie Gilbert, NUS Scotland (online)
- Kenny Stewart, SAMH (in-person)
- Lynsey McPhail, Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland (online)
- Mairi Campbell-Jack, SAMH (in-person)
- Martyn Pickersgill, University of Edinburgh (in-person)
- Matthew James, Royal College of Psychiatrists (online)
- Mehar Shagufta, Playlist for Life (online)

- Mike Corbett, the NASUWT (in-person)
- Oluwatoyin Opeloyeru (online)
- Simon Porter, REH Patients Council (in-person)
- Steve Mulligan, BACP (online)

Apologise

- Andrew Muir, Psychiatric Rights Scotland
- Beth Davidson, Feeling Strong
- Jill Stavert, Napier University
- Joanne Docherty, Psychologists for Social Change
- Judith Connell, Kidney Care UK
- Lucy Mulvagh, the ALLIANCE
- Michelle Howieson, Biploar Edinburgh
- Katie Borland, See Me
- Jim Hume, Change Mental Health
- James Banner-Rall, See Me

1. Welcome and apologies

- Oliver Mundell MSP welcomed attendees (both in the Committee Room and online), clarified both online and in-person meeting housekeeping to ensure the smooth running of the meeting, introduced the agenda, and read out the meeting apologise.

2. Minutes from the previous meeting

- Regarding the vote on the group agreement, which was circulated to CPG members and closed in July, Oliver updated that the group had voted in favour of keeping the agreement's current wording. The vote's outcome was also communicated to the group by email. He advised that the group will not revisit this agenda item until the next AGM.
- Beatrice Wishart MSP updated the group an output from our last meeting, which saw Feniks present and discuss on the topic of Ukrainian refugee's mental health needs. Beatrice saw an opportunity to raise the issues raised in the presentation at Portfolio Questions with Shirley Anne Summerville MSP, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice. The Cabinet Secretary expressed that they were interested in hearing more from Feniks, and from there Feniks were able to pass on more information about their work and the mental health challenges that remain Ukranian refugees in Scotland.

3. Teaching and mental health with the NASUWT

- The group heard from Mike Corbett - National Officer at teacher's union, the NASUWT - about the organisation's 'Wellbeing at Work' survey which was completed by their membership, showcasing the mental health challenges of teachers.
- Key findings from the survey saw that 90% of respondents stated that their work-related stress had increased in the last 12 months, and that 91% had stated their job had adversely impacted their mental health.
- Since summer, some teachers have reached out the NASUWT stating that they were having thoughts of suicide. This has reinforced to the union that there is a mental health crisis for teachers in Scotland.
- Key drivers of increased mental health challenges for teachers were identified as excessive workload, pandemic consequences, pupil behaviour and worry over pupil wellbeing and performance.
- Mike stated that excessive workload had topped teacher concerns for many years, highlighting unnecessary bureaucracy, large volumes of mandatory planning, and the pressure of schools/teachers being regarded as society's 'fixers'.
- On the impact of the pandemic, Mike expressed that there is a need for more research on how this impacted teachers and schools. Their members have seen

absence rates increase and difficulty for some young people in sticking to routine and boundaries.

- In regards to violent and abusive behaviour, Mike cited the 94% of their membership had been subject to verbal abuse in the last 12 months. This has resulted in increased stress levels and 1 in 10 taking time off work. Mike expressed a wish for national lead and guidance on pupil behaviour.
- Mike highlighted increased anxiety from teachers around the wellbeing of their pupils, particularly in the context of the cost of living crisis where some children are presenting as hungry, not adequately clothed and not having the right equipment. Whilst there are some localised solutions, such as individual schools using equity funding for breakfast clubs, Mike expressed the need for national solutions.
- Looking to current services for supporting teacher's mental health, Mike concluded there is some small scale effect projects but accessible national funding and services need to be made available.
- Martyn Pickersgill asked if the poor mental health of children as a result of the pandemic had impacted teachers. Mike agreed that the mental health of pupils and teachers are bi-relational and that any effective support service for teachers must take this into account.
- Mairi Campbell-Jack queried how violent behaviour is reported in schools, and if mental health support is flagged in these instances. Mike stated that there is no consistent approach to this in Scotland, and that often there needs to be a special request for a violent incident form.
- Claire Muir picked up on the NASUWT's process for supporting their members who had expressed suicidal ideations. Mike stated that follow up with those individuals is immediate and that they have full time caseworks ensure support is provided where needed. He also stated that the NASUWT is working to ensure that their staff and membership are prepared to talk about suicide
- Helen Forrest signposted to some a [free resource](#) for all staff working in schools across Scotland. It takes a whole school approach centred on prevention and early intervention to promote positive mental health and wellbeing for everyone in the school community.
- Steve Mulligan commented that in some areas of Wales, counselling support for pupils (funded for all secondary schools on a statutory basis by Welsh Government) is also available for teaching staff. Mike stated that the NASUWT was aware of this and have highlight this with the Scottish Government.
- Emma Wood shared their experience of leaving the teaching profession because of their mental health and feeling unsafe in their workplace day to day. Their experience is that when additional resources were given to schools, the safety of everyone in the school community improved.
- Jim Dorman signposted to the St Andrew's First Aid ['Ready for Life' programme](#) for pupils aged 16 and over which includes the Mental Health Awareness (SCQF4) certificate.
- Agnieszka Morrison drew attention to Strategic Action 2.6 in the Scottish Government's newly published Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy Delivery Plan. This refers to the mental health and wellbeing support in education settings

and names a few strategic partners that may be of benefit for NASUWT to reach out to.

- Helen Auld expressed, as a serving teacher, real worry about the impacts of the current mental health crisis on teachers and young people, which they see as having been exacerbated by the pandemic and cost of living crisis. They are seeing dysregulated and hungry children arriving at school, and teachers who are still recovering from the mental toll of online teaching. Helen expressed that COVID recovery in schools is not a reality for everyone.
- Ewan Carmichael commented on the cycle between the lack of access to mental health support for children and young people and worsening teacher's health, particularly as teachers are often points of access for services. He expressed that solution making should take a whole systems approach, with Ewan explicitly referencing the need to address lack of CAMHS access, lack of access to diagnosis for neurodiverse young people, and high teacher workloads.
- Aidan Mitchell queried if the NASUWT had noticed a geographical difference in teachers reporting mental health challenges, referencing different feelings of stigma depending on where an individual lives potentially impacting disclosures of poor mental health. Mike stated that they always see differences in experiences but that the pandemic did see more people become comfortable with online meetings. In regards to stigma, Mike has seen an increase in comfort for members in talking about their mental health generally.
- Audrey Nicoll MSP shared their reflections on the similarities between the mental health challenges in teaching and policing, particularly in that both are often on the front line of responding to the current mental health. She queried whether there was any real leadership in providing clarity to teachers and parents about early intervention. Mike commented on the increase in support and training for senior staff members but that head teachers often find themselves too busy with management responsibilities to able to give a personal touch to action around mental health support.
- Billy Burke stated that, as a former head teacher, the findings of the NASUWT's wellbeing survey would resonate with other teaching unions. They commented that we need reform of mental health services in the widest sense and raised the issue of large class sizes making early intervention difficult. Mike agreed that additional time and space is going to help both teachers and pupils if the Scottish Government's commitment to reducing class sizes is realised.
- Dawn Fyfe questioned whether online support and resources had had any evaluation, of which Mike was not sure on.

ACTION

- Oliver to take away query on evaluation of online mental health support and resources for pupils and teacher to the Cabinet Secretary for Education.

4. Voice of lived experience

- Ewan Carmichael stated that he had attended a roundtable event organised by SAMH, which brought together the First Minister and 20 young people aged between 14 and 25 to talk about the mental health challenges facing Scotland. They stated that it was a very positive experience, and that they were pleased that the First Minister was open to challenge.
- Helen Auld shared a recent experience as a supply teacher, where they had accidentally misgendered a pupil. Whilst the situation was quickly rectified, it sparked stress and anger from another pupil in the classroom and Helen was threatened with violence. Helen expressed her hurt at having caused the pupils to become upset, and the stress that the incident caused her. They highlighted the need for supports to be put in place for supply teachers when coming into a new classroom setting (i.e. pupils preferred names and pronouns being noted on the register).

5. Any other business

- Barry Gale expressed that the recent vote on the CPG's group agreement had been close – with 11 votes for incorporating a proposed change of wording, and 13 against - and that there may have been some confusion over the vote. Oliver stated that there would be time to look at this at the next AGM, but not before.
- Barry noted the purpose of the group is missing on the CPG's section of the Scottish Parliament website. Oliver stated that any changes made to the group's objectives and purpose would result in the need to resubmit an application to exist as a group. There will be space at the next AGM to look at this if members would like to amend the group's purpose.
- Barry informed the group that there would be a protest taking place outside the Scottish Parliament on the 7th of November regarding the topics raised in the 'Locked in Hospital' Disclosure programme. Oliver and Beatrice stated that they would try and make it along.

ACTION

- SAMH to request the CPG's current purpose statement is uploaded to the website
- Group members to have a think about possible amendments to the group's stated purpose.