

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) Scotland

RNIB Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation and to support the future developments of the Integration Authorities (IAs).

We recognise that strong and effective partnership must be at the heart of driving better outcomes for the people of Scotland.

As Scotland's leading sight loss charity working with blind and partially sighted people and a key partner with a range of integrated eye-care and sensory services, we support those with a sensory impairment to live full and independent lives.

The integration of health and social care represents a unique opportunity to improve the provision of services and embed better care for blind and partially sighted people.

We would like to see each IA developing an action plan to manage eye health and community services coherently, ensuring better care and prevention strategies.

We believe that the proposals going forward for IAs must explicitly recognise the interests and needs of blind and partially sighted people in order to deliver seamless services and better outcomes.

Please note that we think it would be worthwhile considering the language used to denote an Integration Authority (IA) as compared to an Integrated Joint Board (IJB). RNIB Scotland's experience is that the term 'IJB' is used by several of the current IAs/IJBs. Consolidation of this into a single term may be helpful.

The consultation remit poses the following questions:

- Do you know how and when you can get involved with the Integration Authorities to influence decision making?
- Were you consulted in the preparation of the strategic plans or involved with the work of the Strategic Planning Group?
- Have you been involved with the work of the Integration Authority following the publication of the strategic plan?
- Have you been involved with the work of the localities/ what involvement would you like to have?
- Do you think that your involvement with the IAs has had an impact on decision making?
- What could be done to improve the communication from the IAs?
- What could be done to ensure greater collaboration and engagement in the decision making process of Integration Authorities?

RNIB Scotland recognises the importance of locality planning in order to derive the best outcomes for blind and partially sighted people and seeks to engage at every level possible.

RNIB Scotland is currently examining and scoping out how best to effectively influence the outcomes for blind and partially sighted people through applying a strategic policy perspective allied with our long term organisational knowledge, direct service experience in some localities and collaborating with other visual impairment organisations as to what IAs should be considering as best practice.

We hope to be a constructive actor in shaping the future of service provision for blind and partially sighted people in partnership with local visual impairment organisations and IAs.

Have you been involved with the work of the localities/ what involvement would you like to have?

During this period of transition we welcome the opportunity to support localities across Scotland and to establish new and collaborative ways of working.

Localities are key to achieving the aspirations we share for health and social care integration. The new arrangements provide the opportunity to do more joint working and partnership, focussing together on our joint responsibility to improve outcomes for people.

In line with the Christie Commission Report (2011), 'effective services must be designed with and for people and communities – not delivered, "top down" for administrative convenience'.¹

RNIB Scotland offers services that give key support to people with sight loss. Examples of our local engagement work include low vision assessments, vision rehabilitation support, vision support services and the You Care, Eye Care project:

Low Vision Assessments

Access to low-vision assessments in the community to cater for people with sight loss - including those with complex needs (learning disability, stroke autism and dementia) and those in residential care - are important to identify and properly support unmet needs. RNIB's award-winning community services have been operating in Scotland for over 15 years. They include specialist vision assessment to inform the development of a personalised package of independent living, training and support.

Vision Rehabilitation Support

¹ The Christie Commission Report Commission on the future delivery of public services, June 2011.

We are aware of the need for more vision rehabilitation support. Just under half of blind and partially sighted people in touch with their council are not assessed for vision rehabilitation support.² This means that the council doesn't have accurate knowledge of their needs, and some visually impaired people miss out on the support they require to live independent lives.

Vision Support Service

The Vision Support Service operates within hospital clinics to provide crucial emotional support to those diagnosed with sight loss. This intervention establishes a bridge between the health and social care settings, giving advice and support to enable people to start rebuilding their lives.

'Every day in Scotland, 10 people begin to lose their sight - but only one in six will be offered support and counselling.

Without support people may lose confidence and find it difficult to cope, leading to isolation.'³

The Vision Support Service offers services such as:

- emotional support;
- support and information for you, family, friends and carers;
- information on eye conditions and good eye health;
- referrals to other services;
- Information on certification and registration.

You Care Eye Care (YCEC)

The You Care, Eye Care project, funded by Alliance Scotland, began in 2014 and supports a peer-to-peer model which offers free practical support to 15 Black African men and women aged 25 and over, identifying their individual eye care and other needs.

Between the 2001 and 2011 census, the African community in Glasgow increased dramatically, by 400 per cent. As a result, there was a marked increase in the number of African people presenting at ophthalmology services with late stage eye disease.

Recommendation

² Looking Local: How councils can help blind and partially sighted people in their area, RNIB Scotland Manifesto 2017.

³ Vision Support Services, RNIB Scotland, quote from John Legg, then Director of RNIB Scotland, September 2014.

RNIB Scotland welcome the localities input to reduce health inequalities as part of the Scottish Governments health and wellbeing outcomes.

Eye health and the importance of taking up regular eye tests (free in Scotland) are health priorities and we urge localities to work with public health and community structures to promote these.

We welcome a locality approach, especially alongside the effective embedding of key prevention messages with health staff in regular contact with groups at higher risk of sight loss in the community, ensuring that staff members are more confident and knowledgeable in talking to patients about eye care.

What could be done to improve the communication from the IAs?

It is crucial that service users, as well as organisations are able to engage effectively in the co-production of future services and be able to influence long term policy where appropriate.

Accessibility, of services, is a human right enshrined in Article Nine of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This emphasises the need to identify and eliminate obstacles and barriers to accessibility.

Communication formats all too often present one of the first obstacles to accessing services for blind and partially sighted people.

Too often, services are 'digital by default' which means that they are primarily accessible online. This is problematic for people with a visual impairment, especially when websites are incompatible with sight aids such as screen readers and Braille readers.

Despite living in a digital age, less than ten per cent of public and commercial websites are accessible.

The Scottish Government should actively promote accessibility measures whilst IA senior officers and practitioners must also address the issue.

Recommendation

We urge the IAs to follow the accessibility 'asks' in 'Looking Local', RNIB Scotland's manifesto for the 2017 Scottish local government elections:

- 'That all council websites and apps are designed with accessibility in mind, and that blind and partially sighted people are consulted in the design process.'

- That council systems are not 'digital by default' and that a range of communication formats are available to ensure that services are accessible to all.'⁴

⁴ 'Looking local: How councils can help blind and partially sighted people in their area. (RNIB Scotland, 2017).