

Voting Rights for Third Sector, Service-User and Carer Representatives on IJBs

The Third Sector Interface (TSI) network is pleased to respond to the written call for views on the instrument to revise voting rights on Integrated Joint Boards.

TSIs have a key role in supporting third-sector participation in IJBs across local areas in Scotland.

The TSI network strongly supports the introduction of voting rights and believe this represents an essential step towards more effective, equitable and transformative decision-making within Scotland's health and social care system. This is not a new idea, rather the closure of a democratic deficit that has existed in IJB governance since the start of the integration process. These IJB stakeholder members are currently accountable for decisions made without having meaningful input into those decisions.

Representatives from these stakeholder groups bring essential insight into the lived experiences of people and communities. Their contributions enable IJBs to understand how decisions affect those who rely on support, those who deliver community-based services, and those who care for others. This knowledge strengthens decision-making and ensures that governance does not become detached from the realities faced by individuals, families and communities.

These representatives also help IJBs look beyond a narrow focus on the governance of NHS and Council services. They prompt a wider system view—one that recognises the importance of prevention, community support, wellbeing, and the broader social determinants that allow people to live healthy, connected and fulfilling lives. This perspective is crucial if IJBs are to lead genuine transformation rather than perpetuate the status quo.

Stakeholder representatives already act as key drivers of change. They ask difficult questions, challenge assumptions, and highlight alternative pathways when existing systems are failing to deliver. Public service reform requires boldness, and these representatives are essential to shifting IJBs towards meeting the needs of people today and in the future.

A major barrier to transformational change is the persistence of deeply embedded power dynamics within the public sector. While IJBs should and often do strive to operate by consensus, the presence of voting rights is a critical marker of parity and respect. Without voting rights, stakeholder representatives operate with diminished influence, and their ability to challenge entrenched structures is constrained. Their insights can too easily be ignored, even when they reflect the real experiences of those most affected by decisions.

Granting voting rights is therefore an important step toward rebalancing entrenched power dynamics that hinder progress and slow reform. It is also worth noting though that the effectiveness of these roles depends on the strength of their connection to the communities they represent and the level of support and infrastructure available to them. Voting rights alone are not sufficient. Representatives must be supported to engage meaningfully, communicate with their stakeholder groups, and contribute with confidence and authority.

Membership is currently balanced between Health Board and Local Authority membership. The inclusion of other strategic partners does not affect this balance, nor does it undermine local democratic accountability or either party's ability to meet their statutory responsibilities.

The third sector is an increasingly important partner in the integration programme - Councils and Health Boards are only part of the strategic infrastructure around the delivery of health and social care at a local level. Those with lived experience of services provide crucial insights into the way that services are provided and delivered, while the third sector is a key strategic partner. Their membership enriches the IJB and ensures that key strategic perspectives are included in decision making.

The third sector is an increasingly important partner in the integration programme with services (including statutory services), commissioned from the sector and accounting for a greater proportion of service provision each year. 34% of the social care workforce work in the third sector compared to 22% in the statutory sector, and 44% in the private sector. (Source: [Scottish Government](#) 2022)

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the introduction of voting rights for stakeholder representatives does not come without risks. Exercising a vote may bring additional legal responsibilities, and clarity will be needed to ensure that representatives understand their duties and that they are protected. There are also potential reputational risks, as representatives—particularly those drawn from lived experience or community roles—may be publicly associated with decisions that can be contentious or unpopular. Without appropriate safeguards, training and organisational backing, this may deter some individuals from putting themselves forward for these roles, especially those who already face barriers to participation.

These risks do not diminish the case for voting rights, but they highlight the need for clear guidance, proportionate support, and a system that enables representatives to participate confidently and safely. We welcome Scottish Government creating a short life working group to develop this infrastructure.

TSIs play a critical enabling role for third sector representatives, ensuring strong links to the diverse organisations delivering community services across Scotland. TSIs can also add significant value to the work of service-user and carer representatives, given the thousands of third sector organisations that support, advocate for and connect people who draw on health and social care services and those who care for them.

For Scotland to achieve the transformation envisioned in national policy, engagement, participation and co-design must be embedded throughout the system—not only in service delivery but also in governance. Granting voting rights to third sector, service-user and carer representatives is a meaningful act of power-sharing. It signals a commitment to genuine partnership, strengthens accountability, and aligns governance structures with the principles of collaboration and co-production that underpin health and social care integration.

For these reasons, the TSI network strongly supports the introduction of voting rights for stakeholder representatives on IJBs and urges Scottish Government to adopt this important reform.