

# **Cross-Party Group on Visual Impairment**

## **Tuesday 4 March 2025, 18.00-19.45, online and Committee Room 3, Scottish Parliament**

**Present – attending in person**

### **MSPs**

1. Neil Bibby MSP
2. Stuart McMillan MSP

### **Invited guests**

1. Alan Dudley
2. Niall Foley, External Affairs Manager (Scotland), Guide Dogs
3. Michael Moore, Policy and Campaigns Manager (Scotland), Guide Dogs
4. Sue Webber MSP

### **Observers**

N/A

### **Non-MSP Group Members**

1. James Adams, RNIB Scotland
2. Catriona Burness, RNIB Scotland
3. Eileen Clarkson, RNIB Scotland
4. Matthew Leitch, Office of Stuart McMillan MSP
5. Joanna Zawadzka, Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans
6. Jacquie Winning, Forth Valley Sensory Centre

## **Present – attending online**

### **MSPs - attending online**

N/A

### **Invited guests – attending online**

1. Helen Aluko-Olokun, Policy Manager - Built Environment lead, Guide Dogs
2. Emma Sedgwick, Engagement Manager, OSCR
3. Hannah Tweed, The ALLIANCE - Scottish Sensory Hub

### **Observers – attending online**

1. Ellie May Garnish
2. Mike Stewart, Scottish Government

### **Non-MSP Group Members – attending online**

1. Deidre Aiken, Highland Blindcraft Sensory Services
2. Paul Bartley, Optelec
3. Salena Begley, MBE, Family Fund
4. Claire Black, NHS Education for Scotland
5. Jordan Black, SAVIE
6. Tanya Castell, RNIB Trustee
7. Graham Findlay, Thomas Pocklington Trust (TPT)
8. Raquel Garrido-Soriano, Visionary
9. Sheila Hands, NHS Tayside
10. Kirstie Henderson, RNIB Scotland
11. Laura Jones, RNIB Scotland
12. Adam Lodge, Visibility Scotland
13. Maureen Macmillan, Highland Blindcraft Sensory Services
14. Jo MacQueen, RNIB Scotland
15. Carla Marchbank, North East Sensory Services
16. Rod Murchison
17. Joanne O'Hanlon, Optometry Scotland
18. Nicoletta Primo, Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans
19. Jonathan Reid, Deafblind Scotland
20. Terry Robinson
21. Lewis Shaw, The ALLIANCE - Scottish Sensory Hub
22. Danny Sweeney
23. Colette Walker

## Apologies

1. Miles Briggs MSP
2. Claire Forde, RNIB Scotland Advisory Group
3. Amanda Foster
4. Gillian Hallard, RNIB Scotland
5. Pauline Gibson, Hearing and Sight Care
6. Thelma Ingram
7. Margaret Jackson, RNIB Scotland
8. Maureen McAlister
9. Dan Meikle, RNIB Scotland
10. Sally Paterson, Vision Support Service, Aberdeen City Council
11. Hussein Patwa
12. Professor John Ravenscroft
13. Ken Reid
14. Kirin Saeed
15. Colin Smyth MSP
16. Alan Stewart
17. Charles Willis, Senior Manager Policy and Sector Improvement, Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR)

## **Cross-Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on Visual Impairment #CPGVI**

### **Purpose of the group:**

The Cross-Party Group on Visual Impairment draws together the blind and partially sighted sector in Scotland to identify issues competent to the Scottish Parliament and seeks, in a reasonable fashion, to influence policy, legislation and decision makers to better reflect the needs of blind and partially sighted people.

## **Agenda**

### **Agenda item 1 - Welcome, introductions and apologies**

Stuart welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologised for a delayed start due to the overrunning of a debate in the Scottish Parliament Chamber.

He read out the GDPR statement (below):

“The names of individual members are listed on the CPG website alongside the list of organisation members. The parliament's guidance states that “The name of an individual is considered to be personal data

so if you are holding the names of those attending CPG meetings and minutes of what was said, then those minutes include personal data.” The names of CPG attendees will be on the public record of the meeting. If anyone does not wish their name to appear on any publicly available CPG documents, please let Catriona know. This notice will be read at the start of CPG meetings.”

He also went over meeting etiquette for those attending online and in person.

## **Agenda item 2 - Approval of minutes of meeting of 20 November 2024**

The minutes were approved with one amendment – the addition of Eileen Clarkson, RNIB Scotland, to the list of in-person attendees noted for 20 November 2024.

Mover: James Adams, RNIB Scotland.

Seconder: Jacquie Winning, Forth Valley Sensory Centre.

## **Agenda item 3 - Matters arising and Action Points**

### **Action points carried over from previous meetings**

Stuart thanked all who took part in the RNIB Scotland Braille 200 event in the Garden Lobby at the Scottish Parliament on Wednesday 29 January 2025. This special event was organised to mark the 200th anniversary of the invention of braille. The event attracted much praise and was very well attended.

### **Action Points from 20 November 2024**

1. The Secretary circulated the Electoral Commission Report and RNIB's Turned Out Report to the CPGVI membership.
2. Jamie Hepburn MSP, Minister for Parliamentary Business, will give an update at the next CPGVI meeting on Tuesday 27 May.
3. Kate Thomson-McDermott of Social Security Scotland will be asked to provide more information on the case review process to the CPGVI.
4. RNIB See Sport Differently resources shared:  
<https://seesportdifferently.org.uk/>

## **Agenda item 4 – Changing Charity Law in Scotland**

Emma Sedgwick, Engagement Manager for the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR), spoke about how Scottish charity law will be changing over the next year or so. Some key points from her presentation are noted below:

- The current legislation Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 is now 18 years old and requires updating.
- This will bring it in line with counterpart legislation in England and Wales. It also follows feedback from consultations carried out by OSCR in 2019 and 2021, which identified where practical improvements could be made.
- There will be three phases of changes – some have already been implemented last year, and more are to be introduced this year. This includes new rules around use of legacy funds, so these are protected if charities merge. Trustee disqualification criteria has also been updated and is due for implementation this year.
- This includes new rules on how Trustee details are processed by OSCR and publication of charity accounts by OSCR.
- Accounts/annual returns of charities will be published on OSCR's website – up to five years previous. It is therefore important charities understand the permissions required should photographs or personal information be published/printed in these documents so there are no GDPR breaches.
- There will be new automatic disqualification criteria for charity Trustees. Details will be shared with the CPGVI membership. Some of the new criteria also cover those in senior positions working in charities, including those who are directly accountable to Trustees. This covers certain convictions (such as bribery, perverting the course of justice, dishonesty, fraud, etc). These rules also exist in England and Wales.
- Figures suggest that around 0.7 percent of the Scottish adult population may fall into this category, so the figures are relatively small but still require charity Trustees to be aware and take responsibility for these changes.
- OSCR may be able to exercise discretion and waiver these rules in exceptional circumstances but will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.
- Trustees will be able to seek support through third sector interfaces operating in their areas, as well as SCVO (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations). They may also be able to seek employment law advice.
- It's likely there will be guidance and self-declaration forms for charity Trustees to sign in relation to the changes.

Stuart thanked Emma for her presentation and opened the meeting up to questions.

**Question 1:** SM asked also asked if OSCR will be sending out communications to let charities know what is happening?

**ES:** said yes – there will be further information, but she will take this back to OSCR to determine when and how this will be provided.

**Question 2:** JA asked how the changes will impact on charities based in the UK but operate in Scotland?

**ES:** UK Government is also passing legislation which is broadly similar to what is being introduced in Scotland, so those organisations should be made aware of changes.

**Question 3:** JA asked if OSCR will have a role in informing charities they must meet obligations, to ensure information they produce to be published is accessible?

**ES:** will take this point back to OSCR to determine what obligations will be placed on charities to ensure information they submit is accessible.

**Question 4:** SM asked if OSCR will contact all charities about these changes or are they expecting charities to be aware of changes already?

**ES:** not aware of anything at present but will take this point back to OSCR for clarification.

**Question 5:** GF asked how Protection of Vulnerable Groups Scheme (PVG) will dovetail the new charity rules, with reference to how PVG applications will be processed for Trustees, where applicable.

**ES:** OSCR is working closely with those from Disclosure Services on the changes within new legislation. Although this isn't something OSCR can advise on they are happy to signpost onto relevant people who do.

#### **Action Point 4.1**

The OSCR briefing paper on changes will be circulated to the CPG membership with contact details for any further questions, [engagement@oscr.org.uk](mailto:engagement@oscr.org.uk).

#### **Agenda item 5 – Designing for Inclusion - Guide Dogs**

Introduced by Niall Foley, External Affairs Manager (Scotland), Guide Dogs with contributions from Helen Aluko-Olokun, Policy Manager - Built

Environment lead, Guide Dogs, and Michael Moore, Policy and Campaigns Manager (Scotland), Guide Dogs.

Unfortunately, Professor Nick Tyler CBE, Director UCL PEARL and Centre for Transport Studies, was unable to attend the meeting.

Niall Foley opened the presentation to explain the background to research undertaken by Guide Dogs in partnership with UCL PEARL. Guide Dogs identified the need to investigate certain street designs which negatively impact on the safety and independence of blind and partially sighted people across the UK. They commissioned UCL PEARL to conduct this research, with the aim of producing substantial evidence to influence and engage decision makers. The research looked at four different aspects of street design:

1. Floating island bus stops.
2. Segregated Cycle-footways.
3. Continuous Pavements.
4. Shared bus stop borders.

The research involved a literature review, focus groups, workshops, site visits and laboratory findings.

Fifteen recommendations were highlighted from the report which Helen Aluko-Olokun ran through in detail during the meeting. The report will be circulated to the CPG members.

Niall Foley followed up discussion by highlighting the recommendation below:

“Investigate different ways of enabling cycle lanes and bus stops to interact which do not raise safety concerns amongst passengers and pedestrians using the stop. This investigation should include consideration of alternative positions, alignments and routes for the cycle lane to ensure that both cyclists and pedestrians are safe around bus stops. Until findings from this research are available, stop the further installation of Floating Island Bus Stops and Shared Bus Stop Borders.”

This is key if we are to gain consensus around what types of infrastructure are safe for blind and partially sighted people.

Michael Moore from Guide Dogs spoke about next steps, including:

- The report recommendations are crucial to inform Guide Dogs campaigning work in Scotland with other Scottish sight loss organisations.
- An approach from different angles is required – for example, a Scottish Parliamentary motion submitted by SM helped to raise awareness of the Guide Dogs report.
- Cross party support is required – we need a clear commitment from those in the Scottish Parliament, and Scottish Government, to halt problematic builds until these can be designed safely for people with sight loss.
- We recognise that responsibility for designing and implementing plans often sit with local authorities.
- There is a sense of urgency that without action inaccessible designs are only going to proliferate across cities in Scotland, undermining the capacity of blind and partially sighted people to get around. Problematic street designs for people with sight loss must be made safe before more are installed.
- We need to seek consensus going forward and a coalition in support of the recommendations in the Guide Dogs report.
- We also need mandatory guidance and standards which will apply consistently.

The meeting was opened to questions and comments which are noted below:

- Stuart McMillan MSP noted how Greenock Town Centre plans have negatively impacted on the experience of disabled people, including those mobility scooters due to the gradient of the street in places.
- Sue Webber MSP actively opposes designs which impede on blind and partially sighted people and other disabled people and lends support to highlight the recommendations further.
- Niall Foley highlighted designs are often not safe for cyclists and other road users, hence the need to build consensus across organisations.
- James Adams mentioned some floating bus stops/bus stops with cycle-lanes are already planned due to contracts. It was suggested that in the run up to the 2026 Scottish Parliament Elections a commitment to halt the installation of further floating bus stops/bus stops with cycle-lanes, until they are made safe, should be sought. In addition, no new capital funding should be made available until this work has taken place.



- Neil Bibby MSP supports a pause/re-think to look at priorities for active travel infrastructure to ensure they are safe for everyone including cyclists. He highlighted an example in Renfrewshire where plans for Paisley town centre were aborted due to concerns for pedestrian safety. These also included floating bus stops.
- Colette Walker spoke about her experiences of engaging with designers, planners and others, showing them how designs can negatively impact on her ability to navigate with her guide dog. She spoke of inconsistent designs at crossings, lack of tactile paving and crossing two-way cycle tracks get onto the pavement from the bus stop. When re-visiting sites after installations she has often found they have ignored feedback and recommendations which is extremely frustrating.
- Graham Findlay spoke about Union Street in Aberdeen which has two-way cycle lanes in operation next to bus stops. He also said the council consulted but did not listen when it comes to installing these designs.

### **Leith Walk – a lived case study – Alan Dudley speaking in a personal capacity**

Alan spoke about his experiences of struggling with continuous footways and the misplacement of tactile paving on Leith Walk, highlighting how this impacts on his daily life, in terms of being able to confidently and safely get around independently.

This has been an ongoing issue, and he has gained support from the Leith Community Council, but he has also faced great difficulty in getting the local authority to do anything about the problems he faces. This is despite numerous attempts including site visits with officials, deputations at council meetings, etc.

Stuart McMillan summarised by stating he accepts change is constant, but this should not make life more difficult for blind and partially sighted people to get around. It was suggested to invite Fiona Hyslop, Cabinet Secretary for Transport, and COSLA officials to meet blind and partially sighted people and to take a walk along Leith Walk. RNIB Scotland Hillside Crescent offices could be used as a base for this given its proximity to Leith Walk.

Terry Robinson highlighted RNIB Scotland's report Street Credibility and volunteered to meet with those in Glasgow to demonstrate difficulties with certain designs.

## **Action points**

### **Action point 5.1**

CPGVI to invite the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Fiona Hyslop MSP, to offer a response to the recommendations in the Guide Dogs report.

### **Action point 5.2:**

CPGVI to write to relevant Scottish Parliament committees - Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee and the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee) – with copy of the Guide Dogs report and proposing committees consider an inquiry into active travel designs and their impact on disabled people as well as people with sight loss.

### **Action point 5.3**

Guide Dogs are keen to gather further anecdotal feedback and evidence from people with guide dogs on how this impacts on their ability to get around and requested that their email address be shared to allow people to make contact with them - [CampaignsScotland@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:CampaignsScotland@guidedogs.org.uk).

### **Action point 5.4**

CPGVI to invite Fiona Hyslop, Cabinet Secretary for Transport and COSLA representatives to a meeting at RNIB Scotland Headquarters at Hillside Crescent, to meet with blind and partially sighted people and as an example, observe difficulties in navigating Leith Walk.

### **Action point 5.5**

The Convener to circulate the Guide Dogs Research report to MSPs and request a Members Debate on the report within the Scottish Parliament.

HT mentioned the Cross-Party Group for Deafness (CPGD), noting the significance of these issues amongst deaf and deafblind people also.

### **Action point 5.6**

Hannah Tweed will ask the CPG on Deafness Convener Colin Beatie, MSP, to write similar letters to highlight the ongoing problems faced by people with sensory loss and the importance of recommendations from the Guide Dog's report.

## **Agenda Item 6 – Dr Hannah Tweed, Secretary, Cross-Party Group on Deafness, Update on the cancellation of the See Hear Strategy**

The CPG on Deafness wrote to express concern to the Minister about the cancellation of the See Hear Strategy.

Other organisations within the sensory sector have also written to the relevant ministers - Neil Gray MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, and Maree Todd MSP, Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport - to express their disappointment and concern about cancellation of the strategy.

Members of the CPGVI also laid out their concerns about the cancellation of the See Hear Strategy.

### **Action points**

#### **Action point 6.1**

SM and CB will draft a letter to the Scottish Government on behalf of CPGVI to Scottish Government to express disappointment about the cancellation of the See Hear Strategy.

#### **Action point 6.2**

With permission from Convener Colin Beattie, HT will send CB and SM copy of letter already sent by the CPGD. SM thanked HT.

## **Agenda Item 7 - Any other competent business**

None notified.

## **Agenda item 8 - Date of next meeting**

The next meeting of the CPGVI will be held on Tuesday 27 May, 18.00-19.45, Committee Room 3, Scottish Parliament, and online.

SM thanked all contributions and closed meeting.