

Cross Party Group on Visual Impairment in the Scottish Parliament

Minutes of the Cross Party Group on Visual Impairment meeting held on Tuesday 5 December in Committee Room 3, Scottish Parliament

Members present:

Stuart McMillan MSP; James Adams, RNIB Scotland; Tom Arthur MSP; Richard Barr, Scottish War Blinded; Paul Bartley, Optelec; Elaine Brackenridge; Royal Blind School; Miles Briggs MSP; Ian Brown, RNIB Scotland; Catriona Burness, RNIB Scotland; Campbell Chalmers, RNIB Scotland; Maggie Chapman, SCOVI; Pamela Chater, Macular Society; Matthew Clark, Haggeye; Ian Clement; Jamie Cuthbertson, Macular Society; Jane Donnelly, Connect Radio; Amanda Drollinger, ADA Scotland; Dominic Everett, Royal Blind School; Anne Marie Fleming, RNIB Scotland; Niall Foley, Guide Dogs Scotland; Colin Gallagher, Guide Dogs Scotland / SCOVI; Laura Gray, Macular Society; Carl Hodson, Fife Society for the Blind; Caitlin Howie, RNIB Scotland; John Hughes, IGA; Bob Ironside, PKSB; Maureen Macmillan, Sight Action; Terry Moody; Mark O'Donnell, Royal Blind / Scottish War Blinded; Karen Osbourne, IGA; Sally Paterson, Royal Blind; Ken Reid, RNIB Scotland; Terry Robinson, RNIB Scotland; Allan Russell, Connect Radio; Angela Russell, Royal Blind School; Kirin Saeed; Fiona Sandford, Visibility; Carolyn Scott, SCOVI; Davina Shiell, Royal Blind; Colin Smyth MSP; Ken Swa; Brigid Wallace; Colette Walker; Sandra Wilson, RNIB Scotland; Jacquie Winning, Forth Valley Sensory Centre; Cate Vallis, RNIB Scotland; Lyndsay Voice.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Stuart McMillan MSP welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Apologies

Jayne Armour, RNIB Scotland; Amanda Burt, RNIB Scotland; Valerie Breck, Visibility; Graham Cormack, EyeCare Scotland; Hilary Davies; John Donaldson, Scottish Braille Press; John Furze, Macular Society; Mairi Graham; Laura Jones, RNIB Scotland; Maureen McAllister; Debbie McGill, Optometry Scotland; David McKerral; Linda Middlemist, Guide Dogs; Rod Murchison; Hussein Patwa, RNIB Scotland; Mary Rasmussen; Hal Rollason,

Optometry Scotland; Stephanie Rose, Police Scotland; Janelle Scotland, ASTN; Mhairi Thurston, Abertay University.

3. Minutes of the AGM and meeting held on 12 September 2017

The minutes from the last meeting held on 12 September were proposed by Ken Reid and seconded by Fiona Sandford.

4. 'Education of visually impaired pupils - a teaching perspective'

Anne Marie Fleming thanked the group for the opportunity to discuss the need to reduce the educational attainment gap for children with a sensory impairment. There has been a drop in numbers of Qualified Teachers of Children and Young People with a Vision Impairment (QTVIs) in local authorities, with some being replaced with Additional Support Needs Teachers. In 2015 the Scottish Parliament's then Education and Culture Committee published its 10th Report, 2015 (Session 4): Attainment of pupils with a sensory impairment. A further report on the attainment gap by Professor John Ravenscroft was commissioned by and duly submitted to the Scottish Government. However, this has been embargoed. There is concern that the data will be out of date if not released soon.

Elaine Brackenridge thanked the group for inviting her to the meeting and commended the Scottish Government's consultation on Consultation on Excellence and Equity for All: Guidance on the Presumption of Mainstreaming (closing on 9 February 2018), agreeing with the four key principles:

- Improve outcomes and support the delivery of excellence and equity for all children and young people
- Meet the needs of all children and young people
- Support and empower children and young people, parents and carers, teachers, practitioners and communities
- Outline an inclusive approach which identifies and addresses barriers to learning for all children.

Elaine shared some examples of where pupils with a sensory impairment have fallen behind in mainstream schools:

- David is blind and reads braille. He attended a mainstream school and was offered a place at a Scottish University, however quickly realized he didn't have the independence to enable him to get around on his own.

His place was deferred and he is now at the Royal Blind School receiving intensive support.

- A P2 class were played a video, however one boy thought it was a CD as he couldn't see the screen and no one had told him what was happening.
- Elaine leaves a box outside her office and fills it with different objects every day. One pupil couldn't identify a tangerine as it had always been peeled and segmented for him previously.
- One boy didn't know how large horses are.

It was noted that local authorities sometimes employ QTVIs; however, some are seen as consultants. Peripatetic teachers have wide caseloads but children benefit more from learning how to read and write every day rather than once or twice a week. Staffing resources are a concern and it is hoped the Scottish Government will continue moving in the right direction and reach an agreeable outcome.

Terry Robinson agreed with the importance of ensuring that children are taught braille, as audio is not the same as reading.

Terry Moody suggested that it should be assessed whether local authorities/schools are generating the support required. In the consultation document it is noted that the government will measure participation, support and achievement going forward.

Fiona Sandford noted the importance of including habilitation.

Colin Smyth MSP thanked Anne Marie and Elaine for their input. Attainment level figures are detailed in the report submitted to the Scottish Government; however, this has yet to be published. The link to the Scottish Parliament report is to be circulated. Stuart McMillan will also write to the Scottish Government to ask when Professor Ravenscroft's report will be available.

Action

- The link to the Scottish Parliament report is to be circulated.
- Stuart to write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education regarding access to Professor Ravenscroft's report, and to highlight the importance of teaching braille.

Matters arising

5.1. Campaign materials: E-voting will be discussed at the next meeting with a letter being circulated to parties in advance.

5.2. CPG topics: A poll for 2018 CPG topics has been circulated. Responses should be submitted to Cate Vallis by 11 December 2017.

5. Dates of future meetings

- 6 February 2018, 13:00 - 14:30, Fleming Room, CR3
- 8 May 2018, 18:00 - 19:30, Clerk Maxwell Room, CR4
- 11 September 2018, 13:00 - 14:30, Fleming Room, CR3
- 4 December 2018, 18.00 – 19.30, Fleming Room, CR3