

Cross Party Group on Visual Impairment in the Scottish Parliament

Minutes of the Cross Party Group on Visual Impairment meeting held on Tuesday 12 September in Committee Room 3, Scottish Parliament

Members present:

Stuart McMillan MSP; Colin Smyth MSP; James Adams, RNIB Scotland; Jayne Armour, RNIB Scotland; Paul Bartley, Optelec; Elaine Brackenridge; Royal Blind School; Catriona Burness, RNIB Scotland; Campbell Chalmers, RNIB Scotland; Ian Clement; Helen Court, Sight Action/NHS Education for Scotland; Jane Donnelly, Connect Radio; Graham Findlay, NESS; Clair Henderson, Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland; George Henry, Transport Scotland; Chris Highcock, City of Edinburgh Council; Carl Hodson, Fife Society for the Blind; Jane Horsburgh, Guide Dogs; Caitlin Howie, RNIB Scotland; Sheila Mackenzie, Scottish Sensory Centre; Gillian Mitchell, Sight Action; Terry Moody; Sarah Noble; Scottish Government; Mark O'Donnell, Royal Blind / Scottish War Blinded; Ken Reid, RNIB Scotland; Allan Russell, Connect Radio; Kirin Saeed; Fiona Sandford, Visibility; Janelle Scotland, ASTN; Julie Tomson; Mhairi Thurston, Abertay University; Mary Travers; Liz Ure, Scottish Government; Cate Vallis, RNIB Scotland; Colette Walker; Sandra Wilson, RNIB Scotland.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Stuart McMillan MSP welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Apologies

Tom Arthur MSP; Colin Beattie MSP; Neil Bibby MSP; Miles Briggs MSP; Ian Brown, RNIB Scotland; Amanda Burt; Matthew Clark, Haggeye; Mo Colvin, Haggeye; Jamie Cuthbertson, Macular Society; John Donaldson, Scottish Braille Press; Dominic Everett, Royal Blind School; Anne-Marie Fleming, RNIB Scotland; Niall Foley, Guide Dogs; Claire Forde, Haggeye; John Furze, Macular Society; Rhoda Grant MSP; Laura Gray, Macular Society; Gozie Joe Adigwe, RNIB Scotland; Laura Jones, RNIB Scotland; Maureen MacMillan, Sight Action; Debbie McGill, Optometry Scotland; Alex Mowat, Scottish Government; Hussein Patwa, RNIB Scotland; Mary Pitcaithly, City of Edinburgh Council; Terry Robinson, Describe Online; Angus Scott, NHS Forth

Valley; Steven Sutherland, Haggeye; Layla Theiner, DAS; Cirta Tooth, NHS Lothian; Mary Rasmussen; Ken Swa, RNIB Scotland.

3. AGM and Election of Office Bearers

Nominees for Office Bearers had been proposed as follows:

Convenor: Stuart McMillan MSP

Vice Convenor: Neil Bibby MSP

Secretariat: RNIB Scotland

Nominations were opened for additional proposals, but none were made. The office bearers were elected unanimously.

4. Minutes of the meeting, held on 7 February 2017

The minutes from the meeting held on 7 February were proposed by Campbell Chalmers and seconded by Sandra Wilson.

5. Report of the last meeting (non-quorate), held on 16 May 2017, with Convenor's recommendations

The notes taken at the meeting on 16 May are for information only as the meeting was inquorate. Catriona Burness highlighted for the group's attention Professor Carrie MacEwen's reply regarding Skills Development Scotland's involvement in the Certification Review on page 7 of the minutes.

6. Matters arising

6.1. Football Clubs: Letters have been sent to Football Clubs, however response has been limited.

6.2. Campaign materials: Scottish parties have been written to regarding accessible campaign materials with one reply received so far. The reply will be circulated to the group.

6.3. Haggeye: The parliamentary motion for Haggeye's tenth birthday is to be circulated.

Action

- Response re accessible campaign materials to be circulated.
- Catriona to circulate parliamentary motion.

7. CPG topics

The timing of CPG meetings was discussed, with some feeling that lunchtime meetings would be more beneficial. The evening reception in December will go ahead as planned. However, the meeting in spring will take place in the afternoon. It was agreed to have a mix of evening and afternoon meetings going forward. Catriona Burness and Ken Reid will meet to discuss circulating a Doodle Poll or other poll for future CPG topic planning.

The possibility of having additional meetings was raised. However, the majority agreed that this would be unsustainable due to other commitments of the group and availability of MSPs.

Action

- Catriona and Ken to discuss Doodle Poll or means of topic selection.

8. Session on accessible voting

Mary Pitcaithly, Convener of the Electoral Management Board (EMB) sent her apologies due to illness. Chris Highcock, Secretary to the EMB, represented the Electoral Commission Scotland (ECS) in her place. Ken Reid, Collette Walker and Chris Highcock presented a session on accessible voting.

Ken Reid updated the group on accessible voting and noted that at the last election, 50 per cent of blind and partially sighted people were unable to make their vote. Support at polling stations varies; however there is a need to standardise to ensure votes aren't missed. . The system in Ken's view was 'adequate' but not 'brilliant'. He cited changes suggested by RNIB:

- Replace the tactile voting device with a tool to view candidates and mark chosen option.
- Recognise why the current process doesn't work.
- Online and telephone voting available by the next general election.

Colette Walker spoke about the difficulties faced in postal voting, as either a magnifier or help from a sighted peer is needed. At the polling station, the layout might be unfamiliar and the booths are sometimes too dark so help from other people is required again. An electoral commission app has been developed for use in Scottish and, hopefully, general elections.

Chris Highcock said that any change in the way we vote would have to be legislative. Some electoral legislation dates back to the Ballot Act of 1872. All polling stations should have a tactile voting device (Chris brought an example with him) for blind and partially sighted people to use, large print ballot papers,

and offer help from a Presiding Officer, the latter option however takes away independence. Different methods of voting will be considered, along with additional training for polling station staff. Points were then taken from the group.

Allan Russell described his voting experience. Staff were keen to help but weren't sure how and had nearly invalidated his vote by placing the overlay on the ballot wrongly. He highlighted the use of electronic voting in Maryland in the US as a better option.

In response Chris Highcock outlined the importance of ensuring ballots are secret and accurate and that electronic voting presents some challenges to this.

Mairi Graham asked if changes would need to be made to the law in this case, Chris Highcock replied that they would.

Stuart McMillan MSP asked the Scottish Parliament officials in the room to comment on the options for this and they agreed to attend the next meeting with a briefing on the matter.

It was suggested that coloured strips of tape could be used in polling station to clearly mark the way to the booth and lighting could be added inside the polling booth. It was acknowledged that this would be possible but would not help people with little or no sight.

Action

- Accessible voting to be added to December agenda.

9. Update on legislation to ban parking on pavements

George Henry of Transport Scotland updated the group on the legislation surrounding irresponsible and obstructive parking.

The Scottish Government supported the principles of the Bill previously sponsored by Sandra White MSP. However, there is concern around implementation, public acceptability and vehicle displacement. The public consultation paper on parking closed on 31 August with over 660 responses. The findings will inform policy and the Transport Bill. The Bill will also involve looking at a national ban on footway parking, the bus policy and work with the Scottish Road Workers Commission. It is anticipated the Bill will be implemented next year.

Jane Horsburgh (Guide Dogs Scotland) asked about what else would be in the bill, how likely it is that the bill will pass and when it would be presented to parliament.

George Henry answered that a ban on footway parking, parking in front of dropped kerbs and double parking would be included in the bill. It is likely that it will be presented in year two of the parliament and that they would be looking to further engage stakeholders in the future.

Ian Clement commented that 660 odd responses seemed low. George Henry replied that it was comparatively high.

10. Matters arising

10.1. Sandra Wilson (RNIB Scotland) spoke about concerns over accessible communication in relation to the Social Security Experience Panels. There was a letter recently circulated in PDF format which could not be translated by screen readers and an Eventbrite link circulated, which some find inaccessible. A question was put to the Scottish Parliament to review the accessibility of its communications.

10.2. Gillian Mitchell (Sight Action) raised concerns over the PIP assessment. Three clients were recently asked to attend PIP assessments in Inverness. All three are registered blind or severely sight impaired. They were all asked to read from a shiny hand held illuminated eye chart handed to them across a desk. One was asked to read a small wall eye chart at an angle across the room. Distance was not measured and lighting conditions were changing. Why is registration not being taken into account prior to any face to face assessment? And what training do they have to carry out this measurement? Who monitors this?
ATOS training is currently being reviewed.

11. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 5 December 18:00 - 19:30 followed by a reception to mark both Christmas and the 100th anniversary of the Scottish Council on Visual Impairment (SCOVl).