

Cross Party Group on Visual Impairment in the Scottish Parliament

Minutes of the Cross Party Group on Visual Impairment meeting held on Tuesday 11 September in Fleming Room, CR3, Scottish Parliament

Present:

Andrew Busby, Scottish Government; Jim Crombie, NHS Lothian; George Curley, NHS Lothian; Amanda Hawkins, RNIB; Jamie Hepburn MSP, Minister for Employability and Training; Dorothy McColl, RNIB Scotland; Andrew Russell Stewart, Scottish Government; Nigel Townley, RNIB Scotland; Richard Baker, Royal Blind; Neil Bibby MSP; Ian Brown, RNIB Scotland; Catriona Burness, RNIB Scotland; Maggie Chapman, SCOVl; Ian Clement; Jane Donnelly, RNIB Connect Radio; Amanda Drollinger, ADAS; Anne Marie Fleming, RNIB Scotland; Niall Foley, Guide Dogs Scotland; Claire Forde, Haggeye, Member of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYP); Sheena Guz; Carl Hodson, Fife Society for the Blind; Ian Hughes, Associated Optical; Louise Hunter, Visibility; Laura Jones, RNIB Scotland; Matthew Leitch, Office of Stuart McMillan MSP; Sheila Mackenzie, Scottish Sensory Centre; Maureen Macmillan, Sight Action; Stuart McMillan MSP; Gillian Mitchell, Sight Action; Terry Moody, RNIB Scotland Committee; Gavin Neate, Neatebox; Mark O'Donnell, Royal Blind; Sally Paterson, Royal Blind; Rosie Pybus, RNIB Scotland; Ken Reid, Scottish Vision Strategy Ambassador/RNIB Scotland Committee; Ann Robertson, North East Sensory Services; Terry Robinson, RNIB Scotland Committee; Allan Russell, RNIB Connect Radio; Angela Russell, Royal Blind School; Kirin Saeed; Fiona Sandford, Visionary; Janelle Scotland, ASTN; Carolyn Scott, SCOVl; Davina Shiell, Royal Blind; Colin Smyth MSP; Steven Sutherland, Haggeye (MSYP); Clare Sweeney, Visibility; Julie Thomson; Mhairi Thurston, Abertay University; Colette Walker; Hayley Weetman, Edinburgh Council's educational support service; Sandra Wilson, RNIB Scotland Committee; Jacquie Winning, Forth Valley Sensory Centre.

1. Welcome and introductions

Attendees were welcomed to the first meeting of the group following the summer recess.

2. Apologies

James Adams, RNIB Scotland; Tom Arthur MSP; Colin Beattie MSP; Elaine Brackenridge, Royal Blind School; Miles Briggs MSP; Campbell Chalmers, RNIB Scotland; Matthew Clark, Haggeye; Helen Court, NHS Education for Scotland; Jamie Cuthbertson, Macular Society; John Donaldson, Scottish Braille Press; Dominic Everett, Royal Blind School; John Furze, Macular Society; Mairi Graham; Jane Horsburgh, Guide Dogs Scotland; Bob Ironside, PK Vision, Maureen McAllister; Debbie McGill, Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ASDO); Linda Middlemist, Guide Dogs Scotland; Rod Murchison; Hussein Patwa, RNIB Scotland Committee; Professor John Ravenscroft, Scottish Sensory Centre; Hal Rollason, Optometry Scotland; Susan Robinson; Stephanie Rose, Police Scotland; Colin Smyth MSP; Ken Swa, RNIB Scotland Committee; Cirta Tooth; Mary Travers; Cate Vallis, RNIB Scotland.

3. AGM and Election of Office Bearers

3.1 Convener – Ken Reid nominated Stuart McMillan MSP – this was seconded by Mhairi Thurston. Agreed.

3.2 Vice-Convener - Neil Bibby MSP was nominated by Stuart McMillan MSP and seconded by Gillian Mitchell. Agreed.

3.3 Secretariat – RNIB Scotland was proposed by Stuart McMillan MSP and seconded by Ken Reid. Agreed.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 8 May 2018.

The minutes were proposed by Sandra Wilson and seconded by Carl Hodson and agreed by the meeting.

5. Matters arising

On point four regarding accessible elections, Stuart McMillan MSP tabled parliamentary questions. The questions and subsequent answers were circulated to the CPG membership.

Extensive correspondence on the issue of hospital building and car park accessibility was circulated ahead of the meeting.

Research articles by Dr Alexandros Zangelidis were circulated in May 2018. Ian Clement asked if the mapping of assets - that is, requesting information on the number, level and specialisms of consultant ophthalmologists employed by the NHS and private sector in Scottish health boards - had not been agreed as an action point. The previous meeting had not agreed this. The request was agreed as an action point.

6. Panel discussion on mental health and employment with speakers

Dr Mhairi Thurston of Abertay University spoke on the topic of sight loss and mental health, addressing why emotional support is required, the type of support required, and barriers and obstacles. Research has shown that there is a definite correlation between sight loss and mental health issues. There is not always an immediate trigger to services whilst sight-loss sufferers may worry that the public will behave differently towards them. The ECLO service is a good form of support. Extended help such as counselling, peer support and screening for depression may help. Uptake may be increased if customers had to opt out of services instead of opting in.

Amanda Hawkins, Specialist Lead Emotional Support for RNIB spoke on RNIB's Need to Talk project which offers a digital solution to social isolation. The project is funded under the EU INTERREG VA Programme and its geographic scope includes Northern Ireland, the Border Counties of Ireland and Western Scotland including the Western Isles. £1.8 million was granted to help customers in rural communities across these areas. Initially piloted in London, the Need to Talk service offers online or telephone counselling. Uptake in Scotland has been very low. CPG attendees were encouraged to promote the service wherever possible.

Cross Party Group member, Kirin Saeed spoke about her personal experience of losing her sight and the subsequent challenges she faces. Kirin is a disability consultant trainer and actor. After the loss of her husband she relocated, which left her feeling isolated and lonely whilst she faced a lack of work opportunities. She found it very difficult to access services and had to wait over four years before receiving effective counselling. She began to attend a voluntary women's group and met with a counsellor who was open and empowering. Kirin wants to work and to be able to do what everyone else does. Her message is "to stop thinking and start doing".

Jamie Hepburn MSP, Minister for Employability and Training thanked the speakers and referred to the Scottish Government ambition to halve the disability employment gap of 36%. There are social and economic imperatives to improve the employment situation for people who have disabilities. Talent should not be

overlooked or wasted. It is important to work in partnership with other organisations. RNIB can provide support for employment. The Scottish Government can provide a leadership role, but there must be a collective endeavour.

Discussion

The following points or questions were raised:

- Employment figures (Ken Reid) – 75% of people who are blind or partially sighted and of working age are unemployed. Vast numbers are under-employed, and many blind or partially sighted people have to be self-employed.
- Screening for depression being funded in the Highland area (Gillian Mitchell); any findings to be reported.
- Need for GPs to be screening for depression in patients who have sight loss (Mhairi Thurston).
- Welcome work being done at Alexandra Eye Pavilion (Ian Clement).
- Scottish Government support (Mark O'Donnell) - given that the theme of the discussion was emotional support and employment, would the Scottish Government support the further development of national resource to support those affected by acquired sight loss and their relatives and carers.
- Need to consider the built environment itself as a barrier to the visually Impaired (Terry Robinson).
- Need for increased awareness and uptake of Access to Work (Sandra Wilson and Kirin Saeed).

The Minister Jamie Hepburn stated his intention to take the issues regarding the role of the health service and employment and packages of support required, back to his colleagues for discussion and action. He stated that the Scottish Government cannot set the terms of Access to Work, but that it can 'let' young people know what is available and he is determined to see an increase in uptake. The Convener thanked the Minister and speakers for their input – the Minister then left the meeting.

7. Any other competent business (AOB)

7.1. GDPR - Convener Stuart McMillan MSP referred to the Scottish Parliament's 'Cross Party Groups – Guidance on data protection requirements'. This guidance provides information about the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation and

the Data Protection Act 2018 which together form the framework for handling personal data in the UK from 25 May 2018 onwards. Data protection requirements are a fundamental requirement of all CPGs. The current CPG mailing list contains only individuals and organisations that positively opted into receiving CPG mailing following our email consultation exercise in May 2018. 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. This notice will be read at the start of future CPG meetings.

7.2. Inappropriate parking at Glasgow hospitals and inaccessible healthcare premises

Jim Crombie, Acting Chief Executive, and George Curley, Director of Operations, of NHS Lothian had asked for the opportunity to speak to the CPG. They duly attended and addressed the meeting. Jim Crombie has noted the issues of concern raised in the Convener's letter and has written to all hospitals within NHS Lothian. This has met with a varied response as NHS Lothian has a range of facilities. An eight-figure sum of £22million has been committed to parking, roads, walkways and signposting - building stock will continue to be assessed. NHS Lothian will also continue to engage with external partners and will seek providers that can help with public transport. Lifts have tactile braille signage, so are appropriate for visually impaired people. NHS Lothian will continue to seek improvement and to extend invitations to blind and partially sighted people on audits and surveys. Terry Robinson stressed the need for a dissemination of information. Ian Clement recommended consultation with visually impaired people as they are experts.

Action point

The topics of inappropriate parking within Glasgow hospitals and healthcare premises that are not accessible for visual impairment patients is to be continued.

8. Date of next meeting – please note change of date

Tuesday 20 November, 18.00 – 19.30, Fleming Room, Committee Room 3, Scottish Parliament.