

Cross-Party Group Annual Return

Name of Cross-Party Group

Cross-Party Group on Visual Impairment

Date Group Established (the date of establishment is the date in this parliamentary session that the Group held its initial meeting, where the office bearers were elected and not the date that the Group was accorded recognition. All Groups should hold their AGMs on, or before, the anniversary of this date.)

Wednesday 8 September 2021

Date of Most Recent Annual General Meeting (AGM)

Wednesday 24 September 2025

Date Annual Return Submitted

Thursday 23 October 2025

Date of Preceding AGM [this date is required to aid clerks in verifying that the most recent AGM has taken place within 11 to 13 months of the previous AGM]

Wednesday 4 September 2024

Group Meetings and Activities

Please provide details of each meeting of the Group including the date of the meeting, a brief description of the main subjects discussed and the MSP and non-MSP attendance figures.

Details of any other activities, such as visits undertaken by the Group or papers/report published by the Group should also be provided.

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.

Meetings and Activities

The Cross-Party Group on Visual Impairment (CPGVI) held meetings on:

- Wednesday 20 November 2024
- Tuesday 4 March 2025
- Tuesday 27 May 2025
- Wednesday 24 September 2025 (AGM)

The meetings were hybrid, taking place in the Scottish Parliament and via Teams. All the meetings were quorate.

Wednesday 20 November 2024

MSPs present: 3 (in person)

Non-MSP members present: 37 (14 in person and 23 online)

Speakers: 3 (2 in person and 1 online)

Observers: 5 (1 in person and 4 online)

The meeting had two topics of discussion:

- Social security in Scotland – transferring disability and carer benefits
- Scottish disability sports

Social security in Scotland – transferring disability and carer benefits

Speaker: Kate Thomson-McDermott, Head of Carer Benefits and Case Transfer Policy, Social Security Directorate, Scottish Government

Ms Thomson-McDermott provided an overview of social security in Scotland, the case transfer process and the progress of case transfer.

Over 720,000 Scottish residents have now had their benefit awards transferred from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to Social Security Scotland, across five different benefits.

Around two-thirds of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) cases in Scotland have been transferred onto Adult Disability Payment (ADP) – which equates to around 200,000 people in Scotland. In addition, 47,000 children and young people have been transferred from Child Disability Living Allowance onto Child Disability Payment (CDP).

It is hoped the transfer process for remaining benefits will continue into 2025 and beyond for existing DWP claimants living in Scotland. This includes Carers Support Payment, which is replacing Carers Allowance; Pension Age Disability Payment which is replacing Attendance Allowance, and Scottish Disability Living Allowance (DLA) which will replace DLA.

The Q and A session included a question asking if ten years was the maximum length of award under ADP. Reviews of benefits can be a source of anxiety, particularly for people who have conditions which will not improve/get better. Kate Thomson-McDermott stated that reviews will be as light touch as possible for those whose condition is unlikely to change.

A paper, “Social security in Scotland – transferring disability and carer benefits”, was circulated in advance of the meeting.

Scottish disability sports

Speakers: Mark Gaffney, Head of Policy, Scottish Disability Sport; and Stephen Clegg, swimmer, and Paralympian gold medallist, Paris 2024

Mark Gaffney gave an overview of the work of Scottish Disability Sport (SDS). SDS was established 60 years ago and is the national governing body for disability in sport in Scotland. They work with around 40 sporting bodies, including Sport Scotland, local authorities, government and the third sector. The overall aim of SDS is to enable people to become more active and get involved in sport if they want to.

A Scottish Disability Sport National Survey is being conducted. Initial results show around 75 per cent of disabled people want to be more active and 82 per cent of people notice a benefit when they become more active. Mr Gaffney also noted that 49 per cent of those involved in sporting activities rely on benefits to enable their participation, yet

there is still a fear that benefits will be stopped if a person is seen as active and independent. Scottish Disability Sport and Social Security Scotland have been working together on this issue.

Stephen Clegg shared his personal experience of acquiring a visual impairment as a child and the challenges this brought, including the low expectations of what others thought he'd be able to do. He mentioned that the incidence of poor mental health amongst young people with visual impairments is much higher, almost double, when comparing rates amongst sighted peers.

Sport was essential for his mental wellbeing and development. He spoke about resources and the role parents and educators play in enabling young people to overcome barriers to participate in sport. For example, the support he received from Jane Coates at RNIB Scotland, and his swimming coaches, enabled him to realise his own potential and support him towards his achievements.

The Q and A session reflected that CPG members found Stephen Clegg's contribution inspirational. The discussion underlined the importance of local resources and the need for disabled people to gain a level of access to sporting activities.

Tuesday 4 March 2025

MSPs present: 3 (in person; included 1 non-CPG member attending as a guest)

Non-MSP members present: 29 (6 in person and 23 online)

Speakers: 7 (4 in person and 3 online)

Observers: 2 (both online)

There were three topics of discussion:

- Changing Charity Law in Scotland
- Designing for Inclusion - Guide Dogs
- Update on the cancellation of the See Hear Strategy

Changing Charity Law in Scotland

Speaker: Emma Sedgwick, Engagement Manager for the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR)

From summer 2025, all charities will need to provide OSCR with details about its trustees. Then, starting at the end of 2025, full charity

accounts will begin to be publicly available on the Scottish Charity Register.

These changes stem from the Charities (Regulation and Administration) (Scotland) Act 2023, which strengthens oversight and public trust in the sector. 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 new automatic disqualification criteria for charity Trustees. Some of the new criteria also cover those in senior positions working in charities, including those who are directly accountable to Trustees. These rules also exist in England and Wales.

The Q and A session focussed on how charities would be informed of the changes. It was agreed to circulate a briefing paper provided by OSCR and along with direct contact details for any further questions from CPG member organisations.

Designing for Inclusion - Guide Dogs

Speakers: Niall Foley, External Affairs Manager (Scotland), Guide Dogs, Helen Aluko-Olokun, Policy Manager - Built Environment lead, Guide Dogs, and Michael Moore, Policy and Campaigns Manager (Scotland), Guide Dogs

Guide Dogs presented on their recent research report, [Designing for Inclusion](#). The research looked at Floating Island Bus Stops, Shared Bus Stop Boarders, Segregated Cycle-footways and Continuous Footways. These designs all incorporate cycle paths into their design.

The research, which included a literature review, focus groups with disabled people, workshops with professionals, site visits and controlled experiments at UCL's Person-Environment-Activity Research Laboratory (PEARL), identified significant problems with these designs and identified 15 recommendations for improvements.

The recommendations included a pause in the further implementation Floating Island Bus Stops pending further research. The report also found that Shared Bus Stop Boarders are largely inaccessible and unsafe for disabled people due to the challenges they face when boarding and leaving a bus directly onto a cycle path. These problems are inherent in the design of Shared Bus Stop Boarders and therefore Guide Dogs do not think they should continue to be used.

The Q and A on the report produced many examples of problematic street design around Scotland.

Leith Walk – a lived case study

Speaker: Alan Dudley

Alan Dudley spoke about his experiences of struggling with continuous footways and the misplacement of tactile paving on Leith Walk, highlighting the challenges of being able to confidently and safely get around independently.

As follow-up actions to the discussions, it was agreed to:

- Invite the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Fiona Hyslop MSP, to respond to the recommendations in the Guide Dogs report at a future CPG meeting and to take part in a guided walk to observe the difficulties in navigating streets such as Leith Walk at first hand.
- 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.
- The Convener to circulate the Guide Dogs Research report to MSPs and request a Members Debate on the report within the Scottish Parliament.
- Hannah Tweed will ask the CPG on Deafness Convener Colin Beattie, 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.

Update on the cancellation of the See Hear Strategy

Speaker: Dr Hannah Tweed, Secretary, Cross-Party Group on Deafness

This was the first meeting of the CPG on Visual Impairment since the cancellation of the See Hear Strategy in December 2024. The CPG on Deafness had met in December and wrote to express concern to the Minister about the cancellation of the See Hear Strategy as had other organisations within the sensory sector.

As a follow up it was agreed that the CPGVI should also write to the Scottish Government to express disappointment about the cancellation of the See Hear Strategy.

Tuesday 27 May 2025

MSPs present: 3 (1 in person and 2 online)

Non-MSP members present: 32 (8 in person and 24 online)

Speakers: 6 (4 in person and 2 online)

Observers: 5 (2 in person and 3 online)

There were two topics of discussion:

- Making voting accessible
- Update on the work of the Cross-Party Group on Deafness Working Group on Sensory Care and Dementia

Making voting accessible

Speakers: Jamie Hepburn MSP, Minister for Parliamentary Business, Sarah Mackie, Head, Electoral Commission (Scotland), and Jim Savege Chief Executive, Aberdeenshire Council and Chair of the Electoral Management Board (EMB) sub-group on accessibility

There were three presentations.

Jamie Hepburn MSP, Minister for Parliamentary Business introduced the session on making voting accessible. He referenced the 2024 RNIB Turned Out survey conducted after the 2024 UK General Election which found that only a quarter of blind and partially sighted respondents felt that the current system allows them to vote independently and in secret.

He committed to addressing this for the next Scottish Parliament elections in 2026. Several developments are taking place in Scotland. A new tactile aid, a cardboard ballot paper overlay, has been developed to help people with sight loss vote independently. This was trialled and tested by the Scottish Government Elections Team with assistance from the Forth Valley Sensory Centre and RNIB Scotland, with positive feedback.

A further trial of the overlay took place on 19 June at two local government by-elections in Highland Council areas. He also confirmed that the overlay can be combined with an audio recording, via a telephone line, so voters can hear the names of candidates in the order they appear on the ballot paper. A telephone trial also took place at a Glasgow City Council by-election in March.

Sarah Mackie, Head, Electoral Commission (Scotland) outlined the Electoral Commission's work to improve accessibility, in preparation for the Scottish Parliament elections.

Under the Equality Act (2010), Returning Officers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people and must take steps to anticipate and understand disabled voters so support can be provided. The UK Elections Act (2022) now places a duty on Returning Officers to provide equipment to support disabled people equipment for voters to vote independently and in secret.

Guidance was produced in 2023 on the types of assistance available. The Electoral Commission is now updating that guidance, across the UK, consulting with stakeholders. A formal 12-week consultation will open in August. The guidance will specify what Returning Officers must and could provide. No equipment already provided would be removed.

The Electoral Commission will report on accessibility requirements following elections. They recommend that political parties prepare accessible manifestos. Polling station staff will also receive training, so they know how to use equipment to support voters on polling day.

Jim Savege Chief Executive, Aberdeenshire Council and Chair of the Electoral Management Board (EMB) sub-group on accessibility spoke about the work of the sub-group and preparations for the 2026 Scottish Parliament Elections. The sub-group has been set up to ensure that Returning Officers know how to maximise accessibility, in line with legislation and guidance.

He noted there was a need to consider arrangements for postal voting for blind and partially sighted voters. On voting aids, a Performance Framework for Returning Officers could ensure consistent and universal provision of support throughout Scotland. Guidance was prepared for the last Scottish Parliament elections and the EMB could also consider using their power of direction.

EMB Secretary, Chris Highcock, added that the aim was to try and remove barriers to voting independently and in secret. Training of staff, and making sure voters were aware of what was available, would be key for the upcoming election.

The Q and A included questions on the timescale for the Electoral Commission consultation, how visually impaired voters would be informed about new voting aids, and on the by-election trials of the overlay and audio. The new developments were welcomed.

It was agreed to circulate details of the Electoral Commission consultation to CPG members when published. The EMB will link up Deirdre Aitken of Highland Blindcraft Sensory Services with the Highland Council Returning Officer. The EMB will also report back to the CPGVI on the results of byelection trials.

Update on the work of the Cross-Party Group on Deafness Working Group on Sensory Care and Dementia

Speakers: Roz McCall MSP, Working Group Convener, and Amy White, Senior Sensory Hub Officer (Deafness), Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE)

Roz McCall MSP explained that the working group of the Cross-party Group on Deafness aims to improve care pathways and support for people with dementia who also experience Deafness, Deafblindness or Visual Impairment, including BSL users.

This working group, with voluntary support from two CPGVI members, is developing the first framework of sensory care standards for people affected by dementia in Scotland. (For information, the working group receives secretariat support from the CPG on Deafness not the CPGVI.)

Amy White of the ALLIANCE said that following a survey of health and medical professionals in Scotland, a report has now been published. Key findings included that only six per cent of GPs specified that they would assess both sight and hearing as an integrated part of assessing memory/dementia while only 12 per cent of survey respondents indicated they would assess both hearing and sight as part of a memory/dementia assessment. Work is now underway with Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) to update clinical guidance for the assessment of dementia to include sensory loss.

The Q and A highlighted the current potential for misdiagnosis and the hope that in a few years' time we will see a different figure to the one quoted in the report which shows only six per cent of GPs routinely identify whether dementia or sensory loss communication issues.

It was agreed to circulate the ALLIANCE report to the CPGVI mailing list - <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/blog/news/dementia-assessments-for-people-with-deafness-deafblindness-or-visual-impairment-report-published/>

Wednesday 24 September 2025 (AGM)

MSPs present: 3 (in person)

Non-MSP members present: 24 (10 in person and 14 online)

Speakers: 3 (2 in person and 1 online)

Observers: 3 (1 in person and 2 online)

The AGM confirmed office-bearers in position.

There were three topics of discussion:

- Social security in Scotland
- National Eye Health Week 2025
- The future of vision rehabilitation services in Scotland

Social security in Scotland

Speaker: Kaukab Stewart MSP, Minister for Equalities

Kaukab Stewart, Minister for Equalities presented to the CPGVI, in place of Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, who was unable to attend the meeting. Her presentation covered the Scottish Government's progress in delivering a social security system responsible for several key devolved benefits.

In August 2025 a major milestone was achieved - everyone in Scotland who was receiving Personal Independence Payment (PIP) - almost 350,000 disabled people - have had their benefit award transferred to Adult Disability Payment (ADP). Edel Harris OBE has now reported on the Independent Review of ADP with a series of recommendations. The report provided positive examples of how the Scottish based system of administering and delivering disability assistance differs from others. The report has a series of recommendations which the Scottish Government will respond to early in 2026. Ms Stewart also spoke about potential challenges posed by possible UK Government changes to the reserved welfare system.

The Q and A session posed several questions on inclusive communications. The Minister said that an Inclusive Communications toolkit has been commissioned to support organisations realise their

role in delivering inclusive communications, across different demographics. The toolkit will be issued to all public sector organisations with templates included to deliver all forms of inclusive communication. She also said she wanted to see accessibility embedded across all public transport services and associated infrastructure and gave the example of the pilot project offering free companion rail travel for those with a blind person's rail card.

National Eye Health Week 2025

Speaker: Eilidh Thomson, Chair, Optometry Scotland

Optometry Scotland (OS) is the national representative organisation for the optometry sector in Scotland, dedicated to advocating for optometrists, dispensing opticians, and optical practices throughout the country.

Eilidh Thomson noted it has been 20 years since Scotland introduced universal NHS funded eye tests to everyone. Scotland remains the only part of the UK to provide this service. National Eye Health Week (22-28 September 2025) gives the opportunity to raise awareness about the importance of accessing free NHS funded eye tests. Eye-tests may help prevent avoidable sight loss and can help with early detection of several eye conditions and other health issues.

Ms Thomson explained the developing role of community optometry such as the Community Glaucoma Service which enables patients to be discharged from hospital into community-based services. Optometry Scotland also calls for the introduction of a Scotland Low Vision Service.

The Q and A raised questions about the numbers who could potentially benefit from community optometry services. Ms Thomson undertook to send Sarah Boyack MSP some information which could be shared with the CPG membership.

The future of vision rehabilitation services in Scotland

Speaker: Laura Walker, Vice-Chair, Vision Collaborative Scotland

Vision rehabilitation plays in supporting people with no or low vision. It enables people to gain new skills across various aspects of daily life, including within employment, education, or general navigation skills.

Vision Collaborative Scotland aims to address the ageing rehabilitation workforce and lack of qualification pathway in Scotland. The Graduate Low Vision Rehabilitation Course at Glasgow Caledonian University

was reinstated in January 2023. Nineteen people graduated from the one-off course in July 2024, increasing the numbers of qualified Rehabilitation Officers across Scotland.

An online postgraduate diploma for vision rehabilitation specialists is being launched at the University of Strathclyde in January 2026. This two-year course can be completed within one year if individuals wish to graduate with an assistant level qualification.

Questions were asked on when information on the postgraduate course will be available, and Laura Walker offered to share information via the CPG mailing list.

MSP Members of The Group

Please provide names and party designation of all MSP members of the Group.

1. Jeremy Balfour MSP (Independent)
2. Neil Bibby MSP (Scottish Labour)
3. Sarah Boyack MSP (Scottish Labour)
4. Miles Briggs MSP (Scottish Conservative & Unionist Party)
5. Pam Duncan-Glancy (Scottish Labour)
6. Stuart McMillan MSP (Scottish National Party)

Non-MSP Members of The Group

For organisational members please provide only the name of the organisation, it is not necessary to provide the name(s) of individuals who may represent the organisation at meetings of the Group.

Individuals

1. Jordon Anderson
2. Cindy Godfrey-McKay
3. Amanda Foster
4. Tom Heald
5. Thelma Ingram
6. Lisa Kelly
7. Joan Kerr
8. Maureen McAllister
9. Hazel McFarlane
10. David McKerral
11. Terry Moody

	12. Councillor Robert Mooney 13. Rod Murchison 14. Hussein Patwa 15. Mary Rasmussen 16. Ken Reid 17. Terry Robinson 18. Kirin Saeed 19. David Weir
Organisations	1. RNIB Scotland – Secretary and Treasurer 2. Allergan 3. Angus Council 4. Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO) 5. Associated Optical 6. Bayer 7. Blind Veterans UK 8. Deafblind Scotland 9. Deafblind UK 10. DeHavilland Scotland (formerly Newsdirect) 11. Dundee Blind & Partially Sighted Society 12. Eyecare Scotland 13. Family Fund 14. Glaucoma UK 15. Guide Dogs Scotland 16. Haggeye 17. Hearing and Sight Care 18. Highland Blindcraft Sensory Services 19. Linking Education and Disability (LEAD) Scotland 20. Macular Society 21. Microphthalmia, Anophthalmia & Coloboma Support (MACS) 22. NHS Education for Scotland 23. NHS Forth Valley 24. NHS Lothian Princess Alexandra Eye Pavilion 25. NHS Tayside Disability Equality Network 26. North East Sensory Services (NESS) 27. North Ayrshire Council 28. Optelec UK

	29. Optometry Scotland 30. Pocklington Trust 31. Police Scotland 32. RNIB Connect Radio 33. Scottish Association for Visual Impairment Education (SAVIE) 34. Scottish Government 35. Scottish Sensory Hub (ALLIANCE) 36. seescape 37. Sight Action 38. Sight Scotland 39. Sight Scotland Veterans 40. Stirling Citizens Advice Bureau 41. The Royal Blind School Sight Scotland 42. University of Edinburgh, Moray House School of Education and Sport 43. University of Edinburgh, Scottish Sensory Centre 44. VI Charity Sector Partnership Mental Health Committee 45. Visibility 46. Visionary 47. Vision PK 48. Vision Support Service Aberdeen City Council
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Group Office Bearers

Please provide names for all office bearers. The minimum requirement is that two of the office bearers are MSPs and one of these is Convener – beyond this it is a matter for the Group to decide upon the office bearers it wishes to have. It is permissible to have more than one individual elected to each office, for example, co-conveners or multiple deputy conveners.

Convener	Stuart McMillan MSP
Deputy Convener	Neil Bibby MSP
Secretary	RNIB Scotland - Dr Catriona Burness

Treasurer	RNIB Scotland - Dr Catriona Burness	
Financial Benefits or Other Benefits Please provide details of any financial or material benefit(s) the Group anticipates receiving from a single source in a calendar year which has a value, either singly or cumulatively, of more than £500. This includes donations, gifts, hospitality or visits and material assistance such as secretariat support.		
The CPG has received the support outlined below from RNIB Scotland, October 2024 – September 2025 Secretariat C Burness (12 days) & M Jackson & K Henderson (3 days) Total: £2,537 Other costs Catering Wednesday 20 November 2024 - £61.10 plus £12.22 in VAT - £73.32 Tuesday 4 March 2025 - £109.98 plus £22.00 in VAT - £131.98 Tuesday 27 May 2025 - £89.60 plus £17.92 in VAT - £107.52 Wednesday 24 September 2025 (AGM) - £42.70 plus £8.54 in VAT - £51.24 Total: £364.06 OVERALL TOTAL: £2,901.06 The CPGVI does not have a member subscription charge.		
TO BE COMPLETED BY THE CONVENER		
COMPLIANCE WITH SECTION 6 OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT (Please tick all boxes that apply) I, Convener of the Cross-Party Group on <X>, hereby declare that, in line with the requirements of Section 6 of the Code of Conduct, this CPG has:		
5 MSP Members from 3 different political parties		Yes

Held at least 2 quorate meetings in the last 12 months		Yes
Held an AGM within 11-13 months of the date of registration or the last AGM		Yes
Submitted an annual return form within 30 calendar days of the AGM		Yes
Provided Standards Clerks with 10 calendar days' notice of all meetings		Yes
Provided minutes of all meetings		Yes
Signed	Stuart McMillan MSP	
Date	23 October 2025	