

Cross-Party Group on Visual Impairment

Wednesday 8 September 2021, 13.00-14.00, by Teams

Minute

Present

MSPs

Neil Bibby MSP

Stuart McMillan MSP

Paul O’Kane MSP

Colin Smyth MSP

Invited guests

Richard Lyle (former MSP) - observer

Non-MSP Group Members

1. Richard Baker, Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans
2. Paul Bartley, Optelec
3. Salena Begley, Family Fund
4. Ian Brown, RNIB Scotland
5. Catriona Burness, RNIB Scotland
6. Sara Burns, Forth Valley Sensory Centre
7. Lesley Carcary, seescape
8. Scott Cassidy, Blind Veterans UK
9. Hannah Donnelly, Visionary
10. Niall Foley, Guide Dogs Scotland
11. Claire Forde
12. Laura Gray, Macular Society
13. Councillor Sheila Hands
14. Thomas Heald
15. Laura Jones, RNIB Scotland
16. Matthew Leitch, Office of Stuart McMillan MSP
17. Gwenn McCreath, Vision PK
18. Rachael McMurchy, RNIB Scotland
19. Maureen Macmillan, Sight Action
20. Philippa Mason, Glaucoma UK

21. Linda Middlemist, Guide Dogs Scotland
22. Gillian Mitchell, Sight Action
23. Councillor Robert Mooney
24. Terry Moody
25. Rod Murchison
26. Nicoletta Primo, Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans
27. Professor John Ravenscroft, Scottish Sensory Centre,
University of Edinburgh
28. Ann Robertson
29. Terry Robinson
30. Kirin Saeed, RNIB Scotland Advisory Group
31. Fiona Sandford, Visionary
32. Angus Scott, NHS Forth Valley
33. Alan Stewart
34. Danny Sweeney, North Ayrshire Council
35. Mairi Thurston
36. Laura Walker, Visibility
37. Colette Walker
38. Sandra Wilson

Apologies

1. James Adams, RNIB Scotland
2. Miles Briggs MSP
3. Mathew Clark
4. Helen Court, NHS Education for Scotland
5. Rosie Dempsey, Children, Young People, Families & Education,
RNIB
6. John Donaldson, Scottish Braille Press
7. Amanda Foster
8. Rhoda Grant MSP
9. Hawys Kilday, Sight Scotland
10. Hazel McFarlane, Scottish Sensory Hub
11. Eilidh Morrison, Member of the Scottish Youth Parliament
12. Ken Reid
13. Stephanie Rose, Police Scotland
14. Jacquie Winning, Forth Valley Sensory Centre

Agenda item 1 - Welcome and introductions.

Convener of CPGVI Stuart McMillan MSP welcomed members to the first meeting in session 6 and explained that the purpose of the meeting was to re-elect Office Bearers.

Agenda item 2 - Re-registration of the CPGVI and Election of Office Bearers.

Catriona Burness advised that Stuart McMillan MSP and Neill Bibby MSP had expressed a willingness to remain as Convener and Vice Convener respective and that RNIB Scotland were happy to remain as Secretariat if there are no objections.

Convener

Stuart McMillan MSP was proposed by Terry Robinson and seconded by Colette Walker. No other candidates indicated therefore Stuart McMillan was re-elected unopposed. Stuart McMillan thanked everyone from their support.

Vice Convener

Stuart McMillan MSP opened nominations for Vice Convener and proposed Neil Bidy MSP, seconded by Alan Stewart. No other candidates indicated so Neil Bibby was re-elected unopposed. No objections were noted.

Secretariat

Stuart McMillan said that RNIB Scotland has undertaken the role of the Secretariat for quite some time and have done a great job in this role, and proposed they continue. No objections were raised. RNIB Scotland continues as the Secretariat with Catriona Burness as Secretary.

Stuart McMillan thanked RNIB Scotland and said he look forward to the continuing working relationship within this CPG.

Agenda item 3 - Report on Action Points from the CPGVI meeting of 2 March 2021.

3.1. Low vision service

It had been agreed to write to the Scottish Government seeking an update on the proposed low vision service. The reply was attached to papers for information and states that an update on this work will be shared with the CPGVI in the next session of the Scottish Parliament.

3.2. From AOB

The Convener Stuart McMillan on the CPG had agreed to write to the Scottish Government on vaccine priority and reconsideration of visiting rights for young and elderly people with visual impairments. The detailed reply to our letter was circulated to Colette Walker earlier as it covered the question of visiting rights she raised in March 2021 and was circulated with meeting papers.

3.3. Feedback on documents

Councillor Sheila Hands was disappointed to see that these documents were not accessible. Stuart McMillan advised that the CPG has raised this with the government on multiple occasions. With permission of the CPG, Stuart McMillan will write to Scottish Government and raise it again.

3.4. Accessible voting

Terry Robinson enquired about the Scottish Government accessible voting trials. He expressed concern over the reliance on technology that that is not widely available to blind and partially sighted people. Sandra Wilson advised that she was on the Scottish Government trial group and while there had been a lot of initial activity, she had not received any updates recently.

Catriona Burness explained that there were two accessible voting methods under consideration. The first was a Scottish Government group trialling QR codes to make postal voting more accessible. The second was supported by the Cabinet Office and involved using the tactile voting device with an audio player to read candidate names. Plans to trial the audio device at the Forth Valley Sensory Centre in October 2020 were postponed due to Covid. Instead, some remote trials were conducted in December 2020. There was agreement that this is an area that the CPG would like to see more work on.

Richard Baker proposed inviting the Scottish Government to present to the CPG on the progress that has been made. This was agreed and if/when the CPGVI is re-registered, the Secretary will invite the Scottish Government to give an update on accessible voting.

3.5. Re-registration of the CPGVI

The CPGVI must apply for re-registration within 30 days of the AGM. In advance of this, members will be emailed to confirm individual member names and organisations to be listed on membership. The list will be updated before sending onto the parliament for approval. It was pointed out that some organisations listed as members no longer existed (for example, Vision UK) and apologies were given as Glaucoma UK had inadvertently been left off the CPGVI Report on Session 5 Activity.

Agenda item 4

CPGVI programme for Session 6.

4.1. A report on the CPG's activity in Session 5 had been attached to the meeting papers to inform discussion of issues to be covered by the CPGVI in the new session.

Stuart McMillan explained that the work programme is entirely up to the CPG membership. In the previous session, a survey was sent to the membership. Topics were suggested and then prioritised based on demand. He stressed that this is an opportunity for the whole membership of the CPG, and not just politicians, to discuss outcomes for everyone living in Scotland with sight loss. He opened the discussion for suggestions.

Richard Baker asked if there would be a mechanism to suggest items pre-survey whilst Philippa Mason asked for time to consult with Glaucoma UK members on topics.

Stuart McMillan advised that in the previous session there was an initial discussion at the CPG, after which everyone was emailed a topic list and invited to suggest any other topics. A survey was then generated. Individual members then ranked each issue by importance. Catriona Burness confirmed that this had been the process and that a similar approach could be taken again, adding that Covid has put a new perspective on things.

Discussion then suggested several topics for consideration (given in order of suggestion at the meeting not priority):

1. Specialist education of children with visual impairment
2. Accessible information (question of feasibility of the introduction of legislation on accessibility standards on lines of the BSL Act); other aspects, including inaccessible health communications, raised more than once
3. Accessible voting - raised more than once
4. Post-Covid recovery
5. Scottish Social Security System
6. Increasing concern over inaccessible streets and crossings due to clutter - raised more than once
7. Employment - raised more than once - including suitability of employability programmes, such as the Fair Work and Youth Guarantee Schemes for blind and partially sighted people
8. Vision Impairment and race
9. Eye health care services within the community, for example, the Open Eyes policy
10. The shortage of rehabilitation officers
11. The need to be informed about changes from primary to secondary care, such as eye.scot
12. Rail and bus travel (concessionary travel, companion travel and booking seats)
13. Ongoing lack of awareness of how to approach people with a vision impairment.

Stuart thanked everyone who has contributed so far. Catriona Burness noted the possibility of future hybrid meetings and/or a return to face-to-face meetings and reception next year.

4.2. Action points

CPGVI to re-register with the parliament and reconfirm the membership list. Following this, circulate the list of topics suggested at the meeting and prepare membership survey.

4.3. Invitation to Scottish Government on accessible voting

On re-registration, the CPGVI to invite the Scottish Government to give an update on accessible voting given the timeliness of the 2022 Scottish local government elections.