

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 4 September 2024

Date Annual Return Submitted

Monday 30 September 2024

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 20 September 2023

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:

- Tuesday 5 December 2023
- Wednesday 21 February 2024
- Wednesday 4 September 2024 (AGM)

The meeting on 4 September 2024 was held via Teams; the meetings on 5 December 2023 and 21 February 2024 were hybrid meetings, taking place in the Scottish Parliament and via Teams. All the meetings were quorate.

A meeting planned for 5 June 2024 was postponed due to the general election on 4 July.

Tuesday 5 December 2023, 18.00-19.30

Held in Committee Room 3, Scottish Parliament, and online

MSPs present: Four (one non-CPG member MSP attending as guest)

Non-MSP members present: 32 (six in person; 26 online)

Speakers: Four (two in person; two online)

Observers: Three (all online)

While several topics were raised under Any Other Competent Business (AOCB), there were two key agenda items:

1. Human rights in Scotland
2. Visual impairment rehabilitation

1. Human rights in Scotland

Mhairi Snowden, Director of the Human Rights Consortium Scotland, gave a presentation, "It's all Rights – A Human Rights Bill for Scotland".

She provided background to the potential Human Rights Bill for Scotland, a key piece of legislation which seeks to pull together a range of issues on human rights within the devolved context in Scotland. The plan is to bring several United Nations Conventions (called international treaties) into Scots law. The right to a healthy environment is also explicitly laid out in the bill – this includes things like the right to clean air, safe water, etc.

She acknowledged that a Scottish Human Rights Bill would be an ambitious and complex piece of legislation due to the nature of devolution and certain constraints. However, it is hoped it will close the gap between the rhetoric of human rights, what's included in law and people's reality.

Her presentation was followed by Gillian Hallard of RNIB Scotland, stepping in for Sophie Bridger of Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland, to highlight "The Right to Rehabilitation" campaign. The campaign brings together organisations to demand that rehabilitation is part of the Human Rights Bill in Scotland. It was stressed that rehabilitation is a crucial part of re-adapting to life independently. People may require rehabilitation at various times of their life and for several reasons. They may have a need for visual rehabilitation after acquiring a sight loss condition but can require support again in the future if their needs change.

2. Visual impairment rehabilitation

Specific aspects of visual impairment rehabilitation were emphasised by a panel discussion:

- Gillian Hallard, RNIB Scotland – Overview on VI rehabilitation in Scotland.
- Laura Walker, Visibility Scotland, Chair of Scottish Visual Services Steering Group (SVSSG) – Actions taken to address rehab issues for blind and partially sighted people
- Adam Lodge, Visibility Scotland – Explaining the "Right to Dream" project (Visibility Scotland in partnership with Deaf Blind Scotland)

In 2021 the Scottish Sensory Hub made a review of the visual rehabilitation workforce in Scotland. This found the visual rehabilitation workforce in Scotland was reducing and many Rehab Workers are approaching retirement age. The Scottish Visual Services Steering Group (SVSSG) is a consortium made up of Scottish sight loss and its key aims include reinstating the Graduate Low Vision Rehabilitation

Course in Scotland. This is near completion with Glasgow Caledonian University running the course for nineteen students.

The benefits of visual rehabilitation can't be understated – it provides people with the skills and resources to maintain independence and manage daily life with a sight loss condition

Any Other Competent Business (AOCB)

Under AOCB, the meeting also received information on the following:

1. A collaboration request from Colin Beattie MSP – Convener of the CPG on Deafness. It was agreed to contact the CPGD for further information and to invite a representative to the next CPGVI meeting.
2. A short update from Mike Moore, Guide Dogs Scotland, on the pavement parking ban now in place in Scotland.
3. A short update from Sylvia Paton, Chair of the campaign group Keep Edinburgh Eye Pavilion (KEEP), on the ongoing campaign to build a replacement eye hospital in Edinburgh for the Princess Alexandra Eye Hospital, Edinburgh –
4. Information on the Scottish Vision Strategy Conference, March 2024.
5. The Convener Stuart McMillan MSP reported on his meeting with reps from Glaukos and RLT UK (Red Light Therapy).

Wednesday 21 February 2024, 13.00-14.15

Held in Committee Room 3, Scottish Parliament, and online

MSPs present: Two (both in person)

Non-MSP members present: 34 (ten in person; 24 online)

Speakers: Four (three in person; one online)

Observers: Ten (six in person; four online)

Three key items were on the agenda:

1. Scotland - Electoral Reform
2. UK General Election 2024/2025 and Voter ID
3. Access to glaucoma medical technologies in Scotland

1. Scotland - Electoral Reform

George Adam MSP, Minister for Parliamentary Business, gave an update on the Scottish Elections (Representation and Reform) Bill and on solutions under development by the Scottish Government Elections

Team to enable people with visual impairments to cast their vote during elections independently and in secret.

Chris Highcock, Secretary of the Electoral Management Board (EMB) for Scotland, highlighted the work of the Board. The EMB has a responsibility to coordinate the activities of Returning Officers across Scotland. This includes promoting best practice and working towards achieving consistency across Scotland when it comes to the delivery of elections.

He said that in the short-term, changes will be made ahead of the upcoming UK General Election. Recommendations for Returning Officers and Election Registration Officers include better signage at polling stations, training of staff, and having accessible information online. In the medium term, it is hoped more accessible measures will be in place for the Scottish Parliamentary Elections in 2026.

The session generated lively discussion and it was agreed to circulate EMB contacts and for CPGVI members to send comments and information via the CPG Secretary.

2. UK General Election 2024/2025 and Voter ID

Catherine Heggie of the Electoral Commission spoke on preparations for the next UK general election. Although a date for the Election has not been announced, it must take place by the end of January 2025.

Voter ID will be required for voting at polling stations at the UK General Election in Scotland; however, Voter ID is not required for voting at Scottish Parliament or Scottish local government elections.

The Electoral Commission agreed to send contact details and information on Voter ID requirements for circulation to CPGVI members.

3. Access to glaucoma medical technologies in Scotland

Tim Robinson, Market Development Manager with Glaukos, gave information about a medical aid which can help to prevent deterioration in sight amongst patients with early-stage glaucoma.

It is a small titanium stent which can help to drain excess fluid which often builds up in the eye and can raise pressure and cause problems in people with glaucoma.

Scotland has a growing number of people diagnosed with glaucoma, with estimates suggesting around 78,000 people now live with the condition. However, it has been suggested up to 50 per cent of glaucoma cases go undetected so the figure could be far higher.

To date an estimated 50,000 people across the UK have now had surgery to insert the stent. However, only five hundred people in Scotland have had the treatment. Parts of the country such as Glasgow and Dundee are offering the treatment more than other areas.

A Parliamentary Roundtable is taking place on 21st March 2024, sponsored by Stuart McMillan MSP, for those interested in learning more about this treatment.

Any other competent business

It was agreed that the Secretary should circulate the Terms of Reference for the CPG on Deafness Sensory Care and Dementia Working Group to CPG members and ask for any expressions of interest in joining the working group.

Wednesday 4 September 2024, 18.00-19.30

Held online

MSPs present: Two

Non-MSP members present: 36

Speakers: Two

Observers: Five

There were three key items were on the agenda:

1. AGM and Election of Office Bearers
2. The work of the Cross-Party Group (CPG) on Deafness Working Group on Sensory Care and Dementia
3. Developments in community optometry in Scotland

1. AGM and Election of Office Bearers

The existing office bearers were re-elected.

- Convener – Stuart McMillan MSP
- Vice-Convener – Neil Bibby MSP
- Secretariat – RNIB Scotland; Dr Catriona Burness

2. The work of the Cross-Party Group (CPG) on Deafness Working Group on Sensory Care and Dementia

Roz McCall MSP, Chair of the Cross-Party Group (CPG) on Deafness Working Group on Sensory Care and Dementia, gave an update on the working group, noting that two CPGVI members had joined the working group.

She referred to the growing numbers of individuals living in Scotland who are affected by dual sensory loss and noted links which exist between sensory loss and dementia. For example, hearing loss has been closely related to an increasing risk of dementia, particularly amongst an ageing population.

The CPG on Deafness has set up a working group to look at developing sensory and dementia care standards for those receiving support within care homes and from care services at home. In July 2024, three short surveys were conducted to explore how sensory needs are integrated into dementia assessments. The surveys also gathered information on post-diagnosis support available for those with sensory loss and dementia. Early analysis of the findings has identified a good awareness of the need to include sensory loss in dementia assessments but low awareness of tools available to do this. A fuller report will be available later in the year.

3. Developments in community optometry in Scotland

Eilidh Thomson, Vice Chair of Optometry Scotland highlighted developments in community optometry in Scotland.

These include changes to the Community Optometry Undergraduate scheme. The four-year honours degree course will be replaced with a five-year Masters degree which will help streamline the qualification process. Previous arrangements saw students graduate after four years followed by a one-year work placement. The change to a five-year programme will include place-based training in the final year. She highlighted Scotland's ambitions to incorporate independent prescribing into the Masters degree. This will help expand the role and responsibilities of what optometrists can do, vastly improving the care and treatment which optometrists can provide.

The emphasis was on increasing the role of community optometrists within eye health.

Reference was also made to the Scottish Government's short life working group looking at gaps in care, specifically within domiciliary optometry services, which delivers support at home. Maintaining this level of service, particularly in rural and remote areas, present challenges due to available funding, but it is hoped to ensure domiciliary optometry services remain available to those who require it.

Several organisations – the Scottish Sensory Hub, RNIB Scotland and Sight Scotland - offered their support to establishing a low vision service in the community.

Any other competent business

Under AOCB three topics were raised:

1. James Adams shared the sad news that Sandra Wilson, former Chair of RNIB Scotland, member of the CPGVI and a great supporter of the sight loss community in Scotland, recently passed away. She was a formidable character and an outstanding advocate for all blind and partially sighted people in Scotland and will be sorely missed by many. It was agreed that the CPGVI express condolences to her family and friends.
2. RNIB Scotland is holding a reception in the Scottish Parliament in January 2025, hosted by Stuart McMillan MSP, to mark the 200th anniversary of the invention of braille. Invitations will be circulated in due course with places allocated on a first come, first served basis.
3. The Convener Stuart McMillan MSP reported that he had asked the Cabinet Secretary for Finance to confirm whether free eye health examinations will remain in Scotland. The Finance Secretary confirmed that free eye examinations will be safeguarded in Scotland.

MSP Members of The Group

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

1. Jeremy Balfour MSP (Scottish Conservative & Unionist Party)
2. Neil Bibby MSP (Scottish Labour)
3. Miles Briggs MSP (Scottish Conservative & Unionist Party)
4. Stuart McMillan MSP (Scottish National Party)
5. Colin Smyth MSP (Scottish Labour)

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. Joan Kerr
7. Maureen McAllister
8. Hazel McFarlane
9. David McKerral
10. Terry Moody
11. Councillor Robert Mooney
12. Rod Murchison
13. Hussein Patwa
14. Mary Rasmussen
15. Ken Reid
16. Terry Robinson
17. Kirin Saeed
18. Alan Stewart
19. David Weir

Organisations

1. RNIB Scotland – Secretary and treasurer
2. Allergan
3. Angus Council
4. Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ASDO)
5. Associated Optical
6. Bayer
7. Blind Veterans UK
8. Deafblind Scotland
9. Dundee Blind & Partially Sighted Society
10. Eyecare Scotland
11. Family Fund
12. Glaucoma UK
13. Guide Dogs Scotland

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14. Haggeye 15. Linking Education and Disability (LEAD) Scotland 16. Macular Society 17. Microphthalmia, Anophthalmia & Coloboma Support (MACS) 18. Newsdirect 19. NHS Education for Scotland 20. NHS Forth Valley 21. NHS Lothian Princess Alexandra Eye Pavilion 22. NHS Tayside Disability Equality Network 23. North East Sensory Services (NESS) 24. North Ayrshire Council 25. Optelec UK 26. Optometry Scotland 27. Police Scotland 28. RNIB Connect Radio 29. Scottish Association for Visual Impairment Education (SAVIE) 30. Scottish Government 31. Scottish Sensory Hub (ALLIANCE) 32. seescape 33. Sight Action 34. Sight Scotland 35. Sight Scotland Veterans 36. The Royal Blind School Sight Scotland 37. University of Edinburgh, Moray House School of Education and Sport 38. University of Edinburgh, Scottish Sensory Centre 39. VI Charity Sector Partnership Mental Health Committee 40. Visibility 41. Visionary 42. Vision PK 43. 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.

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|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 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 2023 – September 2024

Secretariat

C Burness (12 days) & M Jackson & K Henderson (3 days)
Total: £2,451

Other costs

The September 2024 meeting and AGM was held online and incurred no other costs.

Catering:

December 2023 meeting - £160 plus VAT (£192)
February 2024 meeting - £50 plus VAT (£60)
Total: £252

OVERALL TOTAL: £2,703

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:

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| 5 MSP Members from 3 different political parties | Yes |
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| Held at least 2 quorate meetings in the last 12 months | Yes |
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| Held an AGM within 11-13months of the date of registration or the last AGM | Yes |
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| Submitted an annual return form within 30 calendar days of the AGM | Yes |
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| Provided Standards Clerks with 10 calendar days' notice of all meetings | Yes |
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| Provided minutes of all meetings | Yes |
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| Signed | Stuart McMillan MSP |
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| Date | 30 September 2024 |
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