**Health & Sport Committee Social Care Inquiry**

**Introduction**

Royal Blind is Scotland's largest visual impairment organisation. Our vision is to see a community in which blind and partially sighted people, including those who have other disabilities, are fully included and lead fulfilling lives. We care for, educate and employ blind and partially sighted people from across Scotland and the UK. We support people of all ages - from babies and toddlers at our pre-school playgroup, children and young people at the Royal Blind School and Kidscene after school club, young adults through our supported accommodation and respite care, employees with visual impairment at the Scottish Braille Press and older people in our care homes. Our sister charity, Scottish War Blinded provides a free service supporting individuals who have served in the armed forces and currently live with a visual impairment. *Something specifically about social care.*

**1. How should the public be involved in planning their own and their community’s social care services?**

We recommend tailored, person-centred social care and support plans that address mental health risks and triggers, such as mobility, access to services, employment, economic support and other needs.

In 2019, Royal Blind carried out research into experiences and awareness of Self Directed Support among our members and service users.[[1]](#footnote-1) We worked with Scottish Care to carry out a survey of people’s views and experiences of the Scottish Government’s flagship social care policy. The initiative has the potential to benefit thousands of people with sight loss, enabling many to maintain their independence and live at home for longer. It can offer specialist support, equipment and accessible information to help people with visual impairment.

It was therefore disappointing that our survey of over 100 people across our services indicated a low awareness of SDS. In response to our opening question, 47% said they were currently receiving care services. Despite this, nearly two thirds had never heard of SDS. Among those who had been offered SDS, there was disappointing feedback regarding their potential options. A clear majority (63%) of respondents had never been informed of the budget available to them for their care and support. Only six out of 23 people who had been offered SDS felt they had enough support about their decision, while only just over a quarter (26%) of respondents had been given an explanation of SDS options.

SDS was hailed as a progressive and ground-breaking piece of legislation when it was launched five years ago, but it is clear there needs to be greater collective action to put it into practice. Royal Blind and Scottish Care are now calling on the Scottish Government to take measures to raise awareness of SDS, including through providing accessible information on the policy for people with visual impairment. We are also urging local authorities to develop plans to increase access to SDS for people with visual impairment, such as through providing more training to staff on supporting people with sight loss to have the information they need on the policy.

**2. How should Integration Joint Boards commission and procure social care to ensure it is person-centred?**

It is important that person-centred social care is guided by an inclusive, human rights-based approach. Consideration should be given as to how this will be achieved for all protected groups. Currently, many people with visual impairment are facing unfair and unnecessary barriers to accessing care. A person-centred approach entails an understanding of how a person’s life is affected by their condition. Service delivery should be founded on a “What Matters To You” approach which recognises the individual needs of patients and in care at home requires staff not to be constricted to visits for as little as fifteen minutes.

We recently published a report into emotional support for people with sight loss, which recommended tailored, person-centred social care and support plans that address mental health risks and triggers, such as mobility, access to services, employment, economic support and other needs. Our joint research with the Mental Health Foundation argued that holistic, integrated person-centred support that fully addresses the emotional and psychological needs of those living with sight loss will empower people to live healthier and fulfilling lives. This means offering the right support at the right time and giving people greater control over their emotional wellbeing.

A partnership approach would help to promote person-centred social care. There should be a new concordat between the Scottish Government, local government, NHS Boards and integration authorities and the third sector to establish parity of esteem in delivering health and social care provision and drawing on the expertise and ethos of third sector care providers. Meaningful inclusion of third sector partners in governance arrangements will secure improved accountability in health service delivery as well as planning for the future based on an accurate assessment of need and informed by successful innovation.

Current scrutiny and governance arrangements are not adequate. The report of Audit Scotland and Accounts Commission “Health and Social Care integration: update on progress” calls for a greater commitment from integration authorities, councils and NHS boards to work with the third sector. The report stated third sector providers feel their views are not being sought or are not valued, despite often having innovative ways to improve local services.

**3. Looking ahead, what are the essential elements in an ideal model of social care (e.g. workforce, technology, housing etc.)?**

Improved workforce planning and recruitment is vital to ensure health services can cope with increasing requirements for treatment and care. There are already over 175,000 people in Scotland living with a visual impairment and this is set to rise to over 210,000 by 2030. This will place considerable pressure on already stretched social care services. Recruiting enough expert staff and ensuring they have access to visual impairment awareness training is therefore vital. Social care provision still receives significantly less funding than other health services, including in pay, terms and conditions for staff, and these inequalities should be addressed.

There are huge potential benefits of using technology in social care including for people with sight loss. All people with visual impairment at every stage of life who can be enabled to live independently through using new technology need to have the support and training so that it is accessible for them. Magnification software,screen readers, kitchen gadgets, tactile watches and alarm clocksare some examples of specialist equipment that can help people with sight loss retain independence and maintain daily living tasks more safely. It is important that people with sensory impairments are given access and information to use this equipment, and that there are enough rehabilitation workers trained to support them.

Adaptations to both personal and residential homes are essential in providing high quality social care to many people with visual impairment. This can include adaptations such as more appropriate lighting, grab rails, lever taps and non-slip flooring. EHRC highlight in a 2018 report that although there are many examples of good practice in supplying and installing adaptations, many disabled people across Scotland find the process of making adaptations to be complex and slow. Disabled people and their carers raised concern to the EHRC that professionals in local authorities are not sufficiently aware of the adaptations that people with sensory impairments, learning disabilities or autism spectrum disorders might require. These could include small home modifications such as colour schemes for people with visual impairments.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**4. What needs to happen to ensure the equitable provision of social care across the country?**

Royal Blind School and Royal Blind’s adult services support a number of children and young people with multiple and complex disabilities in addition to their visual impairment. We provide 24-hour residential care and short breaks for adults with visual impairment and additional disabilities, based in Edinburgh. Forward Vision is a transitional service for young adults between the ages of 17-25. Allermuir provides a home for life with community-based supported living. Our adult services support young people with visual impairment and additional disabilities. There is a waiting list for these services as we are currently operating at capacity and we are aware too many young adults with complex needs are waiting too long or are unable to access the care support their need. Local sensory impairment teams are stretched both in resources and staffing, which results in people with sight loss too often finding it difficult to access the support of rehabilitation workers who can help them manage their condition and enable them to continue to live independently.

There is also an acute challenge to support older people with sight loss who require residential nursing care. There are some 12,500 people in Scotland today living with dementia and sight loss. Royal Blind runs Scotland’s only two specialist care homes for older people with sight loss, supporting people who have a high level of care needs. Current funding arrangements mean that these care services are extremely heavily subsidised through our fundraising. Freedom of Information requests to local authorities in 2018 indicated significant disparities between the payments allocated to the independent sector by local authorities for people they refer and the costs allocated to care of residents in their own homes. They showed an average payment of £594 per week for independent providers compared to £1,764 per week for residents in local authority homes. This means that third sector providers, bringing invaluable and expert contributions to care provision, are subsidising local authority residents by as much as £500 a week. This is not a sustainable situation and the budget must ensure funds are available so a national care homes contract can be agreed which meets the needs of residents and the staff who provide this vital specialist support.

Local variation in delivery of care can lead to patchy provision for people receiving services, and a national care service could seek to address regional variation and also help share best practice more effectively. However, there would need to be widespread consultation on how such a national service should be delivered, both at a regional and national level, and this discussion should start on the basis of a more detailed proposal. Without this, it is difficult to assess how a national care service would be more impactful in driving up standards than effective regulation and guidance to statutory bodies. Changing structures will not help if the funding is not available to support reform. As a care provider it is evident to Royal Blind that there has still not been the fundamental shift required to ensure that there is the appropriate level of investment in prevention and social care, rather than an overwhelming focus on acute care.

Collaboration between service providers should be encouraged and is essential to tackle issues like delayed discharge and ensure appropriate care is available for people moving into social care settings from acute care. It is also vital to share the variety of expertise in care provision providers have developed across the sector. An example of this is Royal Blind’s dementia and sight loss project. The charity has been awarded £20,000 for the project by the Life Changes Trust with funding from the National Lottery Community Fund over two years. Through the project, Royal Blind will research what activities in care homes people with sight loss and dementia find most rewarding, and the charity will also develop learning resources for other care providers supporting people living with sight loss and dementia.

1. <https://www.royalblind.org/node/36278> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/housing-and-disabled-people-scotland-hidden-crisis-long-summary.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)