

2022 Scottish Local Authority Elections Manifesto

Time to Focus on Sight Loss

Every hour someone in Scotland starts to lose their sight. There will be over 200,000 visually impaired people in Scotland by 2030. It's time to focus on sight loss and ensure they have the support they need.



Sight Scotland is the leading organisation for sight loss in Scotland. We exist to level the playing field, because we believe that everyone with sight loss deserves the opportunity to lead a great life.

Our services range from providing specialist education to blind pupils, to care, to community-based support, and to document transcription to enable visually impaired people to access vital documents such as bank statements.

We know that there are significantly more people in Scotland who could benefit from our life-changing support, and we are determined to develop new services to be able to reach them.

In 2022, we renewed our ambitious long-term goal: to expand our reach across Scotland to support and empower even more people affected by sight loss.

Our sister charity is Sight Scotland Veterans. Sight Scotland Veterans offers support to veterans with sight loss across Scotland so that they can live independently, regardless of how they lost their sight.

Our mission is to reach everyone in Scotland with sight loss – where and when they need us.



Time to focus on sight loss



Blind and partially sighted people have been profoundly and disproportionately affected by the impact of Coronavirus and this has had serious consequences for their fundamental human rights. Public health measures to reduce infection have had a greater impact on disabled people and have brought additional challenges to those with sight loss.

As Scotland embarks upon its recovery from the pandemic, it's vital that a human rights approach is taken to ensure no one is left behind.

With an increasing number of people in Scotland affected by visual impairment, we believe it's time to focus on sight loss.

We want to see action across all local authorities to:



involve blind and partially sighted people in planning processes to ensure community spaces and town centres are accessible for disabled people.



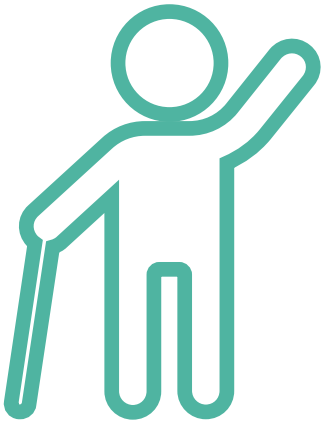
create better chances for blind and partially sighted young people by increasing the number of QTVIs (Qualified Teacher of Children and Young People with Vision Impairment) and other specialist resources available to schools.



make sight loss a priority by promoting good eye health and establishing links with the third sectors.



create an inclusive Scotland for blind and partially sighted people by ensuring local transport networks are accessible and affordable.



Involve blind and partially sighted people in planning processes to ensure community spaces and town centres are accessible for disabled people

Over the past 18 months Scotland's town centres have seen significant changes to pedestrian layouts. The introduction of new cycle lanes and access to bus stops under the Spaces for People schemes have made it more difficult for a blind or partially sighted person to navigate their journey safely.

While the intention behind such schemes is welcome, in some instances these changes

are causing additional hazards and obstacles for blind and partially sighted people trying to get around. A lack of tactile paving and poor distinctions between cycle paths, the road and the pavement can be quite confusing for someone with sight loss – and potentially very dangerous. The increase of on-street dining has also created additional street clutter adding further challenges when getting out and about.

Our calls:

1

Review changes made under the Spaces for People scheme

2

Implement the paving parking ban ahead of 2023

3

Develop a renewed approach to planning that involves blind and partially sighted people.

We're also calling for the ban on pavement parking to be implemented ahead of 2023. As guidance is being developed, we'd like to see local authorities prioritise the assessment process to identify areas of exemption so these can be communicated and consulted on at the earliest opportunity.

A renewed approach to town centre planning should be established across all local authorities to ensure blind and partially

sighted people and other disabled people are part of meaningful consultation in the planning process, so that community spaces are accessible for all. Local authorities should have a duty to actively reach out to the sight loss community and to work with third sector organisations to gather views on accessibility and best practices.





Create better chances for blind and partially sighted young people by increasing the number of QTVIs and other specialist resources available to schools



Blind and partially sighted young pupils face an attainment gap in education. Over the last ten years the number of visually impaired young people in Scotland's schools has more than doubled to 4,930 pupils. However, there has been a reduction in specialist teachers providing vital support, such as braille tuition. Scottish Government figures show a decrease in the number of blind and partially sighted pupils who progress to further education or employment.

We are calling for an increase in the number of Qualified Teachers of Children and Young People with Visual Impairment across all local authorities and for guaranteed hours with a QTVI based on a child or young person's needs. We also support the creation of a national learning resource for all school staff working with blind and partially sighted pupils to be made available across all local areas.

At the Royal Blind School, we've seen great success in partnership working with mainstream schools and we'd like to see all local authorities build upon existing partnerships with specialist provisions to share expertise and knowledge.

We believe every young disabled person, including blind and partially sighted young people, should have a timely transition plan that is coordinated across all services. The plan should reflect refreshed GIFREC guidance and should meet the young person's needs for education, employment, or care.



Our calls:

1

Ensure guaranteed hours with a QTVI for pupils with a visual impairment

2

Increase partnership working with specialist schools and education providers

3

Develop a national learning resource for all school staff working with blind and partially sighted pupils.



Make sight loss a priority by promoting good eye health and establishing links with the third sector

There are approximately 180,000 people in Scotland living with significant sight loss and this figure is rising. That's why access to rehabilitation services and equipment, as well as emotional support after a diagnosis of an eye condition, is so important to help someone adapt to life with sight loss.

The third sector provides vital practical and emotional support to blind and partially sighted people, complementing the medical care received in clinical settings. We're calling on local authorities to strengthen the links with sight loss charities who can offer specialised support, including rehabilitation and access to a range of aides and technology, to help people maintain their independence.

Our calls:

1

Develop greater partnership working with the third sector to provide support for those with sight loss

2

Improve access to rehabilitation services, including sighted guide training and long cane training

3

Involve third sector organisations earlier in health and social care planning processes.

We believe greater partnership working and collaboration with the involvement of blind and partially sighted people can help us achieve our ambition – that no one faces sight loss alone. This is especially important as plans for a National Care Service begin to develop. We're calling for third sector organisations to be involved earlier in health and social care planning process and to be fully included in procurement and or commissioning processes by local authorities. We believe this will help local authorities to deliver value for money services and save valuable time.





Create an inclusive Scotland for blind and partially sighted people by ensuring local transport networks are accessible and affordable



All blind and partially sighted people in Scotland should be able to make safe journeys and have equality of access to public transport. For people with a visual impairment, good quality accessible public transport is of vital importance, helping to promote inclusion and connection with people and services in their communities. However, public transport and infrastructure such as bus stops, stations and ticket offices are not always accessible.

We're calling on local authorities to work with the Scottish Government to establish a new national policy for free rail travel across Scotland for those with a National (Scotland) Concessionary Travel for Blind Persons card and their companions. Different concessionary and companion schemes in different areas are causing confusion for both passengers and rail staff. That's why we're calling for a new national rail travel policy for Scotland, like the free bus travel scheme. This should be coupled with training for station staff to make them aware of the new scheme and the entitlements under it.

There is ongoing debate about how bus services can be most effectively delivered as many routes have been withdrawn for both urban and rural communities. Too often the withdrawal of local bus services has contributed to the social isolation experienced by many people with sight loss. Some bus stops have also been replaced with floating ones, making it more difficult for blind and partially sighted people to get around safely.

Communities should also be consulted on any decision to withdraw or change the route of a local bus service. Similarly, impact assessments should be carried out into how a change to a service will affect people with disabilities and long-term health conditions, including visual impairment. Part of this process should involve consultation with disability charities and local organisations.

Our calls:

1

Work with the Scottish Government to establish a new national policy for free rail travel across Scotland for those with a National (Scotland) Concessionary travel for Blind Persons card and their companions

2

Include local communities in decision making about changes to local transport routes

3

Ensure transport infrastructure is accessible for blind and partially sighted people.



ScotRail
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Tickets

Staff Only

People with visual impairment say:



“My family don’t live nearby so I have to use the train every time I visit them.

“Due to my sight loss, I cannot see the ticket vending machine screens, so I need to go to a ticket office to get a ticket. I also need support with the step on trains in order to get on and off.”

Participant in January 2022 focus group



“I even heard people saying, ‘oh, we’ll put braille on the signs’.

“But what a lot of people don’t understand is, if you don’t know the sign is there in the first place, you won’t know to go up to it and check for braille.”

Participant in January 2022 focus group

People with visual impairment say:



“It was a huge shock. If I had had support at an earlier point following my diagnosis, I don’t think I would have gone into such a depression.

“When you hear that your sight is going, you think, ‘what am I going to do? How am I going to manage?’ You can’t sleep for thinking about how you’re going to cope.

“The first time I feel I have some support is now, with Sight Scotland. There was somebody there who would listen to me. It’s been a blessing.”

Participant in January 2022 focus group



“It’s difficult when you’re partially sighted or blind and you’re living in a sighted world, where you have to fit in.

“I’ve noticed it is getting better, but we’re not there yet.”

Participant in January 2022 focus group



 Sight
Scotland



The new names
for Royal Blind
and Scottish
War Blinded.

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Sight Scotland is the operating name of The Royal Blind Asylum and School, Scottish Charity Number SC017167.

Sight Scotland Veterans is the operating name of Scottish War Blinded, charity number SC047192.