



**Sight Scotland
Veterans**

Annual Review 2020-21



Tackling vision loss together

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About us

Sight Scotland Veterans supports military veterans living with significant sight loss. Our support equips people to rediscover and maintain their independence and to improve their quality of life.

Our ambition is to reach and support many more veterans who live with sight loss in Scotland.

We support veterans with sight loss by:

- Developing people's skills and resources for independent living.
- Supporting individuals to live well and to do the things in their life that are important to them.
- Involving people as leaders, employees and supporters, and proactively engaging people in shaping the services they receive.
- Innovating our services to reflect the changing needs of those who need us most.



We are continually evolving our approach to ensure we can reach every veteran who needs us. None of our work would be possible without the commitment of our outstanding people, including our staff, volunteers and donors. The contribution of veterans affected by sight loss has also been invaluable in enabling us to grow and progress.



Thank you for your support

Thank you to all those who support us in our work for veterans with sight loss in Scotland.

The following charitable trusts, listed in alphabetical order, contributed greatly towards the services we provide:

- The Charles & Jane Allan Memorial Fund
M V Hillhouse Trust
- Glebefoot Charitable Trust
- The John Dunsmuir Trust
- Mrs Jean S Innes Charitable Trust
- Mr W J & Mrs C G Dunnachie's
Charitable Trust
- Templeton Goodwill Trust
- Thomas Robertson Charitable Trust



Words from the Chair



I am proud to present Sight Scotland Veterans' 2020-2021 Annual Review. This review provides an opportunity to reflect on what our colleagues and the veterans who access our services have achieved in the last financial year.

I am grateful for the dedication of colleagues during a very challenging year. The Coronavirus pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns have had a dramatic impact on everyone's lives, including those with sight loss.

During the pandemic, Sight Scotland Veterans adapted the provision of the three key services available. We temporarily closed our two activity centres as part of the lockdown restrictions, and centre officers began phoning those who used the centres. Our Outreach service was delivered through regular telephone calls. This helped to

reassure veterans and addressed common issues of loneliness. Our Rehabilitation team carried out assessments over the phone and delivered specialist equipment to homes. As restrictions eased, colleagues visited veterans in person in gardens and outdoor spaces at first, and later progressed to visits in homes.

During 2020, we developed a new guiding ambition for Sight Scotland Veterans.

Since the creation of Scottish War Blinded in 1915, our charity has supported thousands of veterans with visual impairment. Today, there are around 212,500 veterans in Scotland, and an estimated 20,000 veterans are living with sight loss over the age of 75.

We are determined to expand our reach even further to support as many veterans with sight loss, and their families, as we can.

We set out four new goals that will help us achieve this ambition on page 26.

I hope you will support us in our pursuit of our goals. Together, we will reach out and support many more veterans with sight loss across Scotland.

Thank you.

Michael Craig
Chair of the Board
Sight Scotland Veterans

Our Outreach Service

Outreach services support veterans with sight loss to solve the challenges they face and to link them with other local services that offer specialist help.

The Outreach team offer:



Advice and information



An empathic, listening ear



Everyday life skills



A variety of local social opportunities

Lockdown restrictions changed the way we offered Outreach support.

We realised there was a need to facilitate group calls between veterans, in addition to regular individual calls - so we partnered with Age Scotland, who were running Comradeship Circle groups.

With support from Age Scotland, we organised and delivered our own group calls Scotland-wide for the veterans we support. As well as social chat groups, we also ran activities including quizzes, crossword sessions and reminiscence sessions. We ran 12 sessions a week on average, with between four and seven veterans attending each group.

Over the winter months, some of our Outreach workers were able to do garden visits and sighted guide walks in certain areas when and where it was possible with Covid restrictions.

These visits helped relieve social isolation and further enabled us to support those experiencing a decline in their mental health or wellbeing.



▶ Our Outreach team invited veterans to take part in a creative competition. John Nalepa won the artwork category with this colour drawing of a robin.



▶ Kenneth Hall entered this painting of a coastal scene.

Socially distanced visits

John McOwan was visited at his garden for a socially distanced catch up by Rachel Thomas, one of our Outreach Workers. Rachel said: “It was a fabulous day and thankfully the weather stayed warm and we sat and chatted away. To be able to visit one of my Sight Scotland Veterans members cheered me up no end and I definitely think it cheered him up too!”

▼ John McOwan



‘Non-Pub Quiz’ a huge hit with members

After lockdown began, the Sight Scotland Veterans team thought up many creative ways for us all to remain in touch and have some fun while social activities and centres were closed.

The weekly Non-Pub Quiz run by the Outreach team proved to be a huge hit for many members based across the country.

Each Outreach Worker led a team of six veterans. Outreach Workers would telephone their team members at home each week, seeking answers to two quiz questions.

The quiz received a fantastic response, with quiz participants reporting how much they enjoyed pondering over the questions each week. Of course, with teams spread out across the country, the element of friendly competition went down a treat!

Aberdeenshire veteran Sandra Jaffrey said she loved receiving calls from her Outreach Worker, Ingrid Penny.

Sandra said: “During lockdown I’ve loved Ingrid’s phone calls and doing the quiz. It’s somebody different to talk with; I really do enjoy that.

“It’s not just doing the quiz at the time – if there’s something you didn’t know the answer to it gives you the incentive to go and look up the answer and it’s something else to do during the week. It’s wonderful.”

Our Interim Head of Community Support, Jenny Liddell, said: “It’s always good to stimulate our minds and especially so during these long weeks of lockdown.

“Members have had such fun taking part in the Non-Pub Quiz and many have revealed a highly competitive streak they didn’t realise they had!”

“

During lockdown I’ve loved Ingrid’s phone calls and doing the quiz. It’s somebody different to talk with; I really do enjoy that.”

Our Rehabilitation Service

Our specialist rehabilitation service provides:



Low vision assessments



Specialist equipment to assist with independence



Mobility and independent living skills training and advice

As the lockdown restricted home visits, our Rehabilitation team carried out assessments through phone calls or online communication. Rehabilitation Officers discussed the difficulties veterans were experiencing, and provided advice, equipment and training to best suit their needs.

Outdoor mobility training was one service we provided, and it included long cane training. This enabled veterans to walk outdoors independently and safely, building their confidence and motivation. In one case, a veteran we supported began walking to his local shop to buy a newspaper. Using a new electronic magnifier we arranged for him, he was able to read the newspaper as well. This veteran told his Rehabilitation Officer that being mobile had hugely lifted his mood, and he enjoyed being able to walk and read independently again.

When restrictions permitted it, our Rehabilitation team visited and supported veterans at their homes, following Scottish Government advice.





“

Rehabilitation Officers discussed the difficulties veterans were experiencing, and provided advice, equipment and training to best suit their needs.”

New telephone group for people who experience Charles Bonnet Syndrome

Veterans like Marjorie Ramage say a telephone support group set up by our Rehabilitation team during lockdown has been wonderful.

Marjorie experiences Charles Bonnet Syndrome, which causes visions and silent hallucinations.

The visions can be benign, such as patterns or flowers, but sometimes the visions can appear more sinister. People suffering from Charles Bonnet Syndrome have reported visions of unknown people in Victorian outfits, bedraggled children, or worse.

Marjorie said: “The hallucination I sometimes see is an old man. To begin with, I was worried sick as to why I kept seeing it.

“I could be sitting on a moving bus and look out and see him walking among the people. In bed one night I looked up and he was just stood there looking at me. I didn’t like that at all.”

Marjorie said the man in her visions always wore similar clothes to those her grandfather used to wear.

“My grandfather always used to have his white shirt with no collar on with a black waistcoat, black trousers, and a pinafore because he was a gardener.

▼ Marjorie Ramage



“It suddenly dawned on me that the man wasn’t really there. I was frightened to speak to anybody about it because I didn’t know about Charles Bonnet Syndrome.”

Being able to identify the visions as a common condition was a watershed moment, Marjorie said.

“When I learned about Charles Bonnet Syndrome, it really made a difference to me to know that I wasn’t going daft. I think the first time I really spoke about it was with my Sight Scotland Veterans Rehabilitation Officer.”

Our Rehabilitation team invited six veterans to take part in a trial telephone support group in February 2021. The team partnered with a charity called Esme’s Umbrella that specialises in Charles Bonnet Syndrome.

Veterans shared their experiences of the syndrome over the calls, which were held twice a week for four weeks. Participants discussed coping strategies that had worked for them in the past.

Marjorie said: “Until the Esme’s Umbrella sessions, I didn’t realise so many others were suffering with it and how it varies for each person. Everybody sees something different. We built up quite a camaraderie in the group. It was nice talking to people who had found ways of dealing with it.”

The trial group was rated highly by participants, so the Rehabilitation team continued setting up more telephone support groups to help ensure every veteran who experiences the syndrome can talk to peers about it.



▲ Veteran John Baptie also experiences Charles Bonnet Syndrome



▲ An artist’s self-portrait of themselves, with a depiction of the figures they sometimes see, due to Charles Bonnet Syndrome, in the background.

Supported to continue hobbies during lockdown

Peter Walker, aged 89, said the support he received during lockdown from Sight Scotland Veterans gave him ‘a new lease of life’.

Peter served in the RAF for 22 years. His steady deterioration of sight in recent years had made reading extremely difficult, stealing away one of his favourite pastimes – studying old texts.

However, thanks to our Rehabilitation team’s provision of a video magnifier – a Vario Digital FHD – Peter was able to read independently again.

Peter said: “The video magnifier has changed my life. The old books I study have tiny print, but I just slide them underneath this beautiful machine and I can get back to reading my favourite books again.

“The support and equipment has given me a new lease of life and independence.”



▲ Peter Walker

▼ Veteran Bernard Matthews using a video magnifier



Veteran reclaims independence and favourite hobby

Glasgow veteran William McKinlay says the specialist support he received from Sight Scotland Veterans enabled him to reclaim his independence during lockdown.

William, aged 69, began losing his sight 12 years ago. In 2020, his sight had deteriorated so much he found reading his favourite books extremely difficult.

But thanks to specialist equipment, such as an 'Explore 5' digital magnifier and the rehabilitation support provided by Sight Scotland Veterans during lockdown, William was able to continue reading the military history books he loves.

William said: "I hadn't had any support with my sight loss prior to getting in touch with Sight Scotland Veterans at the end of 2019. I was really needing help to read.

"That's when one of Sight Scotland Veterans' Rehabilitation Officers, Katrina Campbell, stepped in. The amount of help the digital magnifier that she provided me with has given me to be able to read independently again is brilliant. It's definitely kept me busy during lockdown by allowing me to do my military research again and prepare for future school sessions.

"The charity's support has given me that independence back. Katrina also provided me with a talking clock and talking watch, which is very helpful when I'm cooking, and I now have a liquid level indicator for making



▲ William McKinlay

cups of tea to stop overflowing the cup. The help and equipment that I've had has been absolutely fantastic – I'd be struggling without it."

William said Sight Scotland Veterans had been hugely supportive during the lockdown.

"It feels like Sight Scotland Veterans is watching our backs with these phone calls and the support, even in lockdown. The camaraderie and friendship is there and if you're stuck, somebody will help. That's just the way the community is."

Activity Centres

We run two specialist activity centres for veterans with sight loss – the Hawkhead Centre in Paisley, Renfrewshire, and the Linburn Centre in Wilkieston, West Lothian. Free door-to-door transport to the centres from most local locations is provided for veterans.

In March 2020, we had to temporarily close our two centres as part of the lockdown restrictions. Centre Officers kept up regular contact with veterans over the phone. The team also carried out home visits to those who needed them, following the appropriate precautions and advice.

▼ Linburn Centre



Digital devices kept veterans connected

Many veterans kept connected during lockdown using specialist digital devices provided by Sight Scotland Veterans.

The Linburn Centre team supported veterans with sight loss to use the Synaptic devices before the March 2020 lockdown began.

During the lockdown, tech-savvy National Service veteran David Weir, of Bathgate, used his Synaptic smartphone and tablet to keep in touch with family and friends, sort out groceries and find entertainment while staying at home.

David, who is 88, said: “Thanks to my Synaptic smartphone, I’m able to text my family when I’m in need of groceries. I can write down my shopping list on the notepad feature on my tablet and I’ve been emailing it to my family. It can also read messages out loud to me and I can dictate replies.”

David, who has macular degeneration, struggles to use standard screens and keypads due to his low vision. The ‘life-

changing’ devices with Synaptic software feature in-built audio and magnification properties.

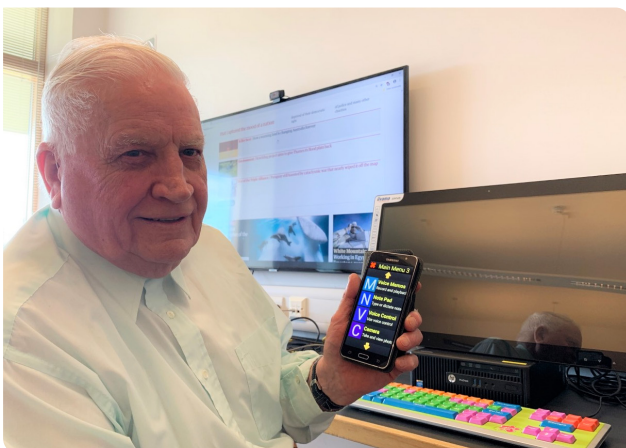
“With being home 24/7, I’m using these devices constantly to download talking books. My vision means I cannot see to read. I can also use my tablet as a diary or for entertainment from YouTube,” said David.

“Having this digital knowledge has made a tremendous difference at this difficult time. The lockdown certainly would be lonelier without these devices.”

Royal Air Force veteran Jim Archibald, 90, of Pathhead, said the Synaptic tablet he received free of charge from Sight Scotland Veterans has been ‘an essential piece of equipment’.

Jim said: “The tablet’s been a godsend to me at this time. Any questions I have, I can just go to the web. It’s been very helpful. I’ve been sending an awful lot of emails and sharing pictures over email too as we’ve just had a new addition to the family.

“It helps me to feel much more connected, without a doubt.”



▲ David with his Synaptic smartphone.



▲ Jim with his Synaptic tablet.

Medical Research

Sight Scotland Veterans has continued with its commitment to provide funding of £250,000 over three years to Action Against AMD (AAAMD). AMD (age-related macular degeneration) is the most common cause of sight loss in high income countries.

A significant number of the veterans who we support have lost their sight due to AMD.

Sight Scotland Veterans co-founded AAAMD – a charity in its own right – in 2019 in partnership with three other leading sight loss charities. AAAMD is focused on finding and enabling convenient, affordable, and accessible solutions to stop AMD in its early stages, before it causes sight loss.





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Marketing and Communications

Our rebrand as Sight Scotland Veterans

A key project for 2020 was launching our new names and brand identities.

Following more than two years of research, consultation, planning and production, we launched Sight Scotland Veterans as the new name for Scottish War Blinded in October 2020. Our sister charity, formerly known as Royal Blind rebranded as Sight Scotland.

The re-branding provides a fresh and vibrant image for the charities. Research has shown that the new brand is increasing awareness of Sight Scotland Veterans, and monitoring activity has been implemented to track progress over time.

Our previous name had become a barrier to being able to reach out to new veterans who we could provide free support to. Scottish War Blinded was started in 1915 for people returning from the trenches of World War One. Today, over 98 per cent of veterans we support lost their sight due to conditions like glaucoma or macular degeneration. Many veterans with sight loss told us over

Previous logo



New logo



the last few years that they had not been aware they would be eligible to get support from our charity, as their sight loss was unrelated to their service. Following an extensive research process, the decision to change our name was made so that we can reach veterans who need our support more effectively.

Our sister charity, Sight Scotland, changed its name from Royal Blind. Research showed that Royal Blind was too often confused with other sight loss charities with similar names.

We are still two independent charities, but strong together; unified in our goal to reach and help more people with sight loss.

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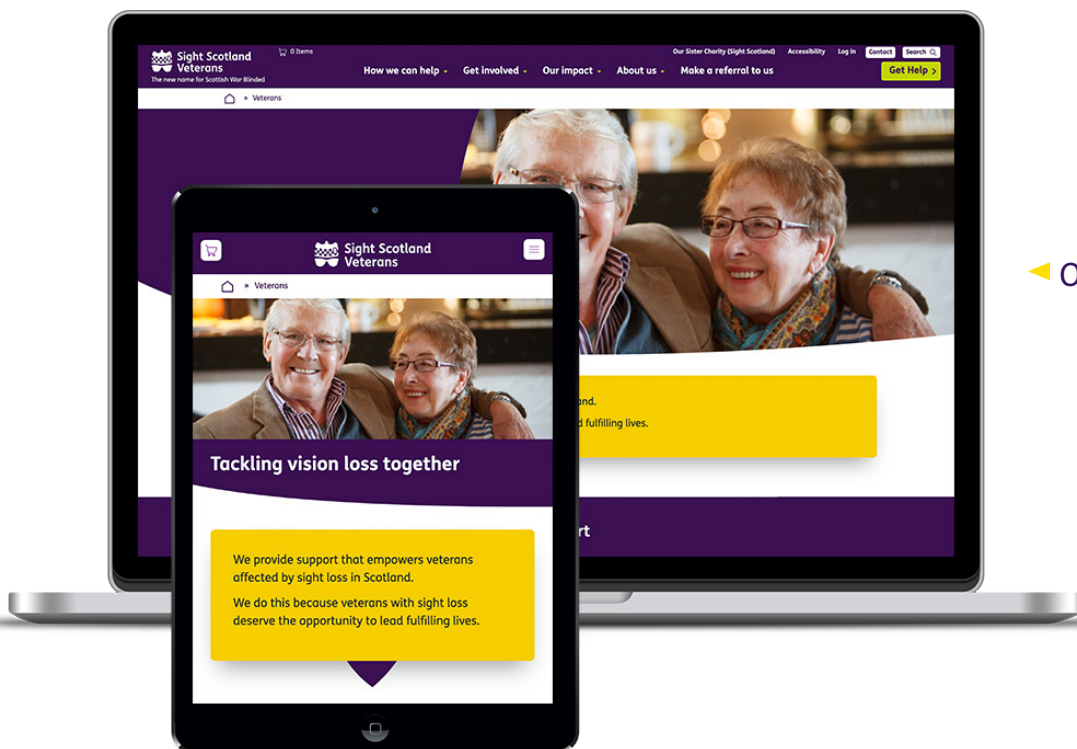
Our previous name had become a barrier limiting the numbers we support. Scottish War Blinded was established over 100 years ago for those blinded in the theatre of war.”



The brand launch

The launch of our new names and brand in October 2020 featured on STV News, as well as online and print coverage. The First Minister Nicola Sturgeon officially launched both Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans' new names in a video that was viewed over 10,000 times on social media in the week after the launch. A motion tabled in the Scottish parliament welcoming the launch was supported by 26 MSPs from across all parties. An extensive communications campaign was carried out to ensure key stakeholders were aware of the name changes.

In recognition of the rebranding project's success, our campaign was shortlisted for the Charity Times Awards' Change Project of the Year award.



◀ Our new website

Newsletters for veterans

Throughout 2020-21, our marketing team continued to write and produce quarterly editions of the Bugle newsletter for veterans.

We adapted the Bugle's content to the lockdown situation, ensuring information and advice was useful. Articles also shared veterans' experiences of the lockdown, with the aim of encouraging camaraderie.



Policy

Our ambition through our policy and public affairs activity is to achieve a more inclusive society for people with sight loss in Scotland.

Our goal is to work with the blind and partially sighted veterans we support to be the leading champions for positive change on the issues which affect them most.

After the 2020 lockdown began, we worked with our sister charity Sight Scotland and conducted the most extensive study of the impact of lockdown on blind and partially sighted people in Scotland. More than two thirds (70%) of the 400 blind and partially sighted people who took part said they felt their sight loss made the Covid lockdown a more difficult experience.

We communicated the findings of our research in the media and through engaging with parliament.

A new strategy for policy will be implemented in 2021-22 which will encompass wider media engagement and the strengthening of a research function, building on the work of the research reports we commissioned in recent years.



Key activities



Involved the First Minister and party leaders in Holyrood in our brand launch



Researched the impact of lockdown for visually impaired people



Highlighted in media and parliament the challenges of the pandemic for people with sight loss



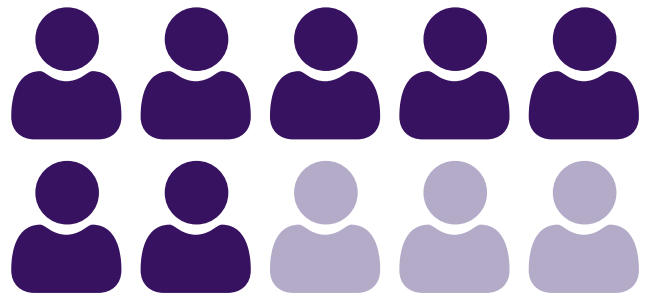
Researched the views of blind and partially sighted people on availability of support services



Collaborated in the development of guidance for health and social care staff on communicating with people with sensory impairment during the pandemic



In January, we launched our first-ever parliamentary manifesto: Time to Focus on sight loss, securing cross-party support



70%

of people felt their sight loss had made lockdown a more difficult experience.*

*Based on a survey of over 400 people living with visual impairment in Scotland.

Our Future Direction

Our aspiration is to support all veterans in Scotland who have sight loss, regardless of the cause.

We are currently supporting approximately 1200 veterans with significant sight loss. We estimate there are around 20,000 veterans with sight loss living in Scotland today. Due to population trends, this number is likely to decline to around 16,000 veterans by 2028.

We therefore have an urgent need to reach out to significantly more veterans while we can.

Over the past decade, our centres and our outreach service have provided support to veterans with significant sight loss. However, there are many more veterans who could benefit from support at an earlier stage of sight loss – and that earlier intervention could have significant benefits. We recognise that veterans’ family members could also benefit from support and advice. In early 2021, we sought feedback from veterans and colleagues to evaluate our current service provision and to explore new ways veterans could be supported. Incorporating this feedback, we developed our new strategy and goals.

Our strategy for 2021-2024

Our new strategy aims to reach significantly more veterans, and to reach them at an earlier stage of sight loss. Our strategy also involves providing advice and support to veterans’ families and friends.

We want to support veterans at each of these four stages of sight loss: pre-diagnosis; those with a recently diagnosed eye condition; those with deteriorating eyesight; and those with significant sight loss or who are registered as severely sight impaired.

We have set four new goals to help us achieve this strategy.

Our goals:

1. Enhance how we support veterans.
2. To remove barriers and become more accessible.
3. Understand what success looks like and ways to improve.
4. Use our resources wisely.

Through the carrying out of our strategy, we will innovate and improve our services so we can reach every veteran with sight loss who needs us.

“

Our new strategy aims to reach significantly more veterans, and to reach them at an earlier stage of sight loss.”



Financial Review

We received £1.6 million in income, mainly from investments and legacies. Income from legacies fell to £181,000 in comparison with £596,000 last year, likely due to solicitors' offices being closed and property sales curtailed in the pandemic.

For much of the last year, both our centres were closed and outreach services were suspended for face-to-face contact, although support was still delivered by telephone and we continued to distribute some equipment. The cost of running our operations was slightly reduced accordingly.

The result from our day-to-day operations was a deficit of £3.6 million. This is in line with our strategy to utilise our reserves for the benefit of the veterans that we support and developing innovative services for them.

Investments recovered during the year, regaining losses reported in the previous year. The gains in the value of the investments totalled £8.3 million.

We have drawn from our investments during the year to sustain both capital and revenue expenditure.

The overall result (net movement in funds) is an increase of £4.7 million.

The balance sheet shows tangible fixed assets of £14.7 million, mainly comprising of our two day centres, properties at Linburn and associated vehicles. We maintained a healthy cash and bank balance in order to meet our commitments and we continue to draw from our investments of £46 million in a managed fashion in order to maximise returns.

“

Investments recovered during the year, regaining losses reported in the previous year.”

Reserves

Sight Scotland Veterans will continue to deploy our reserves for the benefit of the people who use our services, whilst ensuring the level of reserves does not fall below our current minimum level.

Sight Scotland Veterans' financial plans are based on a five-year financial forecast, which determines the extent of the services we can fund in the coming years, mainly from the existing reserves. This leaves sufficient reserves to sustain the organisation's activities. The strategic review serves to keep this reserves policy under review.

Total funds are £61.8 million and are all unrestricted. From this, £14.7 million are tangible fixed assets and £46.2 million is in investments. Our free reserves are therefore £0.9 million but our investments of £46.2 million (2020, £41.7 million) can be realised as required and are regarded as free reserves in nature.

The accumulated reserves continue to provide all the protection the Trustees require against any financial difficulty in the event of adverse circumstances. It is the view of the Trustees that proper stewardship demands that a reserve be maintained to

guard against insolvency, but that the level of reserves currently held makes the likelihood of such an eventuality extremely remote in the short and medium term. The Trustees have agreed that the charity should hold a minimum reserve of 12 months running costs (currently £5.2 million) and this is currently well within our free reserves.



How we received our income

- **Legacies and donations**

We are hugely grateful to all those who have given a legacy gift or made a donation. Legacies and donations help ensure we can continue to give hope and support to all veterans with sight loss in Scotland, regardless of the cause of their sight loss.

- **Linburn and Hawkhead reimbursement**

When Covid measures caused the suspension of activities for veterans at the Linburn and Hawkhead centres, several staff members were temporarily redeployed to provide extra support in Sight Scotland services. Sight Scotland reimbursed us for these staff members' salary costs, which is why Linburn and Hawkhead are showing as having received income.

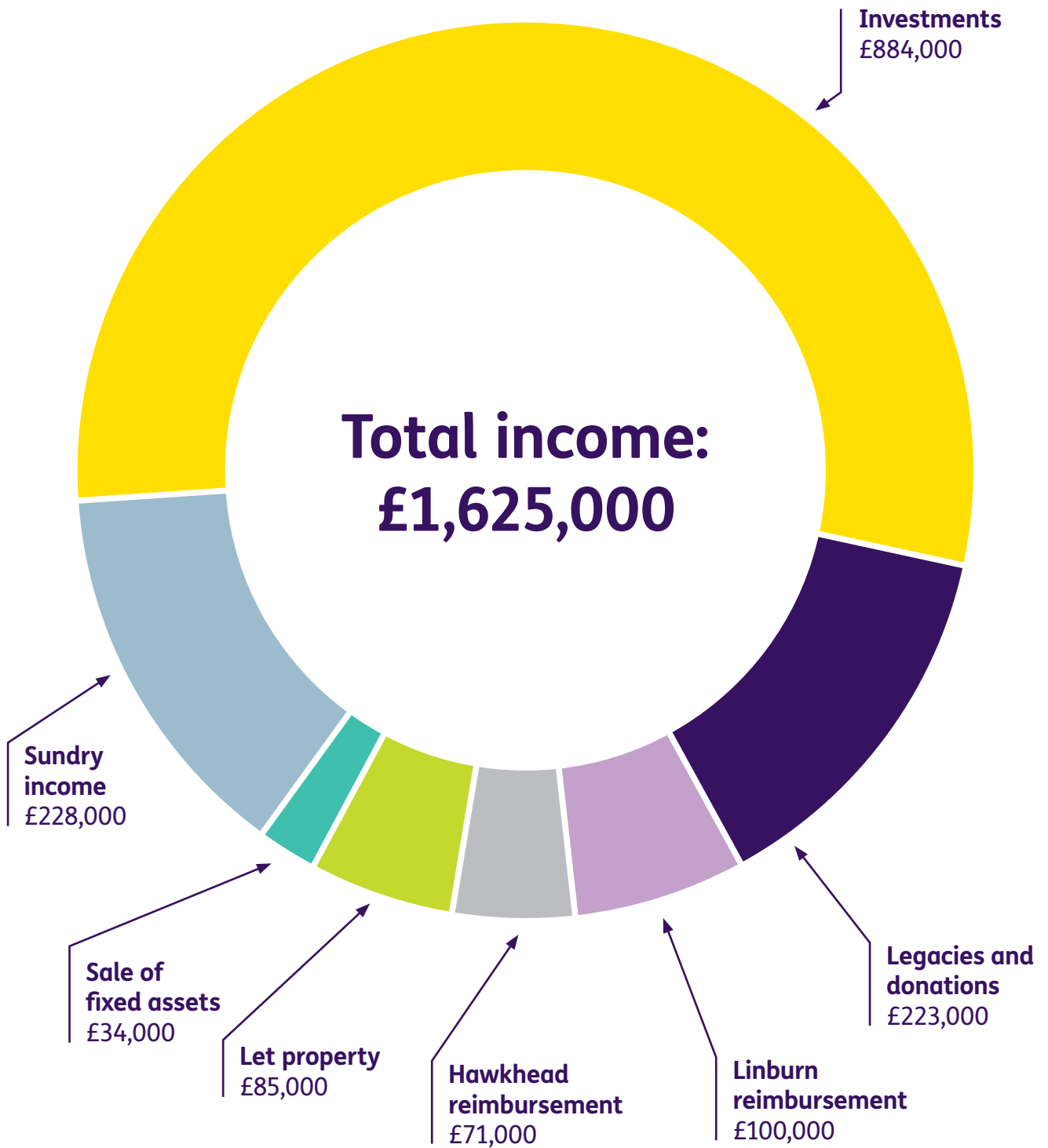
- **Sale of fixed assets**

- **Let property**

- **Sundry income**

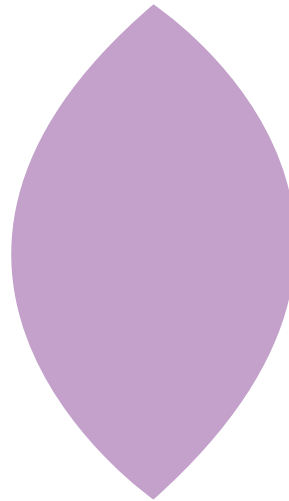
- **Investments**

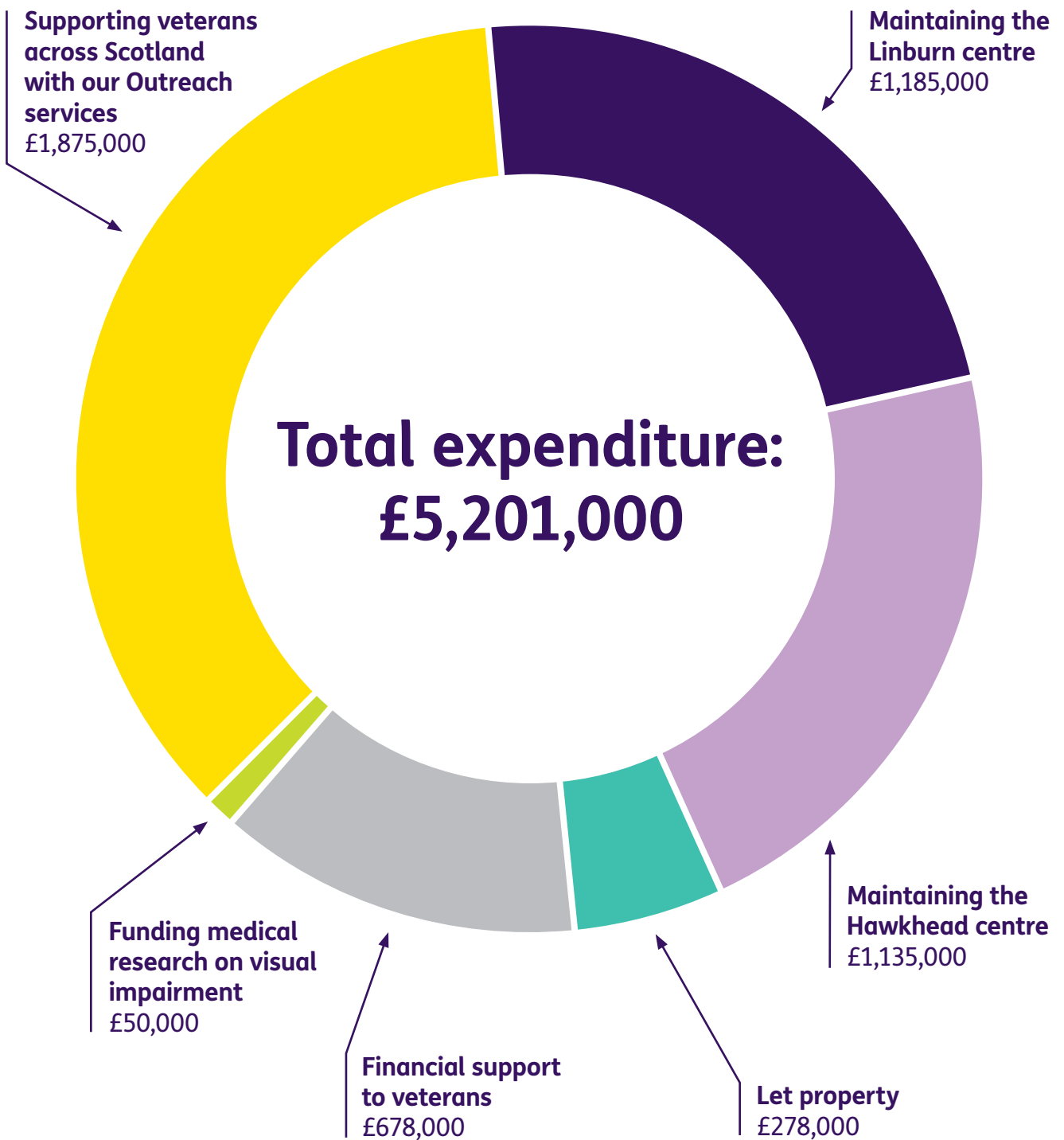




How we spent funds

- Supporting veterans across Scotland with our Outreach service
- Maintaining the Linburn Centre
- Maintaining the Hawkhead Centre
- Let property
- Financial support to veterans
- Funding medical research on visual impairment







Our Patron, President and Board

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

Patron

His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester, K.G., G.C.V.O.

President

His Grace The Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry, K.B.E.

Trustees (The Directors of Sight Scotland Veterans)

- Michael Craig (Chair)
- Jamie Cuthbertson (Resigned 2 July 2020)
- Professor Mike Donnelly
- Michelle McWilliams
- Michael Martin
- Graeme Bold
- Jay Hogarty
- Aidan McCorry
- Ian McGregor (Resigned 28 February 2021)
- Stephanie Philips
- Elizabeth Porterfield
- Professor Baljean Dhillon (Resigned 9 December 2020)

- Robert Mooney (Resigned 9 December 2020)
- Derek Howie (Resigned 30 June 2020)
- James Milhench (Resigned 8 October 2020)
- David McArthur (Appointed 23 April 2021)
- Catherine Topley (Appointed 23 April 2021)
- Dianne-Dominique Theakstone (Appointed 23 April 2021)

Chief Executive and Secretary

Mark O'Donnell

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Auditor – BDO LLP, Citypoint, 65 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5HD

Bankers – The Royal Bank of Scotland plc, 26 Home Street, Edinburgh EH3 9LZ

Solicitors - Thorntons, Citypoint, 3rd Floor, 65 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5HD

Investment Advisers - Barnett Waddingham LLP, 163 West George Street, Glasgow G2 2JJ



Sight Scotland Veterans

Tackling vision loss together

The new name for
Scottish War Blinded.

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Sight Scotland Veterans
is a Scottish Charitable
Incorporated Organisation,
Charity Number SC047192