

Local Vision

Manifesto for Scottish local authority elections 2022

R N I B

Scotland

See differently



RNIB Scotland

About us

RNIB Scotland is the country's leading sight loss charity. We campaign to raise awareness of issues faced by blind and partially sighted people, and work in partnership with local authorities as well as public, private and third sector bodies across Scotland to deliver projects and services.

What we do

- Help people newly diagnosed with sight loss to live the lives they want to lead.
- Help blind and partially sighted children and adults throughout Scotland to live confidently and independently.
- Support adults with sight loss to retain their jobs.
- Provide advice, support, training and aids and equipment.
- Lend and transcribe books and other materials in audio, braille and large print.
- Campaign to improve the life chances of people with sight loss (from nursery to school and into employment).
- Work to prevent avoidable sight loss.

The front cover shows four images of Scottish locations as seen by someone with different sight loss conditions. Clockwise from top left: the Tay Rail Bridge (age-related macular degeneration); the Callanish Standing Stones (diabetic retinopathy); George Square, Glasgow (glaucoma); and Glencoe (cataract).

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Introduction

Around 178,000 people are currently living with a significant degree of sight loss in Scotland, of whom around 4,300 are children and young people. Our ageing population and the increase in sight-threatening conditions such as diabetes means this number will, inevitably, grow.

Scotland's local authorities play a vital role in helping blind and partially sighted people to live as independently and inclusively as possible. People with a visual impairment are more likely to depend on services such as social care and public transport, and to look for support from their council, from engaging with their community to ensuring their children's educational materials are accessible.

To deliver services that can meet their needs, it's vitally important that local authorities appreciate the challenges that visually impaired people face.

We need health and social care services that prevent avoidable sight loss and help people come to terms with it when it isn't. There must be no diagnosis without support. We need information that's always available in alternative formats. Public transport that's accessible. Streets and thoroughfares that allow pedestrians to walk safely and without obstacles. Education that allows every child to reach their full potential. Employment that's informed by a better understanding of what people with sight loss are capable of.

Our manifesto sets out practical steps Scotland's local authorities can take to support those of their citizens who are blind and partially sighted. Each section sets out specific policy asks.

The recent uncertainty has given us all a sense of vulnerability, of what it's like to depend more on others. Let's make one positive legacy of this a resolve to make sure we re-emerge as a society in which no one is left at the margins.

This is the "new normal" Scotland should return to.



James Adams,
Director
RNIB Scotland



Kirin Saeed,
Convener,
RNIB Scotland
Advisory Group

Asks

Accessible streets

- Maintain a minimum 60mm kerb with intermittent dropped kerbs, controlled crossings across roads and, where applicable, cycle-lanes, and ensure bus-stop design allows safe access.
- Halt the building of “shared space” schemes where pedestrians, cycles and vehicle traffic occupy the same levelled area.
- Reserve pavements for pedestrians and use road space for new cycle-lanes.

Transport

- Work with local bus providers to ensure accessibility standards, such as audio and visual announcements, are met.
- Work with transport providers to ensure the infrastructure in and around transport hubs, too, is accessible for blind and partially sighted people.

Education

- Monitor and improve the ratio of QTVIs to blind and partially sighted children and young people to ensure optimum educational outcomes.
- Offer continuous professional development opportunities to teachers and teaching assistants, to improve their understanding of vision impairment and best practice education provision (including the UK Specialist VI curriculum framework), and to promote the benefits of training to become a QTVI.

- Provide teaching materials, exams and tests in accessible formats so that young people with vision impairments can access learning at the same time as their peers.

Employment

- Local authorities should lead by example to ensure that their recruitment processes are accessible.
- Reduce the employment gap by promoting the employment of disabled people within the local authority workforce in sustainable jobs that offer career progression and become a better and more inclusive employer for people with sight loss through aligning working practices to the RNIB Visibly Better Employer quality standard.
- Encourage local employability partners to complete RNIB’s e-Learning for employment professionals course.

Health and social care

- Emotional and mental wellbeing should be central to Strategic Commissioning planning for all local authorities and health boards, including a requirement to provide emotional and practical support services for blind and partially sighted people upon diagnosis.
- Provide accurate, consistent and up-to-date CVI data to the Scottish Government to project future demand on services and increase budget allocation.
- Re-evaluate the level of vision rehabilitation support available to blind and partially sighted people in each local authority area, and work

alongside local and national sight loss societies to increase service uptake.

- Request that all local authorities provide fully accessible digital communications, through apps and websites, to ensure that there are no visual barriers for people with sight loss.

Accessible information

- Provide fully accessible digital communications, through apps and websites, to ensure that there are no visual barriers for people with sight loss.
- Offer alternative ways of accessing services for those who cannot, or do not want to, use digital routes.
- Provide additional training, support and resources to overcome the barriers faced by those at risk of digital exclusion.

Sport and recreation

- Review the accessibility of council run sport and leisure facilities with input from blind and partially sighted people.
- Provide training – including sighted guiding training – to staff in these facilities to improve understanding of the needs of blind and partially sighted people.
- Advertise the support offered at sports and recreation venues and details of how someone can access that support.

Youth participation

- Provide and promote accessible youth participation for blind and partially sighted young people.
- Ensure all staff providing youth opportunities receive sight loss awareness training.



Accessible streets

“Constant changes to our street layouts pose challenges to people with sight loss.” (Sandra, Fife).

Scotland’s streetscapes are being transformed with new claims on public space.

We support promoting healthy activity such as walking and cycling and the move to zero-emission transport. However, our town centres must be accessible to all.

Our streets and pavements can be an obstacle course for people with sight loss. Advertising boards, street café furniture, dustbins, cars parked on pavements are just some of the hazards.

Bus-stop designs requiring passengers to either cross a cycle-track to access a bus-stop, or to stand on a cycle-track to get on or off a bus, make public transport less accessible.

Infrastructure developments without physical delineation and controlled crossings also risk creating “no-go areas” for people with sight loss and other disabilities.

Asks:

- Maintain a minimum 60mm kerb with intermittent dropped kerbs, controlled crossings across roads and, where applicable, cycle-lanes, and ensure bus-stop design allows safe access.
- Halt the building of “shared space” schemes where pedestrians, cycles and vehicle traffic occupy the same levelled area.
- Reserve pavements for pedestrians and use road space for new cycle-lanes.



Transport

“All I want is a transport system that works for me. To be able to know the stops on my bus journey without relying on strangers, travel with ease on trains without worrying about opening the wrong door. To travel with independence and equality. So, I can go about my daily life the same as anyone else.” (Kirin, Edinburgh).

Accessible travel is vital in allowing individuals with sight loss to maintain independence and mobility.

But Transport Scotland’s recent finding from the Scottish Household Survey (2021) showed that disabled people are generally less positive about their experiences on buses and trains than non-disabled adults. This is particularly significant for blind and partially sighted people, as they rely heavily on public transport.

In order for transport to be truly accessible, the needs of blind and partially sighted people should be considered at all stages of journey planning, timetabling and travel.



Asks:

- Work with local bus providers to ensure accessibility standards, such as audio and visual announcements, are met.
- Work with transport providers to ensure the infrastructure in and around transport hubs, too, is accessible for blind and partially sighted people.

Education

The attainment gap between children and young people with a vision impairment and their peers – without additional support needs – remains unacceptably wide. The 2017/18 pupil census showed that:

- One in five pupils with vision impairment in Scotland left school without a qualification at National 4 or higher, compared to one in 50 with no additional support needs.
- 64 per cent of those with a vision impairment gained at least one National 5 qualification, compared to 92 per cent of pupils with no additional support needs.
- Only 40 per cent of students with vision impairment left school with at least one higher, compared to nearly half the percentage of pupils with no additional needs (71 per cent).

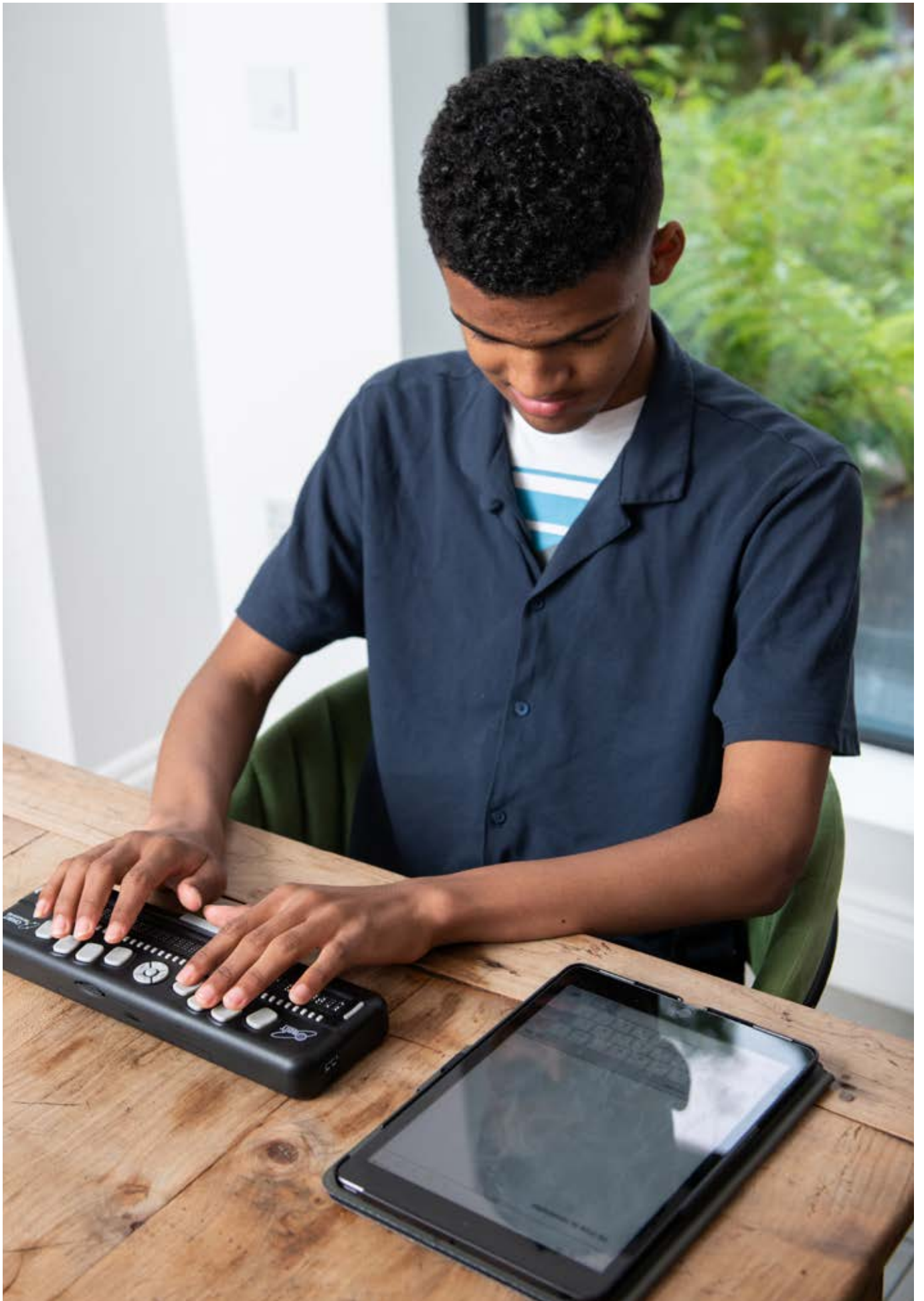
Qualified Teachers of Children and Young People with a Vision Impairment (QTVIs) offer specialist support to ensure that pupils with vision impairment can access both the national Scottish curriculum and develop essential life skills.



These skills and resources are being formally identified in a UK Specialist Visual Impairment Curriculum framework, developed as part of a sector-wide initiative led by RNIB.

"QTVIs provide vital support to blind and partially sighted children and young people. Every local authority must ensure that they have enough QTVIs to enable every student with sight loss to get the most out of their education, and to get the grades they want and deserve to do what they want in life."
(Eilidh, Aberdeen).

- Monitor and improve the ratio of QTVIs to blind and partially sighted children and young people to ensure optimum educational outcomes.
- Offer continuous professional development opportunities to teachers and teaching assistants, to improve their understanding of vision impairment and best practice education provision (including the UK Specialist VI curriculum framework), and to promote the benefits of training to become a QTVI.
- Provide teaching materials, exams and tests in accessible formats so that young people with vision impairments can access learning at the same time as their peers.



Employment

“It’s about finding the right person for the right job and dealing with their needs. Deal with sight loss as an after fact. If they are the right person for the job, you’ll find a way around the disability.”
(Mark, Dundee).

Only 27 per cent of people with sight loss are in work, compared to 74.9 per cent of the general population – an employment gap that places people with sight loss among those furthest away from the job market.

People with sight loss face many barriers looking for work. Assumptions and low expectation levels from employers, or concerns about the cost of adjustments, are common misconceptions. Job adverts and application processes can also be inaccessible.

Employers need to know that government funding, such as Access to Work, can meet additional costs for employees, and that organisations (including RNIB) can support them.



Asks:

- Local authorities should lead by example to ensure that their recruitment processes are accessible.
- Reduce the disability employment gap by promoting the employment of disabled people within the local authority workforce in sustainable jobs that offer career progression and become a better and more inclusive employer for people with sight loss through aligning working practices to the RNIB Visibly Better Employer quality standard.
- Encourage local employability partners to complete RNIB's e-Learning for employment professionals course.

Health and social care

Demand for eye health and social care services continues to increase, with more people now waiting longer to be seen.

The Scottish Government proposes to introduce a new National Care Service to define the strategic direction and quality standards for community health and social care in Scotland. Local authorities must review projected increases in demand and work alongside local and national sight loss societies to provide the support necessary to sustain service provision.

Eye Clinic Liaison Officers (ECLOs)

"The people and the services provided are of the highest order. Keep up the good work!" (Hymie, Dunfermline).

Sight loss can have devastating consequences for individuals. Our Eye Clinic Liaison Officer (ECLO) service offers people emotional reassurance and enables them to access critical early intervention support – face to face and remotely – to help them to remain independent, manage their sight condition and to access both local and national support services.

Our RNIB Patient Experience Research, "Eye Clinic Liaison Officer Evaluation Report" (2021), suggests that many patients leave the eye clinic with little understanding of their eye condition, how best to maintain any functional vision they may have, and how best to live their lives with sight loss. This can have a detrimental impact on their health and wellbeing, leading to a loss of independence.

After accessing our ECLO service, 93 per cent of patients reported that they were either "well informed" or "very well informed" about support available to them enabling them to seek additional information and services.

Ask:

- Emotional and mental wellbeing should be central to Strategic Commissioning planning for all local authorities and health boards, including a requirement to provide emotional and practical support services for blind and partially sighted people upon diagnosis.



Registration

Currently, all local authorities are required to maintain a register of people who are sight impaired and severely sight impaired in their area.

However, following the introduction of the Certificate for Visual Impairment (CVI) (Scotland) Form in 2018 – in which local authorities are requested to submit collated current and new registration data to the Scottish Government – this process has resulted in considerable variation in data collection across Scotland.

Accurate and consistent CVI data would provide local service providers with the information they need to project future demand – without this, preventative services cannot grow and adapt to pressures such as waiting lists, leading to a lack of support for people with sight loss.

Asks:

- Provide accurate, consistent, and up to date CVI data to the Scottish Government to project future demand on services and increase budget allocation.



Vision rehabilitation

“Large numbers of vulnerable adults continue to be at risk because they are not having their basic care needs met. In many cases it will result in an admission to hospital.” (Rehabilitation Officer, Edinburgh).

Vision rehabilitation services are crucial to ensuring blind and partially sighted people can remain as independent as possible. However, these services are under significant pressures due to demands on health and social care, and a growing waiting list due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are currently approximately 2,100 Occupational Therapists and less than 40 active Rehabilitation Officers working in local authorities across Scotland.

Rehabilitation support should be available to anyone at any point in their sight loss journey – we want commissioners, or those making decisions about providing vision rehabilitation services, to ensure that the right resources are in place to meet the needs of blind and partially sighted people.

Asks:

- Re-evaluate the level of vision rehabilitation support available to blind and partially sighted people in each local authority area, and work alongside local and national sight loss societies to increase service uptake.



Accessible information

"I have always had difficulty getting material in accessible documents. When I started getting them via email, they were in PDF format which isn't good for screen readers." (Amanda, Aberdeen).

People rely on good communication to ensure that they understand their health information and needs. For most people this is achieved through printed information, but for a person with sight loss this is often inaccessible.

People with sight loss should be informed about the accessible options available to them from the very beginning of their health and social care journey, giving them the opportunity to self-manage and control their own needs.

However, levels of digital uptake can be significantly lower for people with disabilities. Accessing online information (for example filling in forms online) can be very time consuming or completely inaccessible. Visual barriers, such as inconsistent font-sizes, prevent blind and partially sighted people from accessing information with ease.

As a person with sight loss shared with us: "Websites are very complex to navigate in general so when you have sight loss of any degree it becomes harder. It would be good to have a button to press so that the website becomes less busy and shows simple text."

The availability and cost of assistive technology such as screen readers, as well as geographical barriers to reliable broadband and availability of public service internet access add to the risks of digital exclusion.

The Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations 2018 say that all public sector websites and mobile apps must meet accessibility standards and publish an accessibility statement.

Asks:

- Provide fully accessible digital communications, through apps and websites, to ensure that there are no visual barriers for people with sight loss.
- Offer alternative ways of accessing services for those who cannot, or do not want to, use digital routes.
- Provide additional training, support and resources to overcome the barriers faced by those at risk of digital exclusion.





Sport and recreation

Sports and recreation is key to improving both physical and mental health. But too often facilities are inaccessible and the needs of blind and partially sighted customers are not catered for.

It is the local authority's responsibility to ensure that its facilities and venues are accessible to the public - from the layout of the building, the colour-contrast of signage and floor markings, to equipment such as touch-screen devices - and that staff are trained to offer assistance to those members of the public who need it.

The local authority should also make it clear that guide dogs are allowed in venues, as well as an additional person to act as a guide.

Asks:

- Review the accessibility of council run sport and leisure facilities with input from blind and partially sighted people.
- Provide training - including sighted guiding training - to staff in these facilities to improve understanding of what needs blind and partially sighted people may have.
- Advertise the support offered at sports and recreation venues and details of how someone can access that support.



Youth participation

“The biggest drawback in being a part of a club is having to constantly ask for something to be adjusted so it’s accessible, always putting a hand up to ask if you can go closer to see, always asking to repeat a visual demonstration as you didn’t process it fully the first time.”
(Kerry, South Lanarkshire).

The Scottish Youth Parliament’s publication, “Youth Work and Me” (2019), found that youth work has the power to change young people’s lives by providing opportunities to develop skills and friendships while building confidence, self-esteem, and independence.

But too often blind partially sighted young people face challenges accessing extracurricular activities. The Scottish Government’s 2018 report into young people’s participation in and out of school activities identified a range of barriers including: activities that do not accommodate health conditions; lack of free time outside of school and advertisements that do not feel welcoming to some people.

This can be particularly difficult for blind and partially sighted young people.

Asks:

- Provide and promote accessible youth participation for blind and partially sighted young people.
- Ensure all staff providing youth opportunities receive sight loss awareness training.



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