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### Glasgow City Council: Spaces for People questionnaire: Comment from the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) Scotland

#### Introduction

The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) Scotland supports children and adults with sight loss and helps them to live full and independent lives, campaigning for their rights.

#### Glasgow City Council: Spaces for People questionnaire

Glasgow City Council (GCC) has introduced a variety of changes on roads and footways across the city through the Scottish Government’s Spaces for People Programme, which aims to supports public health by providing additional space for physical distancing while undertaking essential journeys or exercise during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The purpose of the survey was to allow individuals/stakeholders to inform the Council about how you [individuals/stakeholders] have used these spaces, provide feedback on them and tell GCC if they would like any other measures introduced to become permanent.

The specific and localised nature of many of the questions make it inappropriate for a national sight loss organisation to respond using the online survey.

Ergo, RNIB Scotland is not submitting an online response to this consultation.

#### RNIB Scotland and Spaces for People

In May 2020, we circulated our policy position in response to the new Spaces for People initiative, including a Coronavirus Courtesy Code which we believe would help ensure that blind and partially sighted people can get out and about whilst maintaining a safe distance from others. This code - which can be found on our website at <https://www.rnib.org.uk/scotland/campaigning-rnib-scotland/coronavirus-courtesy-code> - was sent to all Scottish local authorities, including Glasgow City Council.

We also indicated that, beyond circulating the Code, RNIB Scotland does not have the capacity to respond to the profusion of local authority consultations on altering street layouts that have since been forthcoming. These are highly local and detailed, with a reliance on photos and images that are inaccessible to blind and partially sighted people. The time for reply is also usually very limited.

We believe that our Coronavirus Courtesy Code reflects the broad recommendations that we believe should be a minimum standard in ensuring public spaces are accessible for people with sight loss and other disabilities.

Although not responding to individual area schemes, RNIB Scotland is collaborating with other organisations, including Guide Dogs Scotland, to raise our general concerns about the implementation of these.

We remain ready to be consulted on the strategic elements of future policy.

#### Summary of concerns relating to Spaces for People

We recognised the emergency nature of the coronavirus pandemic and so initially welcomed the Spaces for People initiative to enable people to physically distance whilst moving around the streets.

Across Scotland the programme utilised almost £39 million funding.

The Scottish Government Programme for Government (2020) stated that local authorities “now have the opportunity to review the temporary infrastructure projects – turning many of them into permanent schemes.”

We are concerned by the prospect of schemes introduced at speed and with minimal consultation becoming permanent.

The pandemic has already had significant consequences for blind and partially sighted people; new street layout arrangements may effectively extend lockdown for blind and partially sighted people.

Feedback from our service users confirms that they are finding the new arrangements challenging. A recent RNIB survey found that 66 per cent of people surveyed said that they feel less independent than they did before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Disability Equality Scotland published a [survey](https://yoursayondisability.scot/weekly-poll-covid-19-spaces-for-people-week-beginning-14-august-2020/) in September 2020 on Spaces for People. Most people who responded (71% - N=333) said that the changes had made it more difficult for them to ger around.

The report concluded:

“In some areas, pavement extensions had created a hazard by extending into roads without the inclusion of dropped kerbs. Poorly designed pop-up cycle lanes which incorporate floating bus stops do not take account of disabled people getting on and off buses. A failure by local authorities to consult with disabled people and Access Panels prior to introducing the Spaces for People changes is a significant misstep, which must be rectified through proactive and meaningful engagement going forward.”

As lockdowns/tier restrictions ease visually impaired people will increasingly have to familiarise themselves with new layouts.

RNIB Scotland has identified the following broad areas of concern about the built environment:

* Local consultation documents highly dependent on photographs, maps and diagrams that are inaccessible to the visually impaired (and non-compliant with web accessibility legislation);
* Lack of public (and accessible) information explaining local schemes - blind and partially sighted people are experiencing difficulties in accessing accurate and up to date information about changes;
* Concerns over the usability of traffic lights including silencing of audio sounds;
* Pavement clutter;
* Concern over pavement café sprawl;
* Increased numbers of proposed floating bus stops and bus boarders alongside temporary cycleways;
* Concerns over the implications of closing off vehicle access within town centres for loading and pedestrian access along with removal of parking bays including blue badge spaces;
* Potential E-scooter rental trials [our concerns directly raised with GCC, jointly with Guide Dogs Scotland];
* General failure to prioritise pedestrian movements, let alone pedestrians with disabilities including sight loss.

#### Scottish sight loss sector and independent review of Spaces for People schemes

RNIB Scotland is of the view that temporary changes should not be made permanent without an independent evaluation of the impact of the Spaces for People Schemes.

In February 2021, thirteen Scottish sight loss charities - the Dundee Blind & Partially Sighted Society, the Forth Valley Sensory Centre, Glaucoma UK, Guide Dogs Scotland, Macular Society, North East Sensory Services (NESS), Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) Scotland, seescape, Sight Action, Sight Scotland, Sight Scotland Veterans, The Trustees of the Scottish Council on Visual Impairment (SCOVI), Visibility Scotland, and Vision PK - wrote to the Cabinet Secretary Michael Matheson.

The joint letter expressed concern that schemes introduced at speed and with minimal consultation would become permanent and sought assurance that there shall be an independent third-party national review of Spaces for People before any changes are made permanent.

In the absence of either acknowledgment or reply, the sector wrote again post-Scottish Parliament election, receiving an acknowledgement on 8 June 2021.

We reiterate that RNIB Scotland is looking for an assurance from the Scottish Government that there shall be an independent third-party national review of Spaces for People.

This should take place before any decisions on permanent alterations are made. Otherwise, the transition out of emergency measures could leave blind and partially sighted people psychologically and physically excluded from our streets.

#### For further information please contact:

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