

RNIB tell Local Authorities what they need to do for blind people



Public spending cuts could push blind and partially sighted people back to the margins of society, the country's leading sight loss charity is warning.

In its manifesto for the Scottish local authority elections, launched this month, the Royal National Institute of Blind People Scotland says councils must safeguard the right of those with disabilities to lead independent lives with dignity.

"Scotland's local authorities are the most important day-to-day agent in the lives of many blind and partially sighted people, but cuts to spending could decimate the support they offer over the next few years," said director John Legg.

"Services such as talking books and accessible education materials are vital if adults and young people with sight loss are to take part in an inclusive society. If these are cut – at the same time as welfare benefits are tightened nationally – it will mean a grim future for some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

"There are 188,000 people in Scotland who are blind or partially sighted and many are living on the margins of poverty. With sight loss projected to double over the next two decades, this will have major implications for public services. Inevitably, local authorities will be the first port of call for many seeking help."

The charity argues that the proposals in its manifesto

are cost-effective and recognise the severe pressure council finances will be subjected to over the next few years.

Already, points out Legg, some councils in England have withdrawn funding from talking books and restricted concessionary travel. "Yet the RNIB talking books library has been called 'a lifeline' by subscribers," said Legg." With 19,000 titles, this is the largest in Europe to be run on a not for profit basis with a subsidised lending service for subscribers.

"Without local authority support, only a tiny fraction of the books that sighted readers take for granted would be available. Many councils currently pay the modest subscription fees for blind or partially sighted people in their area, many of whom are living on low incomes. Any savings by cutting this back would be a negligible – but the loss to those with sight loss, often elderly and living alone, would be immense."

The RNIB Scotland manifesto is also calling on councils to ensure blind and partially sighted school pupils have access to the same educational materials, at the same time, as their peers. There are currently around 2,100 blind and partially sighted children in Scottish schools.

The manifesto also calls on local authorities to reserve at least one procurement contract to a social business which employs workers with disabilities. It wants more emotional support for people newly diagnosed with sight loss, and for people with a learning disability to get their sight tested as part of their care assessment. "This latter group has a high probability of experiencing sight loss – estimated to be as much as 80 per cent – but often has difficulty communicating it," explained Legg.

The elections for Scotland's 32 local authorities take place on 3 May 2012. We have a full list of all candidates in

Edinburgh with their individual profiles [on our Local Elections section.](#)

[Scotland Manifesto 2012](#)