

Health Policy Officers Network – Key Note Briefing 24 June 2020

Background to the network

The HPON is a peer group of health policy officers which is jointly administered by Voluntary Health Scotland (VHS) and RNIB Scotland. The network is attended by a range of small to medium sized third sector organisations who meet to discuss a range of policy issues, current consultations and share intelligence. The group does not offer a policy influencing function. However, in previous years smaller groups have come together to deliver specific pieces of work under the banner of the network.

The normal format of the meetings includes a speaker and question and answer session followed by a general discussion and opportunity to share intelligence and raise future topics. In previous meetings we have invited speakers to speak about a range of topics including the Lobbying Register, Tony Rednall from the Scottish Government spoke about Diet and Obesity, Robert Skey discussed the progress of Public Health Reform and before that Phil Raines the lead on the Health and Social Care Delivery Plan spoke about the plan's implications for the third sector and Mark Simpson to discussed the digital strategy.

The second meeting of 2020 was held via zoom on 24 June. Members at the meeting heard from Claire Menzies, Clerk to the Equalities and Human Rights Committee and her colleague, Leoncha Leavy, Community Outreach Team about their consultation, "[The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on equalities and human rights](#)".

Attendees:

Deirdre Henderson – Inclusion Scotland
Jonathan Sher – Queens Nursing Institute
Lilah Davidson – British Red Cross
Mairi Gordon – Samaritans Scotland
Elizabeth Hurst – SHAAP
Stephanie Mander – Nourish Scotland
Rosie-Tyler Greig – Healthcare Improvement Scotland
Adam Wilson – Families Outside
Kiren Zubairi – VHS – HPON Convener
Laura Jones – RNIB Scotland – HPON Convener

Meeting notes

The Equalities and Human Rights Committee consultation exploring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on equalities and human rights, is a long-term consultation closing in January 2021 to reflect the ever-evolving situation with COVID-19. There

have been 77 submissions to the inquiry so far - majority of these submissions have come from individuals speaking from their own personal experiences of lockdown. There have been three oral evidence sessions and most of the findings have been very bleak.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and increased health inequalities, as well as other issues such as, income uncertainty, food insecurity, social exclusion, domestic abuse and violence as well as issues around housing. There have also been issues with a lack of clear and inclusive communication and suitable PPE.

The Equalities and Human Rights Committee are looking to share as much information as possible with the Scottish Parliament, with abstracts already submitted to the SP and Scottish Government to highlight the top-level issues that are arising.

The Community Outreach Team are a bridge between the Committee and the community. The team have been reaching out to third sector organisations for direct examples, particularly from individuals who do not have access to the internet and cannot respond via the online portal Citizen Space. The Community Outreach Team at the Scottish Parliament are also available to speak to organisations directly and hold online sessions for feedback. Contact: Leoncha Levy for more information - Leoncha.Leavy@parliament.scot

Discussion

- **RNIB** – Laura thanked Claire and Leoncha, commenting that she was pleased that inclusive communication was mentioned, adding that this ever-changing situation has led to the accessibility of information not being prioritised. This leads to people with sight loss not receiving timely information that could lead to unsafe situations and further enhances the inequality of their rights under the Patient Rights Act.
- **Families Outside** - raised a question about funding and sustainability of the third sector. How is the Committee working with others to highlight human rights?
 - Claire indicated that responses from organisations had indicated issues with funding and sustainability of funding. The COVID-19 Budget call for views would consider sustainable funding for the third sector. The Social Renewal Policy Advisory Group will also be exploring Economic Recovery and what this means for the third sector. She also highlighted that all Committees should have a human rights focus.
- **Inclusion Scotland** – commented that they hoped the results of the inquiry would mean that accessible information is released at the same time as standard print information. She added that the people who need accessible information are more than likely to be the most vulnerable during the pandemic. They also mentioned that a health and social care "medical model" has crept back in, rather than a human rights based approach and asked when can a people-focused approach be reinstated?

- Claire responded by saying that the Scottish Government will release a statement shortly about them recognising that accessible information should have been released at the same time as standard information (on the Committee website).
- Alcohol Focus Scotland - Raised the issue about the third sector being heavily relied upon to pick up support as and when needed without proper recognition. That this needed to change and third sector need to be seen as equal partners. They also highlighted the issues around alcohol and drugs recovery during the lockdown and a lack of access to services and support is exacerbating the situation for vulnerable people. They also commented on the level of stigma surrounding people's level of alcohol consumption and how this can be a further barrier to access support.
- **Nourish Scotland** – asked about parliamentary recess dates and committee engagement.
 - It was clarified that the Parliament would go into recess on the 26th of June and Committees will come back on the 11th of August. The Chamber would be meeting on 6 dates over the next 5 weeks.

Route map

There was a discussion on the Scottish Government's [Route Map out of Lockdown](#).

- **Families Outside** - mentioned that there is not a lot of information on the route map and very little detail pertaining to particular circumstances such as those in prisons.
- **Inclusion Scotland** - added that there is very vague guidance, with social care not even mentioned in the route map, considering that a huge amount of direct care has been taken away. They mentioned the Inclusion Scotland survey.

Future focus

- **Inclusion Scotland** - highlighted that the Scottish Government looking into the health and wellbeing economy and asked if VHS/HPON could look into this.
- A discussion around Manifesto development was also suggested as a topic that was important for the group.

If you need any further information please do not hesitate to contact:

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