

## **Deafblind Scotland vision – “A society in which deafblind people have the permanent support and recognition necessary to be equal citizens”**



### **Participation Policy**

Deafblind people can be enabled to be full and active members of committees; to be involved in meaningful consultation; to serve their communities; to represent themselves if the below guidelines are followed:

#### **Before**

It should be recognised that special arrangements may need to be made to publicise the meeting to deafblind people.

Find out the individual needs of those attending a meeting

Ask deafblind people and their support organisations how to make any meeting accessible to an individual deafblind person.

Appropriate communication support should be booked well in advance eg BSL interpreters, guide/communicators, speech to text operators. Check required working arrangements, eg. working time allowed.

Agenda material should be sent out, well in advance, in the appropriate format eg. Braille, large print, moon, audio tape, BSL video.

One to one communication support can be offered to the deafblind person to go over any written materials prior to the meeting.

BSL Interpreters, G/Cs etc. should have a print copy of any materials before the meeting.

Ensure the loop system is working by checking it with a hearing aid user before the start of the meeting

In setting up the room ensure there is:

- Good lighting
- Flexible (mobile seating)
- No loose or trailing wires
- Clear passageways

#### **During**

The Chairperson and speakers should be made aware of good practice for a meeting involving deafblind people.

Have a roll call at the start of any meeting to allow deafblind people to know who is present and where they are seated. The Chair should make clear in which order (clockwise or anti-clockwise) people are introducing themselves. The preferred

method of communication the person uses should also be stated eg BSL interpreter user. Name cards assist interpreters in unfamiliar situations.

All members present should be made aware of the different communication methods being used eg:

- Deafblind Manual
- British Sign Language
- Hearing Aids
- Loop Systems
- Lip Reading
- Speech to text
- Hands-on Signing

Allow 5 minute interpreting breaks approximately every 35 – 40 minutes. This should be increased to every 20-30 minutes where tactile BSL and deafblind manual are being used. Reassure interpreters that they may request breaks if for any reason they cannot provide the required quality of service to the deafblind person.

Ask each person present to speak:

- Slowly
- Clearly
- Where possible in short sentences
- Avoid acronyms, use only commonly known abbreviations, e.g., RNIB
- Avoid jargon
- Spell out unusual names, terms, or places etc.

Ask people to speak in turn as designated by the Chair and allow them to finish. People should raise their hand when they wish to contribute and give their name when the Chair indicates.

**DO NOT INTERRUPT** otherwise it is difficult for the interpreter and deafblind people to follow.

Clearly state when about to move onto the next agenda time. Manual communication takes longer and there is always a time lag, normally between 5 and 20 seconds. Ensure the deafblind person is asked if they want to comment on an issue, they are not able to interrupt or put their hand up in time, because of the time lag.

Only one person can be interpreted at a time, if two or more people speak at one time the deafblind person is disadvantaged.

**DO NOT** continue discussions during interpreter breaks.

Before a vote is taken, make sure that deafblind people are up to date, and understand the implications of a yes or no vote. Often votes are proposed and seconded before the deafblind person is aware of what is going on.

Be mindful of language other than speech that sighted-hearing people use to communicate. Eye contact, head shaking, finger tapping, etc., all give indications of assent/dissent and can influence judgement and input. Endeavour to keep these to a minimum and NEVER use them to detract from a deafblind person's input. A good guide/communicator should in any event make a deafblind person aware if such communication is taking place.

NEVER instruct an interpreter to stop interpreting to exclude a deafblind person from proceedings. Likewise, avoid any asides not intended for interpretation.

Ensure that guide dogs/hearing dogs can be accommodated and that someone is on hand to take them out (if necessary) during interpreter breaks.

### **After**

Notes from the meeting should be made available to deafblind people immediately after the meeting (from note takers notes). Minutes of meeting should be distributed in the appropriate format.