

Disability Equality Scotland

Meeting of the Board of Directors

Wednesday 28 October 2020 10.00am

Zoom Virtual Meeting



Working towards Equality, Inclusion and Participation for Disabled People in Scotland

In Attendance:	Linda Bamford (LB)	Convener
	Scott Stewart (SS)	Director
	Susan Fulton (SF)	Director
	Janis McDonald (JMc)	Director
	Carolyn Griffiths (CG)	Director
	Kenny Milne (KM)	Director
	Dorothy McKinney (DMcK)	Director
	Maureen Morrison (MM)	Director
	Lauren Asher (LM)	Director
	Rhianne Forrest (RF)	Director
	Morven Brooks (MB)	Chief Executive Officer
	Emma Scott (ES)	Operations Manager
	Ian Buchanan (IB)	Access, Training & Engagement Manager
	Claire Jagger (CJ)	Easy Read Worker
Apologies:	Colin Millar (CM)	Director

Item 1 Welcome and Apologies

LB welcomed everyone to the meeting. LB confirmed that the board meeting was being recorded today to assist with minute taking and asked for any objections to this. No objections were received from the board.

LB welcomed our new young directors, Rhianne Forrest and Lauren Asher. LB explained that MB had sent RF and LA a briefing pack to provide information on the company, and also to congratulate them. LB also thanked DMK, SS and MB for their time in recruitment and selection.

LB explained that for today, RF and LA would be joining for the first session of the board to observe primarily, but also welcomed contribution from both. LB proceeded to introduce all board and staff team members present.

LB asked that during discussions if anyone wanted to contribute, they would raise their hands and LB would confirm who wished to contribute and in what order. LB asked everyone to remain on mute unless speaking to limit background noise. During all decision-making, LB will ask who is not in agreement to raise their hand before progressing, and when closing an agenda section, she will ask if there were any further comments before moving on.

It was confirmed that there was one board briefing paper, to be taken as a closed session of the board and that a separate Zoom link had been provided for this.

LB stated the agenda timings for the day including the comfort breaks and close of meeting.

The second closed session, open to board members only, would start at 12:00pm and run until 13:15pm. LB stated everyone should have received their board papers three weeks in advance and asked if everyone felt they had enough information to make decisions and contribute to the board meeting.

LB progressed to agenda item 2.

Item 2 Agreement of Minutes from last meeting

LB stated that the minutes were emailed for comment and checking shortly after the July 2020 board meeting and asked for confirmation from the board on accuracy and content. No one raised any concerns. LB confirmed that all actions or matters arising from the minutes had been picked up and asked for agreement of minutes from Directors present at the previous meeting.

Proposed by: DMcK

Seconded by: KM

Item 3 Outstanding actions 29 July 2020 Board Meeting

LB stated that there were a couple of outstanding actions from the July 2020 minutes, and asked MB to give a brief overview of the two noted as 'further action required'.

Action point 3: IB to prepare briefing paper to outline potential partnership working with Visit Scotland.

MB stated that IB is currently scoping out with Access Panels regarding previous relationships with Visit Scotland, and we will prepare a briefing paper for the January board meeting on how we could work with Visit Scotland in future.

Action point 5: MB to review ELAS contract in January.

MB stated this is outstanding but proposed to close this one off until January 2021. Our contract with ELAS, our HR provider, comes up for renewal in April 2021. This action point is a reminder to review this in January should we have to cancel it and look elsewhere.

SF asked that for the benefit of RF and LA the board avoid using acronyms such as HR and ELAS, perhaps providing an explanation. MB agreed, then explained that ELAS is not an acronym and just the name of the organisation that provides our human resources advice and support.

DMcK asked for clarification that in the case of moving from ELAS to somewhere else, would we need to let them know in January. MB confirmed that was the case. DMcK then suggested that we would then need to be looking for alternative providers now to prepare. MB agreed and explained that this process is underway and ongoing.

LB asked the board whether they are happy to receive the Visit Scotland briefing paper from IB at the January 2021 board meeting as per action point 3. The board affirmed.

LB proposed closing action 4, stating that it is an operational issue that MB and ES will keep on top of. The board affirmed.

LB proposed closing action point 5, while MB looks into alternative HR providers for the board to revisit this issue in January. The board affirmed.

LB asked for any other concerns or questions relating to the action points. No concerns were raised, and LB progressed to agenda item 4, passing over to MB to introduce the paper.

Item 4 Approval of New Members

MB stated that for the period of 30 July to 30 September 2020, we had 44 new members join us. This was 40 individual members, three corporate members and one Access Panel member. This is a 5.3% increase in total membership during this quarter, compared to a 1.6% increase in the previous quarter (April to July 2020). MB stated that this increase has come from our work on the exemption cards, which has been fantastic.

MB highlighted that YouthLink Scotland are now members with us, and we are working closely with them at the moment; also, Macmillan Cancer Support are now members and have been working with us on our weekly polls.

RF asked whether the board have been in contact with Macmillan Glasgow Libraries about the face covering exemption card. RF explained that they can print out exemption cards in their libraries and distribute them from there, for people who do not have access to computers or are otherwise unable to apply for one, they can ask for one at their library. MB stated that we had not yet been in contact, and thanked RF for her contribution.

LB asked if everyone is happy to approve the new members. The board approved the new members.

Item 5 CEO's Update

LB acknowledged that we are running on a tight time schedule for today's meeting to allow a comfort break before the second session and asked MB to provide a quick update on key areas that have been updated since the papers were distributed to the board prior to the meeting.

MB noted that the board may have already seen through our communications that we are administering the Scottish Government face covering exemption card. MB stated that this is due to be announced that day by the First Minister at her daily briefing and congratulated the team in being able to pull all of the project together at speed while maintaining

professionalism throughout. MB stated that the website is www.exempt.scot and is now live with a contact form where people can request a card. We have successfully recruited a helpline administrator to take this work forward.

MB asked ES if there were any other updates on this to mention. ES stated that everything had been covered, and that AB was currently taking the first call.

MB added that the total number of those exempt from wearing a face covering in Scotland is unknowable at this time, though DES has experienced a high volume of calls when distributing our own exemption card. With this being communicated from the Scottish Government, we do expect a higher volume of calls and contacts. MB explained that there is a slight delay in the text service being implemented, which is purely down to the decision making from the Scottish Government regarding the data handling protocols that we can use with this service, specifically concerning data retention policies. At this point, the text service is not live while we sort out these issues out. MB stated that we are hopeful that we can take that part forward to make it more accessible to more people. MB asked the board if they had any questions about this work.

JMc asked if we are pushing the Scottish Government to improve the public awareness and knowledge around exemptions, explaining that we should be taking a human rights-based approach with regard to exemptions and reasonable adjustments. MB confirmed that DES were, and that MB had invites to several meetings with different directorates on reasonable adjustments, to take this forward. MB then reiterated that the exemption card project is purely about the exemption card, however DES will continue to push to influence what messages are shared around exemptions.

MB stated that when we have our helpline administrator trained up, DES would look to signpost to further resources to help people where appropriate. MB confirmed that reasonable adjustments and the core issues JMc mentioned are still on our agenda.

SF asked about accessibility for the website and whether checks have been done on this. SF added that there is a website called www.wave.webaim.org which can check websites for accessibility issues such as missing alt-text. MB stated that there has been a comprehensive

approach to designing this website that has taken accessibility into account, and MB is assured that the website is accessible. Through the testing we have done regarding security also, we have had penetration tests and acquired a security essentials certificate, we are confident it is accessible. SF added that the wave website picked up on some minor errors that are simple to correct. MB agreed to pass this on to JD for checking.

Action 1 – MB and JD to accessibility check new website with the link provided by SF

RF asked if the exemption card was to be used for public transport as well or just for shops, adding that transport providers have their own cards. MB stated that this new exemption card does not invalidate or replace the other cards and tools in place, it is only here to compliment them, adding that and we did not want to overcomplicate the message. This card covers all areas of retail, transport, any area of our lives.

The message is also around this reasonable adjustment's element, whereby the card should not necessarily be required, and if someone says they are exempt they should be taken at face value and not be questioned or challenged on that. This is still a key message coming from our organisation, but we are supporting this exemption card as there is a request, demand and need coming from disabled people across Scotland. This will help people feel more confident.

RF added that issues might crop up with public transport, where drivers have been trained to accept one type of card, often the Thistle Assistance exemption card. MB agreed, stating that the communications from the Scottish Government to all internal departments across the Government should help with awareness.

JMc stated that if we are taking a human rights approach, then diversity should be welcomed, and people should not be forced to declare their disability to get on the bus. Instead, we should have institutions that are capable of recognising this. JMc explained that she had been trying to take a test case through to the EHRC but had been unsuccessful so far.

MB agreed on this point but stated that there needs to be a solution to help people. The exemption card does help people to get out of their homes and not to feel so isolated, especially at a time when there are changes going

on with regulations. MB reiterated that our underlying messaging here remains for people not to challenge anyone not wearing a covering, not asking what their disability or health condition might be. We are trying to communicate this message through this campaign as best we can. MB will continue to share our equality and human rights perspective.

RF stated that you should be able to walk on a bus without having to explain your exemption. RF asked about whether there could be a story campaign accompanying the launch of the campaign, discussing disabled people's experience on public transport. This way the exemption card is being offered for now, so they feel safe, but at the same time influencing the public narrative to be more accepting. MB stated that we have already begun collecting case studies and stories, however people can be very reluctant to record stories to camera. Of course, having that visual story is more impactful, in letting people know how challenging people can affect lives. We have collated some written case studies and sent this to the Scottish Government in the hope that they will use them, but we are also looking at taking this forward internally.

RF asked if we could do an animation and a performed voiceover, using genuine stories. Animations sometimes work better, because you can take the animation on the journey of the bus rather than someone just describe it.

MB asks SS if he had used similar software to this, however with the high demand for the helpline, Disability Information Scotland have not been able to do any work on this. RF stated that she had used Adobe Premier, and when she worked with Thistle Assistance, they used Hillside in Edinburgh, who were able to do fast turnarounds and provide GIF images for use on social media.

DMcK agreed with all statements so far, and added that it is important to remember that the Scottish Government has come to us to do it, and that credibility, trust and confidence we have been given is something positive we should be reflecting on.

JMc stated that she is not sure she agrees, and while it is good, we have been spotted to carry this forward, her thoughts were that we are effectively now giving out a mixed message. JMc explained that her own personal view is that sometimes there's strength in turning down projects if

it's not the right thing, and fundamentally this is a challenge for us that she is not supportive of and would not have voted in favour of.

MB thanked JMc for her view. DMcK and JMc differed on their views on this issue and JMc stated differing views are healthy. JMc stated that we need to be mindful that we are working to our values in all of our work but added that we should perhaps discuss this in the next session.

LB added that we are taking opportunities to push our key messages and noted that this project arose from our own members requesting a card. Members wanted a tool to give them more confidence; following the weekly poll in which we received many emotive responses, we felt the need to expand the scope of the project. LB confirmed that the Board had known this work was coming for roughly six to eight weeks and had previous dialogue in the last board meeting, as well as regular updates to the board as the operational team has taken it forward. LB explained that, on the day of the launch, her priority is about how we can continue to push our messages that we need to communicate on behalf of our members and respond to our members request for an exemption card to give them confidence.

RF added that after having personally worked on a face covering exemption card, and ran a hotline, she understands that not everyone wants one. However, there are a number of people that feel extremely anxious about travelling, and having the card makes them feel as though they can now leave the house. One girl that RF spoke to presented an exemption card to her school bus driver and was denied travel; adding that while it should not be happening, because it is happening to people it is therefore useful to have the tool to stop the discrimination. From here, we can then work to change the narrative to reduce the anxiety felt. RF stated that this tool will help so many people that it should be promoted, and with different techniques we can continue to show why you should not need it.

MB asked if RF would be able to share the stories that she has received so far. RF confirmed that MB could use her contact at Glasgow G Libraries, based in the Mitchell Library, and she should be able to help.

Action 2 – RF to share contact at Mitchell Library with MB. LA added that she is aware of transport operators and retailers who may not be the most accepting of exemption cards. LA asked whether there is the potential to have a sign-up location on the website for establishments to say that they

have conducted disability training and are accepting of exemptions. This might give people more of an understanding of safe places to go where they will not be challenged, providing an additional confidence level.

MB asked ES whether there was any scope with taking this forward with the Hate Crime Charter, because of the current circumstances around coronavirus. ES confirmed that this definitely ties into the hate crime work we have conducted.

RF asked if we could share a poster with retailers to display in their stores, signifying that they recognise the exemption card on their premises. MB stated that we have developed a poster for this purpose and are in the process of adapting it for this campaign.

The discussion on this issue was concluded and the Board thanked the Staff Team for all their hard work and commitment including working over the weekend to ensure things were up and running by tight timeframes.

MB then went on to talk about a meeting she would be attending with the next age and disability circle group. These meetings are in the format of themed discussions and MB has been invited to the access to food policy circle following feedback from our weekly polls on reasonable adjustments at supermarkets. MB stated that she is delighted that the data from our weekly polls has been helpful here and was informing discussions.

MB extended a welcome to RF and LA and concluded her update.

LB added that the food poverty circle was feeding into the social renewal advisory board, which is a 'heavy hitting group', and by feeding into this with our weekly poll data we could make a difference to the advisory board's recommendations, including access to food and how food poverty is managed. LB also asked whether we could invite anyone from the age and disability circle group meeting to join our upcoming webinar on 20-minute neighbourhoods, as the group contains some of the voices we want to hear on the issue of designing inclusive 20-minute neighbourhoods.

Action 3 – MB to forward contact list from circle group for inviting to upcoming webinar.

MB asked for any questions on the CEO report. There were no questions.

Operations Manager Report

MB asked ES for any additions to the Operations Manager report. ES added that we had approximately 50 people signed up to our webinar on return to public transport (scheduled for 29 October) where we would be welcoming colleagues from Guide Dogs and Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB).

Work with the Hate Crime Charter is ongoing and have been working with key partners in the working group to take this work forward, and they assisted with a social media campaign specifically about face covering exemptions. This had a reach of around 15,000 people.

Following the meeting with Christina McKelvie MSP, the Minister for Older People and Equalities, which went really well, she had written a substantial blog post about hate crime which will be included in Open Door and also our social media.

MB asked for any questions on the Operations Manager report. JMc asked if we could ask the Minister to put forward a parliamentary motion on hate crime. ES responded that Ms McKelvie has approached us about writing a blog post, so we did not discuss parliamentary motions.

SF added thanks for all the work ES has done so far. LB added congratulations to all the team for the work they have been doing, adding that it can be difficult to get slots in Ministers' diaries. LB asked that under the ferries accessibility fund, where we were talking about the baseline survey, whether it would be possible to share the results to this survey. ES stated that she has some information from FM (Project Coordinator for the CalMac ferries fund project) on what he has done so far, which she is happy to share. ES added that Fiach is making good progress and hoping that we can take some work forward with NorthLink Ferries in the next round of funding, in partnership with the Customer Service Director, Northlink.

Action 4 – ES to share results with LB from Ferries Accessibility Survey with CalMac

MB progressed to IB's report, asking IB if he had any further updates for the board.

Access Training and Engagement Manager Report

IB stated that he has done a lot of work on Statutory Consultee Status for the Access Panels, following our Parley at the Parly event we held in 2018. The overwhelming response from Access Panels following this event was that they wanted to be statutory consultees in the planning process, which is someone who has to be consulted on planning applications.

IB explained that what we have done with Oban, Stirling and North Ayrshire Access Panels is to suggest a parliamentary motion to ask MSPs to support an amendment to the General Development Procedure. What we had tried to do last year was recommend an amendment to the Planning Scotland Bill that was going through parliament, but unfortunately it was not successful and MSPs did not adopt it. A member from Oban Access Panel came to DES and asked us to pursue this new route. We then utilised a list of MSPs who had signed a pledge in November 2019 to support the Access Panel Network, to ask them to support this motion. We will then be writing to all MSPs and the planning committee, proposing our amendment and take it from there. IB added that this is our first attempt into this kind of work, and that it is exciting to be making progress on this, as it is something that Access Panels have been wanting for years. IB added that he wants to reassure Access Panels that this would not mean they are going to be inundated with plans and that they can choose what they respond to and they will only be forwarded plans that are specific to their expertise.

IB added that we have started discussions with Lochaber Access Panel on developing a Youth Access Panel (YAP) in the Highlands, because the Access Panel Chair wanted to trial a YAP in a rural and remote area. We will be taking that forward with the Access Panel and will search for further funding for our Investing in Access (IIA) pilot project that we ran a couple of years ago. We managed to gather a lot of good data during that time which can inform a funding proposal for IIA and DEAL (Disability Equality Access Learning) as one integrated project.

Finally, we received the news the widow of the former Chair of the Inverness Access Panel, also passed in February this year. Both were heavily involved in the Access Panel with great success over the years, and we feel as though now is the right time to start reviving the Inverness Access Panel as well as the Ross-shire Panel. One of the things we would like to do is to create an Accessibility Award for the former Chair of Ross-shire Access Panel. This person was incredibly involved in improving

accessibility and heavily involved in patient and community transport over the years. The Angus Access Panel promoted a similar award for a member of their Panel who passed away, so IB wanted to do something similar.

LB asked for confirmation that the board are happy to support the creation of this award.

The board expressed agreement, and thanked IB for proposing this. LB added that she believes this would mean a lot to the former Chair's family to be recognised in this way. IB added that he intends to contact the family for their input.

MB asked for any questions on the Access Training and Engagement Manager report.

Action 5 – IB to progress with creating an Accessibility Award

Item 6 Comfort Break

The board took a short comfort break before progressing to the second part of the agenda.

LB progressed to the Annual Calendar of Activities.

Board Annual Calendar of Activities

MB highlighted within the calendar that performance reviews within the staff team have taken place for October 2020. Policies and procedures are being updated as and when required, and MB was speaking with DMcK on the strategic subcommittee, which will come under discussion during the closed session. MB asked for any questions on the annual calendar.

LB stated that during regular meetings herself and MB looked through the annual calendar of activities in terms of governance checks and confirm what needs to be done by that time. The CEO and Convener also looked at our finance including what is coming in from funders as well as the update/progress reports due back to funders. LB added that this was part of the work that would have been done in that subcommittee. LB confirmed that they also did a comprehensive review of the risk log, which would be covered under the appropriate agenda item.

DMcK added that it is great to see the policies listed and this helps us think through workloads for the team, giving thanks to LB and MB for doing so.

MB asked for any questions on this. There were no questions from the board.

Quarterly complaints

Following the complaints policy procedure that has just been finalised, this section is intended to update on complaints received and outcomes over each quarter. DES had received one complaint over the last quarter, and this had been investigated and responded to.

Reflective learning log

There has only been one learning opportunity from this last quarter. Feedback on our webinars was that they were not long enough for communication support within the webinars. The learning outcome being that DES has increased webinar duration from 45 to 90 minutes.

MB asked for any questions from the board on the complaints or reflective learning sections. There were no questions.

Finance

MB stated that we are managing our budgets very well during a time of uncertainty. MB added that her initial fear was being unable to spend funds, but Access Panels (who receive £45,000 per year from the Scottish Government via a grant fund we administer) are still claiming their grant allowances on things like digital equipment, training and software. MB added that we are on track with this so far, and budgets across the board are fine.

MB asked for any questions from the board on finances. There were no questions from the board.

People

MB stated that in the last couple of weeks we have not kept our staff meeting schedule due to setting up the exemption card campaign, though this is not to say that we are not checking in with each other regularly. MB is mindful that all line managers are checking in with staff when required, and during performance reviews, any training and development requirements are being addressed. MB was delighted to share that CJ has

seen her hours increased from five hours to ten hours per week, providing us more easy read work.

MB asked for any questions from the board on people.

RF added that there is a scheme called 'Kickstart' that the Government are funding because of high unemployment. RF explained that while the team are busy with exemption cards, organisations can apply with other charities as a bid and they can fund someone to come in for 6 months free of charge to the organisation. As with a normal post, DES would pick the candidate. RF added that this would be such a benefit for any successful candidate, providing them with valuable training and experience.

MB thanked RF for sharing this information and agreed to look into this.

DMcK wanted to thank the staff for the amount of work that we have been doing and reading Emma's Monday Motivation emails are great to hear what has been done.

MB moved onto the risk management section.

Action 6 – MB to look at Kickstart funding to see if this is something DES can use

Risk Management

MB stated that at every CEO review, MB and LB always go through the risk management log along with the board papers. MB added that we are currently managing 13 organisational risks and in this last review we looked more closely at eight risk areas. MB summarised these eight risk areas.

DES05 – budgets available to sustain operational performances. Likelihood remained at two as our funding is currently being received. We are currently meeting funders' objectives. MB is in the process of planning for April 2021 and beyond.

DES08 – people and the risk of failure to train and develop staff to properly achieve our funding objectives. Likelihood remained at two, due to the recruitment of the helpline administrator. There were tight timescales involved in recruiting and inducting this administrator to complete this role, but we are on track.

DES09 – communications. This risk remained at one; seeking feedback from members on our manifesto as per our strategic plan, which should be going live this week.

DES09b – communications around negative reputational damage caused by stakeholders. This risk remains at one, in consideration of the recent complaint we received. We did not consider moving the likelihood up, but we are developing our review and complaints policy and reporting any trends on complaints from now on.

DES10 – IC system dependency. Likelihood has increased from one to two because of the exemption card campaign website and the traffic expected. We are managing this risk to avoid a crash of our website.

DES11 – IC system dependencies around our business continuity planning. Likelihood has increased from one to three because of large volume of calls for face covering exemption campaign. We just need to make sure that all of our IT resources can cope.

DES12 – People, where DES fails to plan for disruption to workforce. Likelihood reduced to two from three due to staff survey recently conducted and published, showing that we are receiving positive feedback from staff, and that trends of sickness have decreased over the last year.

DES13 – Covid19. Previous risk was eight, we have decreased from two to one. The current circumstances around COVID-19 are unlikely to change for some time, so we are now positioning ourselves for the long-term element of COVID-19 and planning.

MB asked for any questions around risks.

MB added that the average risk score is now at seven, having previously been five. This is reflective of the current risks we are managing, and it does not mean that we are at any higher risk as an organisation, just that we are managing them more effectively and are aware of the risks associated.

Challenges for Next Quarter

MB stated that on continuing to meet objectives and aims she is working with the staff team to address this. We are still holding regular meetings with Equality Unit and the DPO roundtable group, which are helpful to

provide updates to our funders. We meet regularly with Transport Scotland as well to update them on our reporting there too.

MB added that the strategic plan is always in her sights; opportunities for meeting ministers, MSPs and other stakeholders is always on her radar. Also on supporting staff who are working from home, we have made the decision that there will be only be three members of staff in the office with the new helpline administrator starting, and everyone else has been supportive and are comfortable still working from home. All COVID-19 guidance will be followed. MB confirmed that as some staff are contracted to work from home anyway, we have a good set up in place across the organisation. With the planning for the exemption card campaign in the next quarter, MB will be monitoring that as well.

Priorities for Next Quarter

MB stated that as usual, increasing easy read contracts is a priority. We are making good progress in sustaining at least between £4,000-£5,000 per quarter in easy read income.

Another area that MB would like to push this quarter is around promoting our sponsorship across other organisations too and again the exemption card campaign as a priority.

MB asked for any questions from the board. There were no questions.

LB thanked MB for her update.

Item 7 Confirmation of today's actions

LB shared the following actions that she picked up on:

Action 1 – MB and JD to accessibility check new website with the link provided by SF

Action 2 – RF to share contact at Mitchell Library with MB. LA added that she is aware of transport operators and retailers who may not be the most accepting of exemption cards. LA asked whether there is the potential to have a sign-up location on the website for establishments to say that they have conducted disability training and are accepting of exemptions. This might give people more of an understanding of safe places to go where they will not be challenged, providing an additional confidence level.

Action 3 – MB to forward contact list from circle group for inviting to upcoming webinar.

Action 4 – ES to share results with LB from Ferries Accessibility Survey with CalMac

Action 5 – IB to progress with creating an Accessibility Award

Action 6 – MB to look at Kickstart funding to see if this is something DES can use

Item 8 AOB

LB asked for any other business from the board. There was no other business for the board meeting. LB gave her thanks to the team for all their work on the exemption card project, including going above and beyond with working weekends.

Item 9 Close

LB closed the board meeting formally.

Minutes reviewed and agreed: 27 January 2021

Proposed: Dorothy McKinney
Seconded: Maureen Morrison

Signed:

A handwritten signature in green ink, appearing to read 'Linda Bamford', is displayed on a light grey rectangular background.

Linda Bamford, Convenor