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**Information request: Impacts from re-opening pubs, cafés and restaurants**

Response from: **Wales Vision Forum**

The Wales Vision Forum, comprising local, regional and national charities supporting people with sight loss in Wales. The purpose of the Forum is for organisations representing people with sight loss to come together to share, discuss and outline work programmes and priorities to enhance joint working and reduce duplication to maximise our collective reach and impact.

The Forum is a platform for sharing information, sharing good practice and expertise, consulting and identifying opportunities to support service and campaign planning.

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**Introduction.**

Upon ‘lockdown’ Wales Council of the Blind immediately gathered the Wales Vision Forum for weekly meetings to discuss what the sector was doing to address the restrictions imposed by our governments. Consequently, 16 meetings have been held to share concerns and new working practices so that WCB could maintain a web page giving the latest situation for the benefit of professionals and individuals. It was our intention that these meetings enable the sector to work collaboratively and to deliver information in the timeliest manner. This has been its great success. Also WCB, through the forum, assembled 22 local authority booklets (1) giving information on contacts and the availability of local support: optometry; volunteer deliveries; local sight loss charities and so on. These were distributed through the Welsh Local Government Association to each authority and to each contact - professionals and individuals - held by WCB on a county-by-county basis.

WCB has continued to produce Sylw, its weekly e-bulletin and print / audio monthly, so that people are kept up-to-date with changes.

**Reopening pubs, cafes and restaurants**

It is anticipated that reopening pubs, cafes and restaurants will lead to further spill-out areas onto roads and pavements, which will be hazardous for people with sight loss.

As ever, inaccessible information is the key disabling factor for people with sight loss. The pandemic has put that into sharp focus; we hear that not enough services are making their information available in accessible forms, yet this is needed more than ever. It is critical that pubs, cafes and restaurants are aware of how to address accessibility needs of someone with sight loss including matters around social distancing, signage and guiding.

In addition to this, many pubs are introducing apps for customers to order drinks and food. Not everybody has a smart phone. The app may not be accessible for people with sight loss and those with physical dexterity difficulties.

This document also draws on information submitted, as a sector wide response, to the First Minister (2).

**Social distancing.**

*‘I really do not know how I personally would cope with social distancing, as I cannot go anywhere for which I do not have an established mind map, and I am most likely not see not see other folk who are about.’*

*‘Social distancing is difficult if out on my own.  I do not have a very good depth perception therefore do not realise I am too close to someone whilst in a supermarket.’*

*‘I was always so confident getting out and about with my guide dog. I am very concerned about this 2-meter distancing though now. My dog doesn’t understand social distancing so how will that work?’*

Some observations about social distancing are at the Guide Dogs website: <https://www.guidedogs.org.uk/news/Social-distancing-and-sight-loss>]. *See also (3) below.*

*‘Social distancing is the most challenging aspect for me in the whole Covid-19 situation. Not being able to socially distance is a major challenge to my independence and keeping myself safe.’*

*‘My guide dog hasn’t been trained to social distance, that’s why we need help from the sighted public.’*

*- Guide dog owners.*

People with sight loss often have difficulty in maintaining social distance, possibly leading to a negative reaction from general public

Blind and partially sighted people report that **sighted people also need to observe the distancing rules**. This is not always happening, putting the individual at a disadvantage through not knowing how close the sighted person is.

Sight Life reported to us that the vast majority of their members (both young and old) are still very anxious about going out and getting to the pubs/restaurants is the first obstacle. Their members have reported difficulties getting on buses, due to them being full and people ‘pushing in’. Whilst social distancing might be maintained onboard the bus, people queuing to get on or off often do not maintain this distance.

**Changing environments are challenging environments.**

*‘It can be really challenging at the best of times when you can’t see what’s going on around you. At the moment, it’s vital that I get more verbal information from people around me, as a lot of the environment around us is built on visual cues, which I can’t rely on.’*

*‘I have no idea what 2 metres away looks like. I am worried I will never leave the house. I won’t be able to keep away from people and as I don’t look ‘blind’ people will not know to keep away from me. I have a little usable vision but can't judge distance. If I have to rely on bollards or new road markings, I will not see them, it’s such a worry for me.’*

Any familiarity with the physical environment will largely be undermined by the changes being made to tabling and routes within and without eateries to enable physical distancing. Rehabilitation (ROVIs) and mobility officers will play a key role in re-training people with sight loss to navigate once-familiar environments, now made unfamiliar due to the re-organisation taking place.

As pubs and cafes re-open and need more outdoor space for tables and seating on footways, this can cause significant problems for vision-impaired pedestrians. These areas need to be surrounded with a solid barrier - not cones and tape - perceptible with a cane and without creating a trip hazard.

Street furniture has always been an issue but many now worry about the possibility of encountering plastic partitioning between tables outside cafes. These must be marked correctly with glass manifestation or safety stickers.

The references below include links to Welsh Government documents (4) containing a section written by Guide Dogs and RNIB entitled Corona Virus and Remaking Streets. This explains the challenges for people with sight loss created by changes to the environment in response to the current situation. For example, extending pavements to include space for tables and chairs. These should always be surrounded by a substantial barrier, low enough to be detected with a white cane, and with a clear safe walkway to allow pedestrians to get by.

The guidance also advises on how to support social distancing without creating a "no-go" area for people with sight loss.

The guidance sets out design principles for safer urban centres and green spaces in the context of the coronavirus pandemic. It is a framework for identifying the issues associated with the use of public places in light of the need for social distancing. It focuses primarily on areas that are likely to have high footfall. It also includes practical interventions, which are temporary, for adapting and managing public places.

**Some solutions.**

* Welsh Government should run a public information campaign informing the public about the issues that people with sight loss and other impairments have in regards to social distancing.
* Along similar lines, pubs and eateries should provide information to the general public at their venues to explain that some people are not able to identify the instructions and markings and that this should be taken into account before complaining or challenging people.
* Awareness and equality training should be delivered to staff of restaurants, bars and cafes.
* Service providers should carry out an Equality Impact assessment on their provision of services to ensure that the new ways of working don’t have a negative impact on disabled customers and staff. Such assessments should involve the people with sight loss and their organisations.
* Pubs and eateries should publicise the changes made to their premises on their websites and social media so that people are informed in advance of the new layout and new methods of ordering, interaction etc. (An estimated 65% of people with sight loss can use the internet or social media as a way of sourcing this information.)
* Alternative ways of ordering items should be provided which don’t involve using an app, such as socially distanced face-to-face ordering.
* Ensure any apps are fully accessible – incorporating large text and, an accompanying audio description or which make proper use of accessibility features on phones etc.
* Staff should wear masks with a clear section covering the mouth to aid visibility for lip readers.
* Ensure seats are provided for those who need to sit while queuing.
* Ensure instructions, directions and notices are in large print as a minimum, with pictures and an audio description, relayed verbally to people at the time of booking.
* Ensure the handwashing facilities are fully accessible.
* Ensure sufficient, fully accessible toilets are available.
* Ensure the edges of any Perspex or glass screens are marked with a distinctive colour to aid visibility.
* Information stations / stands at strategic places in town centres can be used to advise blind and partially sighted people of the changes to the layout. Awareness training to staff at these stations would help.

**References:**

(1) Community Support booklets at <http://www.wcb-ccd.org.uk/coronavirus/word_documents.php>

(2) Covid-19 measures and their relation to people with sight loss: <http://www.wcb-ccd.org.uk/downloads/guidance_document_covid19.docx>

(3) Guide Dogs’ ‘*Be There*’ campaign gives guidance to encourage the public to feel confident in their ability to offer support whilst maintaining social distancing.

(4) <https://gov.wales/creating-safer-public-places-coronavirus> and

[https://llyw.cymru/creu-mannau-cyhoeddus-mwy-diogel-coronafeirws](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fllyw.cymru%2Fcreu-mannau-cyhoeddus-mwy-diogel-coronafeirws&data=02%7C01%7CKatherine.Hatch%40gov.wales%7C5ffd9af5a5ed44a6c3f808d812adc4e0%7Ca2cc36c592804ae78887d06dab89216b%7C0%7C0%7C637279884822070013&sdata=usGkZdV4VAFA9H4hXsi8mLfeMspVkAhFtiFVh9yZO4w%3D&reserved=0)

The following organisations were invited to contribute to this response:

Guide Dogs

Care and Repair Cymru

Macular Society

RNIB Cymru

International Glaucoma Association

Blind Veterans

Welsh Rehabilitation Officers Forum

North Wales Society for the Blind

Vision Support

Sight Cymru

Sight Life

Visual Impairment Merthyr Tydfil

Vision Impairment West Glamorgan