

Vision Support
Barrow & District

Strategy

2025-2028



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Our Ambitions

Our strategy is split into three principal ambitions. Together these ambitions help us to achieve our vision to provide support to people with vision impairments.

AMBITION ONE

Starting Well

Being recognised as a high-quality provider of services for children and young people who are vision impaired.



AMBITION TWO

Living Well

Being recognised for our subject matter expertise and ability to amplify the voices of people with vision impairments across South West Cumbria.



AMBITION THREE

Aging Well

Ostley House is a jewel in our crown, with an excellent reputation, and a highly experienced leadership team. Aging well is important to us.



Welcome from our CEO

I am delighted to introduce this new three-year strategy for Vision Support Barrow and District.

This is not just my strategy; it is a strategy for everyone. I am proud of what we have produced, which reflects the ambitions of our trustees, employees, and service users. To write this strategy, I have asked service users across our area about their experiences and what is important to them for the future. This collective ambition sets out the roadmap for the next three years.

I fully endorse this strategy and as a leader, I am building an inclusive culture where lived experience underpins all that we do. A culture where we are committed to the social model of disability, working to remove the societal barriers that get in the way.

A powerful sense of belonging and togetherness among our employees will support us in attracting and retaining excellent talent. Employees

who can deliver high quality, effective services for the people of South West Cumbria who are vision impaired. I will role model inclusive behaviours, where lived experience is an asset, driving and inspiring us to constantly improve and be better.

I am optimistic for the future and want to inspire and feel inspired by others in the organisation. We are committed to listening to our service users, learning about their experiences not only with their sight loss but in their life generally. This will allow us to deliver services which break down the barriers they face and overcome the challenges of being vision impaired.

Vision Support Barrow and District has been a mainstay in the lives of people with vision impairments for more than one hundred years. There are some well-loved services,

“

I will continue to empower, challenge and support trustees and employees to make the best decisions”

which have an excellent reputation, including our beloved Ostley House. However, we cannot be complacent. It is important we retain what is valuable within our current offer and that we innovate and develop to cater for the changing needs of the community we serve. To broaden our reach, in relation to 25-60-year-olds.

For my part, I will continue to empower, challenge and support trustees and employees to make the best decisions. Allowing the organisation to thrive.

I encourage everyone to understand their part in delivering this strategy and to play their part in making it happen.

Amanda

Amanda Bennett
Chief Executive



Our vision

Our strategy is split into three principal ambitions.

Together these ambitions help us to achieve our vision to provide support to people with vision impairments. We want people to live independently and live well throughout all stages of life.

It is important to us to recognise the challenges and societal barriers that people with sight loss face in their everyday life. We will use our services, our campaigning, and our collective voice to create opportunities, and challenge inequity both locally and nationally.

We will work to strengthen our routes of engagement and our data integrity to enable us to broaden the scope of this strategy in the future.

Our mission

Vision Support Barrow and District provides expert advice to people who are vision impaired across South West Cumbria.

We provide expert care for people living with sight loss and/or dementia in our specialist care home in Barrow-in-Furness. We will break down the barriers which stand in the way of people who are blind or partially sighted, no matter what their age.

We will provide social connections, a sense of belonging, advocacy, and support. Enhancing the lives of everyone we work with, allowing them to live independently and live well. We will role model inclusive and supportive behaviours and we will challenge systems which marginalise the people we support.



Our principles

Beneficiaries first

We will always act in the best interests of our charity and our beneficiaries, and this will be an underpinning principle of all that we do.

Integrity

We will always act with integrity, working collectively for the good of our beneficiaries and the charity. We will be open, honest, and transparent and we will not allow self-interest to stand in our way.

Accountability

We will be accountable for the organisation we lead, the services we deliver and the impact we have on individuals, on our community and on our planet.



Our values and behaviours

We are dedicated to meeting the needs of people with vision impairments in South West Cumbria.

We are focussed on building an inclusive culture within the organisation and in the wider community. We are proud of our people, and we have a set of behaviours, which articulate our expectations for how our employees will operate. Our role is to support service-users to achieve all the outcomes they identify. We should always respect their boundaries and never undertake work that they have told us they do not want.

We respect each other and everyone we meet; we commit to listening and learning from the lived experience of others. We must take responsibility for our own learning and for keeping our knowledge current.



We must share our expertise with our colleagues, freely and willingly to achieve better outcomes for service users.

We empower people, we understand our role is to provide effective allyship and advocacy and to respect the limits of our own agency.

We trust each other, our partners, and wider stakeholders. We believe in coproduction and collaboration, and we recognise our role in the wider context of people's lives. We should assume our colleagues have good intentions. If we are concerned about their practice this should be raised through appropriate channels, however, in our individual

interactions we should always demonstrate courtesy and respect for our colleagues

We listen actively and respond positively, placing the needs and aspirations of service users at the heart of everything we do.

We inspire people to achieve their full potential, by responsibly supporting, encouraging, and helping them navigate any barriers that may get in their way. We are all at different career stages and we interact not only with our own people but with our partners outside of the organisation. We should always role model inclusive and professional behaviours towards everyone.

What is important to us?

We asked our service users to define what is important to them. This is what they told us:

Social Connection

- Away days
- Residential trips
- Group activities

A sense of belonging

- They enjoy belonging to the groups, which give them peer groups and friendships.
- They feel committed and loyal to the organisation

Expert Advice

- Services offered by the Vision Support Officers
- Technology support, advice, and guidance
- Eye Care Liaison Officer (ECLO) service
- Resource advisors and the Vision Support Centre shop



Why is the Social Model of Disability important?

We believe that the person is not the problem. The disability is not the thing that stands in the way of our service users achieving their hopes, dreams, and aspirations.

The barriers are presented by an inequitable society that places obstacles in the way of people with disabilities. These obstacles can include poorly designed public realm, buses that do not speak so that you cannot know where you are, people giving inadequate descriptions as to where things are such as "it's over there."

It also includes poor lighting and inadequate colour contrast. Also, the obstacles of inaccessible documents - important documents such as mortgage or rent agreements, utility bills and bank statements.

When society says that a disability is the barrier, that places the responsibility back on the person, it removes responsibility from individuals without disabilities, from governments, and from corporations. In an equitable and inclusive world, responsibility is accepted by us all to create a physical and digital environment that works for us all.

We will lead by our example, and we will work hard through our campaigning to hold people to account and to ensure this happens for people with vision impairments in South West Cumbria.

Ambition One

Starting Well

Being recognised as a high-quality provider of services for children and young people who are vision impaired.

Vision Support recognises how overwhelming and frightening it can be for parents and family members faced with a diagnosis of sight loss for their baby, toddler, or child.

“

They've always helped and given us advice whenever we've needed it"

Kristen, parent of two of our service-users



“

He's got to places he wouldn't normally go. Vision Support is like a second family.”

Debbie, grandparent of one of our service-users

“

The groups have helped my kids make new friends and meet people in similar situations.”

Kristin, parent of two of our service-users

We will:

- Provide expert advice and guidance to families and parents on a range of issues including benefits advice.
- Provide the expert advice and support of an ECLO at Furness General Hospital to support you as you navigate your way through the eye care journey.
- Collaborate with the Habilitation Officers for the area and a Qualified Teacher for the Visually Impaired (QTVI) to ensure a seamless and joined up service for children and their families.
- Provide a range of activities, day trips and events for children and young people, hosted by our dedicated Children and Young People's Worker.
- Explore the viability of repurposing our bungalows to create a supported living scheme for young people with vision impairments as they develop the skills for independent living.
- Provide advocacy and allyship to families and children navigating school, Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision and more.

Ambition Two

Living Well

Being recognised for our subject matter expertise and ability to amplify the voices of people with vision impairments across South West Cumbria.

Whether people have lived with their vision impairment for much of their life or are recently diagnosed, there are plenty of obstacles that get in the way. At Vision Support we will provide a range of services and opportunities to support people to live independently and live well.

“

They've been absolutely brilliant, I couldn't fault them."

Ron, service-user



We will:

- Continue to invest in our flagship Vision Support Service, providing a range of support and advice, advocacy and allyship on a range of matters including benefits advice, up to and including tribunal.
- Explore the redevelopment of the ground floor of our Vision Support Centre, to make it fit for future purpose.
- Provide support through the eye care journey via our Eye Care Liaison Officer (ECLO) based at Furness General Hospital.
- Provide technology support through our dedicated Technology Advisor based at the Vision Support Centre.
- Provide social opportunities including groups, trips and residential which help to alleviate loneliness and social isolation build confidence and open new opportunities.
- Collaborate with other groups within South West Cumbria to provide training and support to enable them to be more accessible and welcoming to people who are vision impaired.

- Create a Steering Group called Vision Voices, to place and amplify the voices of service users in our decision-making.

In addition, we will work towards achieving the following:

- Creating a working age programme for people who are furthest removed from the job market but of working age.
- Creating a working age forum for people of working age in work, to come together either virtually or in person to share experiences and knowledge.
- Creating Borrow Boxes full of aids and adaptations that can be tried out at home before deciding whether to buy.
- Creating additional groups and social opportunities that appeal to a wider audience of people who are vision impaired.
- Creating a Barrow Buddies programme which matches up sighted guide volunteers with people who are vision impaired and socially isolated. Barrow Buddies will also hold weekly walks to improve fitness and mental wellbeing. And explore similar programmes in the rest of South West Cumbria.

Ambition Three

Aging Well

Ostley House is a jewel in our crown, with an excellent reputation, and a highly experienced leadership team. Aging well is important to us. As people get older, management of their sight loss can become more challenging. Confidence in independent orientation and mobility can dwindle and depending on where they live, availability of public transport can place a barrier in their way. There are multiple challenges as we get older and many sight conditions begin as we get into our advanced years such as Age-Related Macular Degeneration, Glaucoma and Cataracts. At Vision Support we want to ensure that all older people living with vision impairments can continue to live independently and well for as long as possible.

“

I love it, I'm going to put my own name down.”

**Sue, daughter of resident
at Ostley House**



“

I think it's great. I really do, all the carers are angels in disguise, and they work very hard for their money.”

Anne, resident at Ostley House

“

“I think it's great. The residents are always kept entertained, there is always something going on. Everyone is always cheerful and very helpful.”

Pauline, daughter of resident at Ostley House

We will:

- Continue to invest in our forty-three bedded registered care home Ostley House, which provides residential care for people who live with vision impairment and/or dementia.
- Continue to promote the enhanced level of dementia care that Bradbury Village, our dedicated dementia wing provides.
- Provide expert care, which places the person at the centre of all we do at Ostley House, with a wide range of employees and volunteers.
- Provide expert support in a person's own home, by our Vision Support Officers, who can support with accessing practical support, applying for grants and benefits and referring into our own social groups and those elsewhere in the community.
- Provide social groups, which tackle social isolation and loneliness and provide some excellent opportunities to come together with others who share lived experience of sight loss, in a safe and supportive environment.

Our commitments

To help us get there, we have set out some high-level commitments, which will underpin all our activities over the term of this strategy. They are:

Impact and intent

We recognise that good intent is not enough if the impact of our actions causes any harm or disadvantage.

Accessibility and Vision Impairment

We will get it right for everyone who is vision impaired.

Being Vision Impairment aware

We will ensure that we understand the culture around vision impairment and that we operate and reinforce the social model of disability.

Robust leadership

We will have trustees and leaders who are able to effectively role model inclusive behaviours and deliver the actions needed for this strategy to succeed financially, legally, sustainably and ethically.

Continuous improvement

This strategy is the beginning of the journey, and we will commit to continuous improvement. We will grow our impact to ensure we remain credible and relevant to the people we serve.



Bringing our strategy to life

This strategy is co-produced and reflects the ambitions and aspirations of everyone involved. To produce this strategy, we listened to service users, employees, senior leaders, and trustees.

We would like everyone to stop:

- ✗ Assuming that we know what people want without asking them.
- ✗ Making people feel like they are not equal.
- ✗ Making it feel like the working environment is inequitable.

We would like people to start:

- ✓ Being equitable and service-user led.
- ✓ Making it easier for people to bring their whole self to the organisation, regardless of their lived experience.
- ✓ Creating role models who are visible throughout the organisation and who demonstrate the behaviours of the organisation.
- ✓ Being easily accessible.
- ✓ Remember 'nothing about us without us'.

We would like to continue:

- ✓ Supporting staff to succeed, bringing about the best outcomes for service users.
- ✓ To focus on individual strengths and what people can do, which is far more important than what they cannot do.
- ✓ To continue to attract more people to work in the organisation with lived experience of vision impairment.
- ✓ To promote awareness of our services to enable us to provide the best outcome possible for everyone within our reach.

Sustainability

We know our activities have direct and indirect environmental impacts.

As a socially responsible organisation we have committed to reducing our impact on the environment, ensuring social value and working towards becoming a sustainable organisation. To achieve this, we will focus on the three C's, which are conservation, community, and the circular economy.

Conservation

- We will be determined in our attempts to reduce, reuse and recycle.
- We have solar panels installed on our buildings.

Community

- We will contribute to our local community and role model good practice.
- We will run warm hubs through the winter to support vulnerable people due to the costs of heating.
- We will organise or participate in litter picks and beach cleans to demonstrate our commitment to the environment.
- We will support our service users to use greener methods of transport including by creating buddying schemes to build confidence with walking and public transport.

Circular economy

- We will be intentional in our attempts to engage with a circular economy by sharing, leasing, reusing, refurbishing, and recycling rather than a consume and throw away pattern of behaviour.
- We will engage with the local recycling schemes in all our buildings.
- We will commit to trying to repair before we replace items that break and where this is not possible if we can recycle or refurbish we will.
- We will commit to employing local companies wherever possible which contributes to the local economy and reduces carbon emissions in travelling to our sites.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are not only the right thing to do, but they are crucial to the success of the organisation.

We want everyone at Vision Support to be able to bring their whole self to the organisation, whether they are a trustee, employee, volunteer, or service user. We are stronger by being multi-dimensional, rich in different values and life experiences. It makes us better problem solvers and helps us to be more innovative. It also helps us to be reflective of the community we serve, which makes us more credible and relevant to them.

We will:

Treat everyone equitably

When we treat everyone equally, we treat everyone the same and this does not meet their individual needs. When we treat people equitably, we give them what they need to succeed.

Celebrate difference

We understand that everyone's lived experience is as unique as their fingerprint. We value and recognise the differences between us, and we understand our responsibilities as set out in the Equality Act 2010.

Welcome you fully

We know that everyone who works for us, volunteers with us or receives a service from us deserves to feel confident and comfortable being themselves.

Safeguarding

We are committed to the safeguarding of adults and children, within services, of our workforce and within the wider community.

We have a robust safeguarding policy; our senior leadership team are experienced and highly trained safeguarding practitioners, and we have safeguarding expertise represented on our Trustee Board. All our employees receive safeguarding training, and we operate safer recruitment practices for employees, volunteer and trustees.



Our Impact

To understand where we are going, we first need to understand our current position.

As of November 2024, we have provided the following this financial year to date:

904 adults with vision impairments registered for support	48 children and young people with vision impairments registered for support
Over 3650 children and young people educated about sight loss	Over 200 teachers and youth workers educated about sight loss
Over 39,450 people reached through public engagement activities	Over 57,000 people reached through social media platforms
477 home visits carried out by our Vision Support Officer	194 people with vision impairments supported with technology
53 newly diagnosed people supported by our Eye Care Liaison Officer	93% occupancy at Ostley House

There is still much for us to do, where we have contact, we have impact. However, there are still many people living with vision impairments in South West Cumbria who we do not currently reach. During the first year of this strategy, we will take steps to understand why and to extend our reach.

“

I commit to being a powerful ally to all people with a vision impairment, to be an effective role model and a trusted advocate.”

Vera Wilton, Chair of Trustees of VSBD

Closing remarks from the Trustees

I am very proud to have this three-year strategy now in place.

Vision Support Barrow and District is an organisation steeped in more than one hundred years of history and is well known in Barrow-in-Furness for the contribution it has made to people's lives in the area. Our challenge now is to expand our reach and ensure that people with sight loss in the furthest areas of South West Cumbria, understand the contribution we can make to their lives.

Not only is Vision Support a provider of services, but it is also the custodian of a registered care home and an employer of almost one hundred people. It is hugely important that we remain a credible and trusted employer and service provider and that we adapt to not only the changing environment around us but the global challenges ahead.

I share Amanda's ambition for the organisation, and I am delighted with this bold and determined strategy. I fully endorse the ambitions within the strategy, and I understand the role I must play in helping us achieve them.

I commit to being a powerful ally to all people with a vision impairment, to be an effective role model and a trusted advocate. On behalf of the trustees, I give an assurance that we will work hard on behalf of service users across South West Cumbria to bring this strategy to life.

Vera

Vera Wilton
Chair of Trustees of VSBD

Some of the terms we may use in our work

Social v Medical Model of Disability

The main difference between the medical and social model of disability is how they view the cause of disability.

Medical Model – Disability is caused by a person’s impairment or difference. The goal is to treat the impairment and “make them better.” Many people with disabilities find this an outdated and offensive model.

Social Model – Disability is caused by the way society is organised and the barriers that people with impairment or difference face. The social model of disability focusses on what people can do rather than what they cannot. The social model recognises that disability or impairment is one aspect of a person’s identity.

Lived experience

Lived experience is the knowledge and understanding that comes from directly experiencing something, rather than learning about it from others – this can include for example, disability, race and ethnicity, mental

health, neurodivergence and LGBTQIA+ experiences. Broadly we categorise experience in three ways – lived experience, learned experience (where you have a child, partner or family member with a disability or impairment) and professional experience. All experiences are valuable, and a mix of experience gives us a diverse organisation. However, lived experience and learned experience should not be undermined or silenced by professional experience. Where professional experience becomes the louder voice, the scales have tipped towards power and privilege. Lived, learned and professional experience should all be treated equally.

Inclusive behaviours

Inclusive behaviours are a conscious effort to create an environment that is welcoming and accepting of everyone regardless of their individual characteristics. It involves treating others with respect, valuing different perspectives and ensuring that everyone has equity of opportunity.

Allyship and Advocacy

Allyship - allyship is standing with a person, a group of people or a cause which you do not personally have lived experience of. It is saying, "I stand with you and support you even though I don't personally understand how it feels to go through this." It is using your privilege, and power to step aside and give the spotlight to someone else. The best ally is the one who fully recognises the limits of their own agency.

Advocacy - advocacy is stepping forward, at the request of a person or group of people and using your voice to communicate their message. Advocacy is used to support people who are unable to speak up for themselves or be heard, this could be for various reasons including feeling vulnerable or systemic discrimination which makes it harder to be heard or because of bias in the audience you are trying to reach.

Power and Privilege

Power lies where influence meets visibility. Power is the ability that someone has to direct, influence and be heard without hindrance. Privilege is the advantage afforded to anyone by an aspect by their identity in certain contexts. For example, in a building where all the rooms are labelled only with written signs, if someone does not have a

vision impairment then they have the privilege of being able to navigate easily without assistance.

Neurodivergence

Neurodivergence is a term which describes the different ways in which peoples' brains work. There is no such thing as a "normal" brain, and it is important we acknowledge the different ways in which people process things. Some conditions which come under the neurodiverse banner include dyslexia, Dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC).

Agency

Agency is a sense of control that you feel in your life. Agency is your very own power and your ability to affect the future. Many people, particularly those from minoritised communities believe they have very little agency in their life. It is therefore important that we do not overstep, even with good intentions.

Equity v Equality

Equality is about treating everyone the same, equity is about giving everyone what they need to succeed. For example, giving every employee a laptop is equality, giving those with a vision impairment the software to use it is equity.



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