



**Improving lives of people with sight loss**

## **Vista Round Table Discussion Paper:**

Advancing Vision Screening and Prevention in  
Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland

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## Executive Summary

This paper summarises the key themes, challenges, and opportunities discussed during the Vista-led round table on June 24, 2025.

The session convened a diverse group of professionals from optometry, orthoptics, academia and Vista charity leaders to explore how to enhance vision screening and broader eye health prevention strategies across Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland (LLR).

The discussion was framed by the urgent need to address gaps in local screening provision, as highlighted by national data and recent media coverage.

Participants shared insights from practice, research, and lived experience, and proposed collaborative, pragmatic solutions to improve outcomes for children, families, and adults at risk of preventable eye conditions.

## Participants

- **Louise Wright** – Chief Executive Officer, Vista
- **Stephen Payne** – Director of Care and Services, Vista
- **Becky Newham** – Interim Director of Fundraising and Communications, Vista
- **Paula Varney** – Senior Family Support Officer and Paediatric ECLO, Vista
- **Mohammed Bhojani** – Optometrist; Chair, Local Eye Health Network (LLR); Former Trustee, Vista
- **Jane Macnaughton** – Optometrist; Lead for Low Vision Services at University Hospitals of Leicester (UHL); Academic at Anglia Ruskin University
- **Jean Voller** – Chair of the Board of Trustees, Vista; Orthoptist (retired); Volunteer with Children and Young People's Services
- **Vinesh Patel** – Optometrist; Member of Local Optical Committee (LOC); Connected with ICB and College of Optometry

## Opening Remarks

Stephen Payne emphasised the importance of prevention in sight loss and the significant economic and personal impact of visual impairment.

- Sight loss is on the rise with 1 in 5 people expected to be affected, equating to 35,500 people across LLR.
- Highlighted that 50% of sight loss is preventable<sup>1</sup>, underlining the need for awareness and early intervention.

***An individual who has Glaucoma stated - “Glaucoma is a condition where a person does not have any signs of deterioration, until it is too late. It is a silent thief that creeps up unnoticed and steals your sight. It is crucial that people living with this condition continue to take their eye drops without fail. Even during fasting periods, these drops are essential. Regular checks of eye pressures at hospital or opticians can save sight.”***

The above quote indicates the importance of prevention and awareness in just one of the many conditions that can take a persons sight, showing that early intervention is key and regular sight tests are critical.



## Vista's Strategic Vision

**“To make Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland a place where anyone with sight loss can reach their aspirations.”**

Vista's mission **is** to increase peer led opportunities to build confidence and resilience, to educate and raise awareness to improve eye health, and to advocate for accessibility and inclusion across Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland.



## Key Goals

By March 2026, Vista aims to:

- Increase its reach from 12,000 to 14,000 people affected by sight loss.
- Increase screening from 200 to 500 individuals.
- Reach 600,000 people through media and communications.

By 2028, Vista plans to:

- Expand screening to reach 1000+ people yearly.
- Increase public awareness of sight loss.
- Advocate for a more accessible society, reducing barriers for those affected by sight loss.

## Vista Screening Programme Insights to date:

The evolution of Vista's school screening programme:

- Initially launched in 2017–18, paused during COVID-19, and restructured for efficiency.
- Now screen children in small groups with minimal classroom disruption.

## **Shared outcomes:**

- In 2023, 139 children screened, 73 concerns identified, 62 confirmed refractions (a refraction refers to an error affecting how the light bends through the lens of the eye).
- In 2024 and 2025, similar patterns with slightly lower numbers.

This discussion emphasised the importance of early detection and the life-changing impact of providing spectacles to children.

Challenges identified included difficulty in obtaining feedback from optometrists despite efforts like pre-paid postcards and inconsistent engagement from parents.

Innovative Solutions included introducing a child-friendly screening pack, stronger relationships with optometrists and local health networks.

## **National Policy and Local Gaps**

The UK Government's Child Vision Screening Service

Specification recommends orthoptic-led screening for all children aged 4 to 5 to detect amblyopia (reduced vision in one eye caused by abnormal visual development in the early years), strabismus (a condition where the eyes do not align and point in the same direction), and refractive errors.



However, LLR is one of the few areas in England without a commissioned screening programme, placing thousands of children at risk of undetected vision problems.



To meet their obligations, current Local Authorities and Public Health raise awareness of Eye Health through information sent out to parents.

Despite multiple business cases presented by a Head

Orthoptist over the past 20 years to former Strategic Health Authorities, Primary Care Trusts, and health system leaders, the case for implementing **a vision screening programme for 4–5-year-olds remains unaddressed.**

## Key Themes from the Round Table

### Prevention as a Strategic Priority

Stephen Payne emphasised that 50% of sight loss is preventable, yet eye health is often overlooked in public health strategies.

“Parents are more likely to take their pre school aged children to the dentist than get their eyes tested.”

### Screening Outcomes and Challenges

Vista’s pilot screening programme has shown promising results:

- In 2023, 169 children were screened; 73 concerns were identified, with 62 confirmed refractions.
- However, feedback from optometrists remains limited, and follow-up data is inconsistent.

Participants discussed the need for better data sharing, possibly through QR codes or digital forms, and stronger relationships with local optometrists.

### Professional and Systemic Barriers

- Some optometrists may lack confidence or training to see very young children (below 3), especially if they don’t see this cohort routinely in practice.

- NHS reimbursement for child eye exams is low (£25), making it financially un-viable for some practices.
- Equipment and time constraints further limit uptake.
- There is a lack of integration between optometry and hospital services, with minimal feedback loops.
- There are key opportunities being missed through working with Vista, the local leading sight loss charity with elements of all strategies connecting.

## **Equity and Inclusion**

- Children with learning disabilities and those in special schools are often under-served.
- Ethnic minority and refugee families face additional barriers.
- Rural communities lack access to consistent services.

## **Guidance**

World Health Organisation (WHO)<sup>3</sup> & NHS evidence suggests:

Screening should be universal, child friendly and linked to prompt referral to optometrists and follow up pathways.

Screeners can be optometrists, DO's, orthoptists, nurses and other health care workers, not limited or led by one profession.

## Strategic Opportunities

### A Tiered Prevention Model

RAG (Red, Amber, Green system used to delegate priorities) rated into the following risk groups:

- **High risk groups:** Specialist Support, this would be an Orthoptist delivered model, visiting schools or using a mobile clinic to screen individuals with Learning disabilities or SEND needs including those in special schools.
- **Medium risk groups:** Ophthalmic -led, Targeted screening: Orthoptic-led vision checks using standardised tools (e.g., LogMAR charts) – offering a broader reach whilst maintaining specialist input.
- **Low risk groups:** Expand targeted vision screening programmes for employed adults, enhancing awareness of sight loss risks and enabling early detection of potential visual impairments.
- **Community Engagement.** Universal awareness, School-based education sessions using child-friendly materials. Implement proactive engagement strategies for individuals

with manageable sight conditions, such as glaucoma (a condition where damage to the optic nerve leads to vision loss), to support timely interventions and reduce instances of preventable sight loss.

Vista can play an active part in all the above models, but focus on the Medium & Low risk groups and Community Engagement.

### **Data-Driven Advocacy**

Vista's robust anonymised data collection can support:

- Local needs assessments.
- Evidence-based business cases for ICB funding.
- Cross-sector audits to identify gaps and track outcomes.
- Link with RNIB's Care Pathway

### **Collaborative Networks**

- Vista hosted events with talks, training and continued professional development for optometrists and orthoptists.
- Shared communication platforms (e.g., Integrated Care Board (ICB) newsletters), websites
- Co-developed approach with partners to improve data sharing and feedback

## Recommendations

- 1.** Develop Vista's Prevention Strategy (2025–2028) in collaboration with partners with clear goals for education, awareness, screening, and advocacy.
- 2.** Advocate for a screening model aligned with national standards, with robust data collection and optometrist feedback loops, with identified commissioners and funding streams with an outcome focused delivery model.
- 3.** Expand public education campaigns, especially in schools, using child-friendly materials and digital tools.
- 4.** Strengthen partnerships with Local Optometric Committees (LOCS), ICBs, and community optometrists to co-design services and training.
- 5.** Commissioners should consider investing in universal screening/awareness/education programme with school based approaches creating an awareness especially in deprived and hard to reach communities with a local robust pathway for children to have an eye exam so that not only refractive error and binocular states is assessed but their fundus (the inner, back surface of the eye) is also examined to rule out other pathology that may be missed in screening alone.



**6.** Advocate for equitable funding and inclusion of vision in local Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs).

## Conclusion

This round table marked a pivotal step in shaping a more inclusive, proactive, and data-informed approach to eye vision screening in LLR. As one participant put it, “We can’t do it all, but we can do our part—and do it well.”

Vista and its partners are committed to ensuring that no person’s potential is limited by undetected sight loss.

## References

- 1.** Report: The State of the UK’s Eye Health 2022 Specsavers UK
- 2.** Clarity for Parents: Childrens Eye Health in the UK Report by the Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO), The College of Optometrists and the Optical Suppliers Association in partnership with Mumsnet (2025)
- 3.** Vision and eye screening implementation handbook  
(Published by the World Health Organisation in January 2024)



[www.vistablind.org.uk](http://www.vistablind.org.uk)

