

Voluntary Organisations Disability Group Annual Conference 2025



Tuesday 10 June 2025

Eastside Rooms, 2 Woodcock Street,
Birmingham, West Midlands B7 4BL

vodg.org.uk/vodg-annual-conference-2025
#VODGConf25

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Contents

-
- 4 Welcome to the VODG
Annual Conference 2025
 - 5 Programme
 - 7 Opening Plenary
 - 8-9 Session | Slot A
 - 10-11 Session | Slot B
 - 11-12 Session | Slot C
 - 13 Closing Plenary
 - 15-18 With Thanks



Welcome to the Voluntary Organisations Disability Group (VODG) Annual Conference 2025

We are excited to welcome members to our flagship event! The VODG Conference brings together trustees, senior directors, and chief executives from across the country to connect, share insights and build valuable relationships.

Attendees will have numerous opportunities to engage with their peers through interactive workshops and panel discussions led by experts and fellow members. These sessions will cover important topics such as leading with purpose, navigating employment reforms, and embracing AI, while also encouraging participants to share their experiences and best practices.

The conference will provide structured opportunities for informal interactions and meaningful exchanges, enabling you to forge new connections and strengthen existing relationships within the sector.

Prepare to be inspired, learn from one another, and discover how collaboration can lead to transformative ideas and solutions for our community. Together, we can positively influence the environment in which support services operate!



Being a member of VODG has been so valuable for Milestones over the past few years, as we work through such difficult times in social care. Membership provides an opportunity to share thoughts and ideas in a safe environment with people who understand the difficulties we face while remaining dedicated to delivering excellent services for the people we support. I have greatly appreciated the rapid response from the central team to many key issues as they have arisen, particularly over the past year."

Hilary Crowhurst, Chief Executive at Milestones Trust



Programme



| | |
|-------------|--|
| 08.30–17.00 | Sponsors/Exhibition |
| 08.30–9.50 | Delegate Registration |
| 10.00–10.10 | VODG Welcome Rhidian Hughes Chief Executive at VODG |
| Room | The Belmont Suite |
| 10.10–11.10 | OPENING PLENARY PANEL |
| | Leading with Purpose Elevating Disability Representation Diane Lightfoot Chief Executive at Business Disability Forum Craig Crowley Chief Executive at Action Deafness Nigel Fletcher Chief Executive Officer at Motability Vicci Livingstone-Thompson Chief Executive Officer at Inclusion Gloucestershire Lucy Warnes Chief Executive at SignHealth |
| Room | The Belmont Suite |
| 11.10–11.30 | Break and Refreshments |
| 11.30–12.25 | SESSION – SLOT A |
| A1 | Navigating Risk, Ensuring Quality, and Assessing Financial Viability Dan Gower-Smith Group Director of Operations at Avenues Group Jonathan Taylor Divisional Director, Head of Corporate Risks, Health and Care at Innovation Broking |
| Room | Belmont One |
| A2 | Managing Rising Costs in Care Strategies for Sustainable Procurement Christoph Marr Managing Director at Marr Procurement Paul Turney Chief Financial Officer at Making Space |
| Room | Belmont Two |
| A3 | Leadership Transitions and Forward-Facing Governance Stuart McKay Partner at MHA Chris Rising Internal Audit Director at MHA Stephen Veevers Chief Executive at Hft Jana Zacheva Director at Governance & Legal |
| Room | Belmont Three and Four |
| 12.25–13.25 | Lunch |

Programme

| | |
|-------------|--|
| 13.25-14.20 | SESSION – SLOT B |
| B1 | The Role of the Third Sector in Improving Transitions to Adulthood for Disabled People Katie Ghose Chief Executive at Kids Colin Horswell Managing Director at Cordis Bright Joe Lane Deputy Director at Children's Commissioner for England Room Belmont One |
| B2 | Embracing AI Transforming Organisations for the Future Aisling Duffy Chief Executive at Certitude London Victoria Robertson Partner at Trowers & Hamlin Satya Samal Trustee at United Response and Client Partner (Financial Services) at IBM Room Belmont Two |
| B3 | Social Care and Housing Working Together John Verge Chief Executive at Golden Lane Housing Maria Mills Chief Executive at Active Prospects Room Belmont Three and Four |
| 14.20-14.35 | Break and Refreshments |
| 14.35-15.30 | SESSION – SLOT C |
| C1 | Mastering Contract Negotiations Strategies for Effective Challenges Sarah Burslem Chief Executive at MacIntyre Liam Fitzgerald Senior Associate at Anthony Collins Philip Middlewood Project Director Room Belmont One and Two |
| C2 | Navigating Employment Reforms and the Fair Pay Agreement Tom Noon Chairman and Founder at Cordis Bright Emma Burrows Partner at Trowers & Hamlin Henry Coleman Policy Advisor, Market Distorting Practices at Department for Business and Trade Gavin Edwards Senior National Officer (Social Care) at UNISON Rose Thomas-Willis Deputy Director – Fair Pay Agreements for Adult Social Care at Department of Health & Social Care Room Belmont Three and Four |
| 15.30-16.00 | Break and Refreshments |
| 16.00-16.45 | CLOSING PLENARY |
| Room | Visible and Resilient Leadership Dame Sharon White The Belmont Suite |

Opening Plenary Panel

10.10-11.10 The Belmont Suite

Leading with Purpose | Elevating Disability Representation



Diane Lightfoot (Chair)
Chief Executive,
Business Disability Forum



Craig Crowley
Chief Executive,
Action Deafness



Nigel Fletcher
Chief Executive Officer,
Motability



Our panel of expert speakers will provide insights and strategies for cultivating diverse leadership teams. Attendees will be encouraged to reflect on their personal leadership journeys, acknowledging their challenges and milestones and assessing the tools, practices, and cultural dynamics within their organisations, including active allyship. The discussion will highlight the compelling business case for inclusive leadership, underscoring its significance in driving innovation, improving decision-making, and enhancing overall organisational success.



Vicci Livingstone-Thompson
Chief Executive Officer,
Inclusion Gloucestershire



Lucy Warnes
Chief Executive,
SignHealth

Session – Slot A

11.30-12.25 Belmont One

A1 Navigating Risk, Ensuring Quality, and Assessing Financial Viability



Dan Gower-Smith
Group Director of Operations,
Avenues Group



Jonathan Taylor
Divisional Director,
Head of Corporate Risks, Health and Care,
Innovation Broking



Charities face challenges in balancing their mission with financial stability and operational integrity. This presentation covers three key areas: managing risk, ensuring quality, and assessing financial viability. Attendees will learn strategies to mitigate risks, maintain service quality amid regulations, and strengthen financial resilience for long-term success. Practical examples and expert insights will help leaders safeguard their operations, build trust, and secure a sustainable future.



11.30-12.25 Belmont Two

A2 Managing Rising Costs in Care | Strategies for Sustainable Procurement



Christoph Marr
Managing Director,
Marr Procurement



Paul Turney
Chief Financial Officer,
Making Space



Join us for an insightful session focused on navigating the increased operating costs for care providers resulting from the government's Autumn Budget. As these challenges mount, Marr Procurement offers effective solutions to help mitigate the impact of inflation.

This event will explore practical strategies and top tips for managing rising expenses alongside compelling evidence of savings achieved through real-world case studies. Attendees will gain valuable insights into cost-effective procurement practices that can enhance financial sustainability in the care sector.

Session – Slot A

11.30-12.25 Belmont Three and Four

A3 Leadership Transitions and Forward-Facing Governance



Stuart McKay
Partner,
MHA



Chris Rising
Internal Audit
Director,
MHA



Stephen Veevers
Chief Executive,
Hft



Jana Zacheva
Director,
Governance & Legal



Join VODG partners from Governance & Legal and MHA for a session focused on effective leadership transitions, succession planning, board diversity and forward-focused governance.

During the session, we'll discuss key insights for new leaders, including recognising unknowns in their first 100 days and strategies for onboarding. We'll also cover the importance of proactive succession planning, regular skills assessments and the significance of board diversity in preparation for future leadership changes. Lastly, we'll advocate for adapting governance models by shifting the focus to future challenges and opportunities rather than fixating on past issues and performance, ensuring business success and longevity.



We have benefited significantly from our VODG membership, whether it be keeping up to date with policy, regulatory or sector news, gaining insight and knowledge on specific areas of interest, building new connections and relationships, or collaborating on campaigns that champion our purpose."

Ian Pritchard, Chief Executive at Alternative Futures Group



Session – Slot B

13.25–14.20 Belmont One

B1 The Role of the Third Sector in Improving Transitions to Adulthood for Disabled People



Katie Ghose
Chief Executive,
Kids



Colin Horswell
Managing Director,
Cordis Bright



Joe Lane
Deputy Director,
Children's Commissioner
for England



With provocations from our speakers, this interactive session will encourage delegates to consider the role third-sector organisations can play in helping to address the systemic challenges faced by disabled young people and their families as they navigate the transition from children's to adult services.

13.25–14.20 Belmont Two

B2 Embracing AI | Transforming Organisations for the Future



Aisling Duffy
Chief Executive,
Certitude London



Victoria Robertson
Partner,
Trowers & Hamblins



Satya Samal
Trustee,
United Response
and Client Partner
(Financial Services),
IBM



In this session, industry experts will explore the transformative role of artificial intelligence (AI) in nonprofit organisations, highlighting real-life benefits. Key discussions will focus on data residency, strategies to prevent data leaks, and addressing biases in AI models to ensure fair outcomes. The panel will also examine decision-making, organisational readiness, and cost-effective strategies for scaling AI over the next 18 months. The session will emphasise both the opportunities AI presents and the associated challenges related to legal compliance.

Session – Slot B

13.25–14.20 Belmont Three and Four

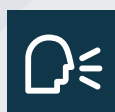
B3 Social Care and Housing Working Together



John Verge
Chief Executive,
Golden Lane
Housing



Maria Mills
Chief Executive,
Active Prospects



This session will explore the ways in which social care and housing provision are working together, and what else could be done to strengthen partnerships between third sector providers and housing organisations, to best support disabled people to live the lives they choose. Forthcoming Supported Housing Regulations and welfare reforms have put into sharp focus the interdependencies of housing, health and care, and their shared role in transforming lives through good quality support.



Session – Slot C

14.35–15.30 Belmont One and Two

C1 Mastering Contract Negotiations | Strategies for Effective Challenges



Sarah Burslem
Chief Executive,
MacIntyre



Liam Fitzgerald
Senior Associate,
Anthony Collins



Philip Middlewood
Project Director



This session will explore the topic of negotiating contracts and care fees, including annual uplifts. It will consider the recent Stoke case and how it can be used in practice. It will also consider the broad legal framework around fees paid by local authorities and which key clauses to look out for in contractual agreements, plus practical examples of tactical approaches that have previously delivered successful outcomes.

Session – Slot C

14.35–15.30 Belmont Three and Four

C2 Navigating Employment Reforms and the Fair Pay Agreement



Tom Noon (Chair)
Founder,
Cordis Bright



Emma Burrows
Partner,
Trowers & Hamlin



Henry Coleman
Policy Advisor, Market
Distorting Practices,
Department for
Business and Trade



Gavin Edwards
Senior National
Officer (Social Care),
UNISON



Rose Thomas-Willis
Deputy Director –
Fair Pay Agreements
for Adult Social Care,
Department of
Health & Social Care



As a local organisation, our membership of VODG connects us to a much bigger picture. It helps keeps us informed of the latest policy developments, connects us with like-minded organisations, but perhaps more importantly helps to amplify our voice at a local and national level."

Kevin Peacock, Chief Executive
at Options



At a time of unprecedented change for employment reforms, workforce challenges and funding pressures, our expert speakers explore the government's ambitions for employment reforms, including a fair pay agreement, and what they mean for third sector providers.

Closing Plenary

16.00-16.45 The Belmont Suite

Visible and Resilient Leadership



Dame Sharon White



For our closing session we are joined by our keynote speaker, Dame Sharon White, who is an acknowledged business leader, currently Chair of Frontier Economics and previously chairman of the John Lewis Partnership – the first woman to be appointed into the position.

Dame Sharon brings a wealth of experience from working in government, regulation and employee-owned business to the conference. She will provide unique perspectives on leadership at scale and connecting commerciality with purpose. As a visible and resilient leader, Dame Sharon will also explore the qualities required for making tough decisions in purpose-driven organisations.



We are a long-standing member and supporter of VODG, and our affiliation brings us many benefits. VODG are always quick to respond to any sector issues, listen to their members and offer many opportunities for members to connect with one another to share experiences, both the good and the bad. We work in a sector that is not without its challenges and that opportunity to connect with others is so important."

Rachael Dodgson, Chief Executive at Dimensions



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Our award-winning team acts for over 1,000 not-for-profit organisations around the country. The team consists of accounting, auditing and advisory specialists and has built up a well-earned reputation of providing first class support and consultancy services.

Our commitment to the not-for-profit sector permeates through the firm and is core to our ethos. We are often involved in the production of sector responses and guidelines, and are consulted by regulators, government departments and tax authorities on key matters within the sector.



Our specialist lawyers are deeply embedded in the health and social care sector, advising operators, local authorities, the NHS, investors and developers. As a market leader, we understand all forms of care provision from multiple client perspectives. Our award-winning practice supports hundreds of charities and care providers, including VODG members, showcasing our nationally recognised expertise.

Our support to VODG members includes governance, risk management, people management, financial and contract management, and property management and we bring commercial benefits to our clients through our breadth of experience and depth of knowledge.

Partners



Agenda Consulting (a WorkBuzz company) is committed to working with leaders of UK not-for-profit organisations, enabling them to measure, improve and sustain high levels of employee and volunteer engagement.



Anthony Collins is a specialist law firm with a clear purpose – to improve lives, communities and society. Our health and social care team acts for social care providers across the full range of legal issues.

With Thanks

Partners



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Innovation Broking supports charities and care organisations with tailored insurance and risk management solutions. With expert advice and sector-specific insights, we help safeguard operations, ensuring financial stability and quality service delivery in a constantly evolving landscape.



Specialising in supporting Associations and not-for-profit organisations with their annual meeting and event requirements. Our free venue finding service lets you relax while we do all the legwork saving you time and money.



Utility Aid is the UK's largest energy broker for the voluntary sector, working with over 4,000 organisations and counting. We are passionate about reducing energy costs, so that you have more money to spend on your services.

Exhibitors



Access Social Care provides legal advice for people with health and social care needs. We empower individuals and communities to enforce their legal right to care, and gather data to advocate for system change.



We're about banking with purpose. We're here for our 14,000-strong community, supporting charitable and social purpose organisations across the UK. We believe in the power of good – and treating your goals like they're our own.



Cohesion is an organisation of social care specialists improving recruitment and retention. We are a highly trained and experienced team from within social care that understands the intricacies of recruitment and the values required in a specialist sector.



ESG Pro delivers ESG and Sustainability results to strengthen your business – reducing risks, cutting costs, winning customers, and opening new opportunities – with practical, affordable solutions designed to make a real difference through social value innovation.

With Thanks

Exhibitors



A leading healthcare and social care business intelligence provider for over 30 years, LaingBuisson is also the chosen supplier of independent sector healthcare market data to the UK Government's Office for National Statistics.



My Family Our Needs (MFON) offers online and printed information, guidance and advice on all aspects of supporting a child or young person with additional needs from birth right up to the age of 25.



The Health & Social Care team at RWK Goodman is a recognised market leader, with in-depth knowledge and experience in the social care sector providing insightful and pragmatic solutions for care providers.



Sona is the next generation workforce management platform that combines Scheduling, Time and Attendance, HR and Payroll, with dedicated features to empower staff and solve the unique challenges of social care, all in a user-friendly, end-to-end platform.



Money Carer supports VODG members to provide corporate appointeeship, money management, and direct payments services. Now also developing accessible payment devices, including wearables and a Biometric card, enhancing financial inclusion and independence for those with disabilities.



Placing purpose and quality before profit, Peridot Partners is a values-led third-sector executive recruitment agency transforming leadership and inspiring change with organisations that have a social purpose.



SCIE is a leading provider of training and consultancy in health and social care. Our experienced staff offer a range of customised solutions and training that improve quality, safety and outcomes in social care.



Wrigleys is a specialist law firm with a dedicated charities and social economy team that advises hundreds of charities and not-for-profit organisations. We provide practical, common-sense, and technically excellent advice, forming long-term relationships with clients.

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