



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

Minister for Disabled People,  
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Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP  
Chair, Women and Equalities Committee

5 November 2020

Dear Caroline,

Thank you for your letter on 21 October, following my appearance before your Committee on 2 September. I welcome the opportunity to respond to points raised.

You highlighted a recent article which asserted that I had “appeared to mislead” the Committee. I strongly refute this assertion.

When in my evidence I said “*we have set up a separate group for disability-led organisations. Again, I am meeting those monthly to empower their voices*”, I was referring to the Disabled People’s Organisations (DPO) Forum which I have established, and not to the Regional Stakeholder Network. I believe this is clear from my evidence, and it is unhelpful of the article you reference to suggest otherwise by conflating two aspects of my Department’s stakeholder engagement.

I have personally met a wide range of stakeholders throughout this year; including the Disability Charities Consortium, the DPO Forum, the Regional Stakeholder Network and a large number of other organisations and individuals. Since I appeared before your Committee, I have hosted six engagement sessions with national disability stakeholders including RNIB and Macmillan Cancer Support, to discuss my Department’s upcoming Green Paper and the National Strategy for Disabled People. And on 23 September I hosted a Green Paper workshop with 21 disability organisations including 4 DPOs. On 29 September I held a similar event for Scottish disability stakeholders.

The Regional Stakeholder Network was set up to make it easier for individual disabled people, as well as DPOs and other disability organisations across the whole of the country to link up and feed in their lived experience and insight directly to the Government. I met the Chairs of the Regional Stakeholder Network on 30 September to hear about the progress they have been making in their regions. They explained that despite the constraints in place around being able to hold meetings physically, they have been keeping in touch with their members in a variety of ways

(including telephone and email), reflecting the communications needs of individual members. This has enabled them to provide the Disability Unit with feedback on important issues such as Covid-19 impact and the National Strategy for Disabled People, despite being unable to meet in person.

The Network is currently working with over 200 organisations and individuals, and greatly expands the range of voices we are able to hear from on a regular basis. It is inaccurate to suggest that no work or engagement has taken place. Of course, once public health guidance allows, we will again hold face to face meetings.

I am personally committed to listening to the views and experiences of disabled people from across this country, and we will continue to do so.

I hope you find this reply useful.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Justin" with a flourish underneath.

**Justin Tomlinson MP**  
Minister for Disabled People, Health & Work