

Written evidence from the Disability Rights UK COL0028

Q4 Policy Update 2022

1. Social Security and Living Standards

The financial pressures on Disabled people are mounting with dramatic increases in inflation, housing costs, energy bills and food and fuel costs. 60% of people seeking support on financial issues from Citizens Advice are Disabled people. 62% of those visiting Trussell Trust food banks are Disabled people. Figures from the Food Foundation show that Disabled people with the most challenges are 6 times more likely to be experiencing food insecurity.

We have written to the business minister seeking urgent action on protecting Disabled people from rising energy costs and spoken out in the media on the worsening situation relating to energy and food bills. We have been quoted in the Food Foundation's press release on new food insecurity figures and have attended a meeting organised by the Food Foundation which included an audience with the UN Commissioner for Food. We envisage financial pressures on Disabled people growing and are working with DPOs and allies to convene a disability focused and led anti-poverty coalition which will look at, highlight and work to change all areas of poverty that affect the community.

In terms of social security, we are considering how best to support the findings of the recent Disabled peoples led Social Security Commission, which seeks a significant increase in benefit levels and disability specific benefits. We have supported calls for a 6% uprating of benefits, as opposed to the 3% inflation increase proposed. Unfortunately the legal challenge relating to the Government's failure to pay the £20 per week uplift to Universal Credit, to those on Employment and Support Allowance and legacy benefits, has been lost.

2. Health and Social Care

The focus this quarter has been on working with a coalition of disability organisations to support amendments to the Health and Care Bill in the House of Lords, to make social care free for working age adults. We have supported joint briefings to peers, the dissemination of a letter which has been drafted to send to peer in

the House of Lords and for DPOs and Disabled people to send to MPs. We have also sought media coverage around the issue. We have been working closely with Baroness Jane Campbell and Inclusion London on this activity.

In terms of health, we have spoken out about the lack of protections for clinically vulnerable people in the light of removal of all COVID related restrictions. We have repeated our calls for better information, practical support and employment protections, made in our letter to Sajid Javid in December 2021.

We have supported work by Health Watch England, that demonstrates the inadequate implementation of the NHS Accessible Information Standard. Research findings show that five years after the implementation of the Standard, there are major systemic and leadership issues preventing its delivery.

3. Disability Strategy and Disability Rights

The High Court has ruled that the consultation on the Disability Strategy and the Strategy itself were unlawful. We supported the drafting of a letter sent by the DPO Forum to the Minister for Disabled people, asking for full engagement in advance of renewing the Strategy and a pause on the current disability stakeholder review. We organised a meeting between representatives of DR UK Our Voices group and the Minister, Chloe Smith on 22 February, where we highlighted the role of DPOs and the importance of engaging directly with Disabled people and DPOs.

Figures on disability hate crime (DHC) show an increase in recorded cases by the police and a fall in CPS prosecutions. We have met with representatives from the Police and CPS to understand the situation and are now working to create a more unified voice on DHC from the disability movement. We have drafted a DHC charter and will be setting up a DHC forum. The Government is due to publish a Hate Crime Plan and we want there to be a united voice calling for the introduction of a specific offence of disability hate crime and action to improve reporting and prosecution. We have written to the Secretary of State, Priti Patel, asking for the Law Commission recommendation on introducing a specific offence of DHC to be urgently acted on.

We have held a meeting on the forthcoming COVID Public Inquiry, to ensure that the voices of Disabled people are well represented. A solicitors firm, Bhatt Murphy, has agreed to make representations on behalf of DPOs in the lead up to the Inquiry, to support us to comment on the Terms of Reference when published and to support our request for Core Participant Status.

The Government is proposing to break links with the European Convention on Human Rights and issued a consultation in December. This consultation has not been produced in accessible formats and we have worked with Liberty to request an extension to the consultation and to seek support from other disability organisations.

4. Employment and Post 16 Education

We worked with the Disabled Apprentices Network, to launch a publication and video on the views and experiences of Disabled apprentices, during National Apprenticeship Week. The publication has been widely praised and some of the Disabled apprentices spoke at events during National Apprenticeship week and at the Disability Skills Unit (DSU) Conference on 22 February. This virtual Conference received excellent feedback. It included a wide range of speakers and over 100 delegates.

We have supported a Disabled school student to challenge the inadequate adjustments being offered by examination boards for her A-Level exams. Through doing this work, we have recognised that the requirement to test memory as part of exams, is discriminatory. We are hopeful that a legal challenge might be made on this point.

We responded to the Government's school attendance consultation which set out aims for a stricter and more consistently implemented framework for managing attendance in the UK. This comes as the government are trying to tackle the rise in absence seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. These stricter proposals included fining and prosecuting parents whose children have low attendance rates. Our response highlighted 5 key issues. These ranged from: the additional barriers Disabled students face regarding attendance and the danger of criminalising Disabled students' parents, to the impact of institutionalised ableist attitudes within the education system. For example, the way that 100%

attendance is commonly celebrated in schools. Our response also highlighted how SEND students are disproportionately impacted by exclusions, so are often barred from attending school, and that effective attendance support means meeting students where they are to achieve their full potential.

We are working to improve access to Higher Education for Disabled students and have appeared in the media on occasions where universities have been found to have not met their legal obligations of reasonable adjustments.

We have begun to collaborate with Disabled Students UK on various projects, focusing on increasing transparency around inclusive practices at universities. We plan to meet with the Office for Students on improving the National Student Survey (NSS), and we're hoping to work with policymakers to incorporate accessibility and inclusion into the UK University League Tables. The hope is to bring access to the forefront for Disabled students when they apply to university, as support varies across HE institutions and finding information on what support is available is currently very difficult.

We took part in Lord Holmes' roundtable on the issues with the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA). Our evidence, amongst others', has been included in a report due to be published imminently. We hope to continue to collaborate with Lord Holmes in our work on improving access to Higher Education for Disabled students.

We have drafted a response to the Government's consultation on Disability Workforce Monitoring, which will call for mandatory monitoring and reporting of Disabled people in the workforce for all organisations with over 250 employees. We are also proposing an updated template for employers that want to voluntarily introduce disability monitoring across a wider range of employment indicators.

We have had several meetings and workshops with the DWP, assisting them to create an advice service for employers to improve the access and inclusion of their workplaces. This has been positive and seen a transformation from their initial product which viewed 'disabled' as synonymous with 'sick' and put the responsibility of reasonable adjustments on the employee over the employer.

5. Transport, Housing and Environment

We have worked to improve the physical access of train stations, to feed into plans to improve audio announcements on trains, to highlight the information needs of those who can't access digital information or ticketing and to improve the response to disability hate crime by rail operators and British Transport Police.

We have supported Bus Users UK to develop an accessibility audit for Bus companies to complete. The timing of this audit has been delayed by other pressing issues in the Bus industry. We are particularly concerned by the way in which bus companies have reduced services, often without taking into account the needs of their Disabled passengers, and have made representations on this issue.

Following the banning of all cars including those with Blue Badges, to streets in York City Centre, we have been working to bring Disabled people experiencing Blue Badge issues across England together. We propose to develop an England-wide position statement, which covers all the challenges being experienced, so the issues can be raised with Government.

We have published a survey conducted in autumn 2021 on access to streets, which shows that Disabled people are experiencing significant problems in moving around safely and independently in their local neighbourhoods. It also shows that Disabled people have very little confidence that their concerns will be addressed by Local Authority complaints processes. A letter has been sent to both the minister for disabled people and the secretary of state for transport addressing these issues and asking for a consultation.

We continue to ask Government to introduce Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs), as recommended by the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. We have written to Priti Patel asking that regulations are laid before Parliament. We have also questioned the Government award of a contract to prepare guidance on the regulations, to a fire safety expert that has opposed PEEPs since 2011 and who has shown no understanding of the rights of Disabled people.

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