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29th February 2024

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer

Dear Chancellor of the Exchequer,

Invest in the future of Disabled people

We are writing on behalf of the Disability Poverty Campaign Group (DPCG), which is led by Disabled people's organisations and includes a growing number of disability and anti-poverty organisations. Our purpose is to highlight the dire financial circumstances faced by millions of Disabled people and to call for action.

Ahead of the upcoming Budget, we urge you to use this final opportunity before the General Election, to take strong, bold, and empathetic financial decisions, not only to address the disproportionate impact of the cost-of-living crisis on Disabled people, but to improve our life chances. On your Government's watch, the lives of Disabled citizens have worsened on every social and economic indicator.

This Budget provides you with an opportunity to re-write and drastically improve the lives of the UK's 14 million Disabled citizens, by implementing the following measures:

1. Significantly increase benefit rates.

Since 2008, welfare benefit reforms have led to Disabled people having lost benefit payments of around £1,200 on average each year while non-disabled people have seen a reduction of around £300.

Research by the Resolution Foundation highlighted that Disabled people are hardest hit by the Cost-of-living crisis, disproportionately struggling to pay energy costs and food bills.

We call on the Chancellor to introduce an Essentials Guarantee that will significantly improve Disabled people's standard of living.

An Essentials Guarantee within universal credit would ensure that everyone has a protected minimum amount of support to afford essentials like food and household bills.

While this would also improve Disabled people's standard of living, like means tested benefits, disability and carers benefits have never been tested for adequacy. So, these should be similarly tested and then paid at a suitable increased rate.

The bedroom tax, two child limit and benefit sanctions should also all be removed.

2. Investment in public services – Health, Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), Social Care and Transport

60 per cent of those who died from Covid-19 were Disabled people. The health inequalities Disabled people already faced were made worse by the pandemic and a decade of austerity. Investment in the National Health Service should be increased, to enable all citizens including Disabled people, to receive the vital health care and treatments we need.

SEND provision has recently been under the spotlight as councils across the country make cuts to services. Thousands of children with SEND have been waiting a year or longer, to access educational support. Education is a right for ALL children and Disabled children must have the appropriate support to blossom and grow. The Government is currently starving local authorities of the necessary funds.

Social care is massively underfunded, resulting in Disabled people of all ages being denied the support we require to live with dignity and choice. Recently Bristol City Council withdrew its Fair & Affordable Care Policy which aimed to put disabled people into residential accommodation if our support at home was deemed too costly. This proposal

clearly demonstrates the chronic underfunding of Social Care. The Government needs to urgently increase investment in social care and make it free at the point of use.

In terms of public transport, the Government should be fast tracking investment in accessible infrastructure and vehicles, enabling Disabled people to travel accessibly and affordably. The importance of human support for travellers, to enable journey planning, ticket purchases and passenger assistance, must continue to be a priority.

3. Meet the energy costs of Disabled people.

We constantly hear from Disabled people, who are going days without eating or heating, using candles instead of lights and rationing the use of health-related equipment and wheelchairs to save power, as social security levels and financial support are far too low, while energy costs have spiralled. Some Disabled people have a greater reliance on energy than others because of the need to power essential health and mobility equipment and keep body temperatures regulated to stave off illness.

We ask that you introduce the energy social tariff, promised in your 2022 autumn statement. An energy social tariff, that based eligibility on low household income and or high energy consumption because of disability. It would be

just, fair and in an era of soaring energy profits, possible to do. A tariff would help to reduce inflation by bringing down the cost of energy bills, plus allowing people to put money back into the economy.

An additional option would be to support Disabled people to meet higher bills through further cost-of-living payments. However, they need to be set at a rate to cover financial expenditure rather than being a tokenistic gesture, which makes little difference.

The Government changed eligibility for the Warm Homes Discount scheme, which saw almost 300,000 disability benefit claimants no longer able to get the rebate, due to the new criteria. We ask for this to be reversed, with Disabled people who claim non-means tested extra cost benefits such as personal independence payments, attendance allowance or disability living allowance, allowed to apply.

4. Increase the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG)

Although we welcome the news that the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) for social care recipients is to be raised in line with inflation, we feel that there is a proven need to raise the amount above that line.

Previous freezing of the MIG, especially under the watch of Previous health secretary Matt Hancock, saw a real terms loss in value of the guarantee. The government admitted in 2023 in response to MP questions on MIG that no assessment has been made of whether it is sufficient to live on. We know it is not, and that disabled people charged for home care from benefit income are living in debt and distress in consequence.

We are also aware that local authorities are not using their discretionary power to raise MIG above inflation under the flawed care act provision, which is resulting in a postcode lottery of care and support across the UK. We urge you to make sure that authorities use new powers to ensure MIG payments are just and equal across the country.

5. Freezing rents and housing.

The Government must end unfair rent profiteering during this cost-of-living crisis.

Rent rises being pushed through are unfair and unjustifiable. Rents must be frozen for all including Disabled people. Renters are struggling with low incomes, extreme fuel poverty and more. Greedy rent rises are pushing Disabled households to the edge.

The dire shortage of private rental properties suitable for Disabled people is also an urgent issue.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission found that 93% of 8.5 million rental properties in the UK were not accessible to Disabled people. We ask you to invest in accessible housing through increasing individual payments from the Disabled Facilities Grant and increasing accessible new build homes, so Disabled people of all ages can live safely and independently in our own homes.



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6. Establish a fund to support Disabled election candidates with reasonable adjustments.

We, as Disabled people, need to be part of the political process, but due to social and attitudinal barriers and lack of funding to meet our reasonable adjustments, we are grossly under-represented.

The UK Government has promised that an Access to Elections Fund will be established in 2025 but this must be brought forward to this year. It is not acceptable that Disabled candidates for parliamentary and local government elections in 2024 will receive no financial support to meet the reasonable adjustments they need to campaign on a level playing field.

We need more representation of Disabled people in political office. Only 5 MPs identified as Disabled people in 2019. More Disabled MPs and councillors would give us more confidence that our issues were understood and that our voices were heard in political arenas.

Recent fiscal events and budgets have failed to tackle any of the economic and social issues felt by the countries Disabled population. Disabled households with at least 1 disabled adult or child, face extra costs of **£975 a month** on average according to DPCG member SCOPE. This budget is an opportunity for you and the Government to acknowledge the deep poverty and deprivation facing Disabled citizens and determine to address the inequalities we face.

With fair and ethical approaches, you can not only begin the process of removing long term poverty but also give Disabled people a voice, choice, and a decent standard of living.

The Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said the UK is a "compassionate" country, but Disabled people feel that our current existence is proof that it is not.

In the Budget on 6 March, we urge you to take action to reverse the disparities faced by Disabled people and to invest in our future.

For further reading and information please visit our [Disabled peoples manifesto](#) website.

Yours Faithfully

On behalf of The Disability Poverty Campaign Group:

Dan White (Disability Rights UK)
Svetlana Kotova (Inclusion London)
Helen Rowlands (Inclusion London)