Liz Kendall

Secretary of State

Department for Work and Pensions

Caxton House

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cc Sir Stephen Timms - Minister Of State For Social Security and Disability

15 July 2024

Dear Secretary of State

**Disabled people and social security benefits**

Congratulations on your appointment as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

Disability Rights UK is the UK’s leading organisation led by, run by, and working for Disabled people. Alongside Disabled People’s Organisations, we seek to influence UK Government to improve the life chances of Disabled people.

We look forward to working with the new Government to make the equality and inclusion of the UK’s 16 million Disabled people a reality.

We wish to raise with you the urgent need to solve welfare benefit issues that are badly affecting Disabled people, both in terms of adequacy and eligibility.

We would highlight the following three issues, although there are many others that we will raise with you in due course.

* Benefit adequacy
* Personal Independence Payment (PIP)
* work capability assessment (WCA)

**Benefit adequacy**

In its research report, [UK Poverty 2023](https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/uk_poverty_2023_-_the_essential_guide_to_understanding_poverty_in_the_uk_0_0.pdf), the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) highlighted that “Disabled people face a higher risk of poverty and have done so for at least the last 20 years.

“This is driven partly by the additional costs associated with disability and ill-health, and partly by the barriers to work Disabled people face.

“As a result, Disabled people and/or families where someone is Disabled frequently rely on benefit payments as a source of income, which at current rates will almost inevitably lead to higher poverty rates”.

Further, a 2023 All Party Parliamentary Group of MPs on Poverty (APPG) inquiry, found that [Disabled people are almost three times as likely to live in material deprivation in comparison to the rest of the population (34 % vs 13%)](https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/%E2%80%9Cenough-be-able-live-not-just-survive%E2%80%9D-new-appg-poverty-report-inadequacy-social-security).

Shockingly, the Trussell Trust report that [nearly 7 in 10 (69%) of those referred to its food banks are Disabled people](https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/number-trussell-trust-food-parcels-nearly-double-over-past-five-years).

The Work and Pensions Committee March 2024 report, [Benefit levels in the UK](https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/164/work-and-pensions-committee/news/200572/benefit-levels-in-the-uk-mps-call-for-cost-of-living-benchmark-and-annual-uprating-guarantee/), highlights that claimants are often not able to afford daily living costs and the extra costs associated with having a health condition or disability.

The Committee urge the development of a framework of principles to inform how benefit levels are set, and to outline objectives linked to living costs as well as work incentives.

It also cited the methodology used in the JRF and Trussell Trust’s ‘[Essentials Guarantee](https://www.jrf.org.uk/social-security/guarantee-our-essentials-reforming-universal-credit-to-ensure-we-can-all-afford-the?_ga=2.124231884.772213834.1711035371-1987904497.1711035356)’.

We would ask that you urgently instigate an independent process to regularly determine an Essentials Guarantee level, based on the cost of household essentials (such as food, utilities and vital household goods), that would include an extra disability related costs addition.

**Personal Independence Payment (PIP)**

Prior to the General Election, the previous Government launched a consultation on PIP reform.

Included in their [Green Paper](https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/pip-reform-green-paper%E2%80%99s-clear-agenda-reducing-financial-support-disabled-people-says-dr-uk), are proposals to replace PIP with a vouchers or one off grants rather than ongoing benefit payments.

Disabled people are asked to rank their PIP spending priorities – for example choosing whether it is more important to them that they have money for food or money for medication. In addition, other proposals included both restricting PIP eligibility rules and PIP assessment criteria.

None of the proposals had ever been discussed with DPOs or Disabled people.

The goals of the proposed reforms were to reduce the number of claimants and diminish financial support - breaking with the principle of a cash benefit to meet the extra costs of disability.

We would ask you to scrap the Green Paper and reject its proposals.

**Work Capability Assessment (WCA)**

Following a consultation of just 8 weeks, in November 2023 the previous Government announced it intended to further restrict the work capability WCA from 2025.

It also intended that it would first restrict eligibility for the [limited capability for work](https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/resources/work-capability-assessment#LimitedCapabilityforWorkAssessment) (LCW) and [limited capability for work-related activity](https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/resources/work-capability-assessment#LimitedCapabilityforWorkRelatedActivityAssessment) (LCWRA) categories within Universal Credit (UC) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

The Office for Budget Responsibility estimates that these planned WCA changes would mean that by 2028/29, 424,000 people with serious mobility or mental health problems would be denied both extra Universal Credit worth over £400 a month and protection from sanctions.

Whilst just 3% of those affected, were expected to move into work in the subsequent four years.

These reforms would not reduce economic inactivity. Instead, they would condemn seriously ill and Disabled people to a life of poverty and the threat of sanctions.

As you know, the previous Government had planned for the regulations to bring in these plans to be put before Parliament in June, once scrutinised by the Social Security Advisory Committee.

This was prevented, however, by the calling of the General Election.

As an incoming government, we ask that you do not proceed with these measures.

We also ask that plans set out in the Health and Disability White Paper in March 2023, to remove the WCA completely are rejected. We note your intention to reform the WCA and we would ask that any process involves Disabled people at its heart.

We do want Disabled people, who could gain employment, to have the appropriate support. We believe that this support can best be delivered by Disabled people’s organisations. We oppose sanctions being used, as a way of driving employment, and there is no evidence that this strategy has ever been effective.

We would welcome your thoughts on the issues and points we have made.

We recognise that a radical redesign of the social security system cannot be implemented immediately.

However, we would welcome an ongoing dialogue with you as to what needs to be done and how.

We would hope that you will institute regular roundtable meetings with ourselves and other members of the [Disabled Peoples Forum England](https://www.disabledpeoplesmanifesto.com/) so Disabled peoples’ problems are highlighted and understood, and resolved through a co-production process.

Thank you for your consideration of the issues and points that we have raised.

Yours Sincerely

Kamran Mallick

CEO Disability Rights UK