**Focus Group Note Summary.**

Participants attending these sessions offered a diverse perspective which included disabled people, carers of disabled people and those supporting disabled people access welfare. The focus group used the questions set out in the presentation to shape the conversations of the group

Overall, the focus groups revealed a strong sense of nothing had changed since 2017. Participants reflected that things have largely remained the same. *‘Still the same issues that haven’t been sorted out’.* Voices also felt they were continually asking for their rights to be considered across policy, social care and society overall. Conversations revealed a sense of being forgotten, hidden and last to be thought of and still having to ensure their rights are met as being normal life.

The focus group commented on the UK’s National Strategy Disability Strategy published July 2021. Conversations generally welcomed the strategy and were hopeful, however for some it was seen as a *‘wasted opportunity’* noting that *‘things should have been done a long time ago’* . Other participants perceived the strategy to be *‘just words’* offering nothing for, deaf and disabled people or disability organisations noting *‘even those who have a newly acquired disability, using the strategy they wouldn’t know what that meant to them regarding their rights’* focus group participants felt overall the strategy was just words with nothing behind it.

Further commentary from participants, who are active in disability stakeholder groups, shared that despite government expressing they consult as well as listen to deaf and disabled people, participants weren’t convinced their recommendations or voices were being heard. This left participants expressing they are *‘Left with this thought there is a vacuum.’* The overall sense from participants was that disabled people have things *‘done to’* them and would welcome being *‘at the top table’* in finding solutions. *‘It has to be a partnership not a means to an end’*

A notion was raised with regards to welfare advice for disabled people, noting it has historically been challenging. However, the introduction of universal credit has not been without its difficulties either, acknowledging there is a chance disabilities may be overlooked in the application for Universal Credit.

Participants also recognised for those with a newly acquired disability may also struggle to know where to access help and support. From a welfare advisor perspective, this could potentially mean some disabled people experience being penalised. It was also noted that those with hidden disabilities, such as mental health have found it difficult during the pandemic accessing the assessment process. It was also noted there was an inconsistency in the use video assessments and a reliance on phone assessment during this time for disabled people applying for Personal Independence Payments (PIP). There was a view that non face to face assessments, have the potential to negatively influenced decisions, resulting in advice practitioners supporting more disabled people through the appeal process.

Participants shared their thoughts on the recent green paper expressing it focused on economics and affordability rather than the human rights of deaf and disabled people. *‘these are the rights of people who aren’t economic viable, this shouldn’t be the only measure.*’

Across the conversations a range of experiences were shared, in particular around benefits and work. There was a sense of difference between those disabled people who can work and those who are unable too. *‘…..all those who can’t work, who receive benefits have nothing, its only if you can work……not against that but misses out a big group of people. I still get the feeling that people with a disability are perceived as less by this government and that has an impact on the rest of society. It’s clearly a big thing.’*

Participants highlighted as disabled people and carers they do contribute at an economic level, as their money is spent on essential support and care needs. For those purchasing care through direct payments, participants shared having to navigate law and legislation in managing their budgets. The overall expression was that participants disability takes a great deal of time and energy in order to have an independent and fulfilling life.

Differences continued to be discussed that related to locality and local authorities response for deaf and disabled people. Social care provision was brought into the conversation noticing that local authorities are charging more, leaving disabled people on benefits to pay more for their support. Questions were raised as to local authority social care spending within council budgets and the tension of managing the allocation of central funding at a local level, that may impact April next year meeting minimum pay.

Changes in accessibility to buildings was discussed, with the experience of disabled people accessing facilities for example was variable. Participants reported a there remains limited human consideration for disabled people, when it comes to the accessibility and facilities, especially in new buildings and shopping centres for example. The sense in the conversations was that facilities had ticked a box in open access and inclusive facilities. Participants felt that these have the potential for abuse, limiting provision for disabled people. However, the broadening of the for Blue Badge to include those with mental health and unseen disabilities was very much welcomed.

Participants commented on the inconsistency and constant changed with national at local government regarding disability. Participants highlighted some of the challenges when asking questions of statutory agencies such as the DWP and NHS, noting there was a disconnect across departments when receiving answers. This left people confused as to where do people go for questions to be answered as there are conflicted messaging across statuary agencies.

The pandemic was seen by those taking part in the focus group discussions as being the most significant event, impacting on deaf and disabled people since 2017. Focus group participants revealed there was a sense of ongoing inequality of ‘not being at the top table’ especially when it came to how the introduction of the COVID Act 2020. Participants expressed a sense of anxiety surrounding COVID referring to the number of deaf and disabled people who had died from Coronavirus. This created a sense of anxiety as participants express how deaf and disabled people have navigated between equalities and the COVID Act with regards to their rights. From a Carers perspective there was a variance in getting those with learning disabilities on to the vulnerable list. Furthermore, participants reported at the beginning there was confusion with regards to disabled people returning to work and a sense the guidance lacked clarity, leaving disabled people feeling vulnerable and confused.

Conversations relating to mental health were shared noticing the disconnection experienced by young disabled people transferring between child and adult mental health services, discussion the impact experienced in maintaining their essential mental health support.

Overall participants attending the focus group sessions recognised the implementation of the UNCRDDP hasn’t been felt by those present. The overall feeling was that there is a long way to go for deaf and disabled people in the UK to feel their rights are meet.