

Policy briefing

Financial statement: No more austerity - protect Disabled people's rights and lives

This briefing is from the Disabled People's Organisations Forum - a coalition of 40 Deaf and Disabled people's led organisations working in different regions of England.

We are horrified at the prospect of further cuts to public services and the impact these cuts will have on Disabled people¹. Disabled people have been amongst the hardest hit by the last 12 years of austerity, the pandemic and now the cost-of-living crisis. Disabled people still face multiple barriers to having an equal life and many of us need support from essential public services, including social care and social housing to live a decent life.

In the current cost of living crisis, which for many Disabled people comes on top of significant extra costs of disability, we know further cuts to the already minimal support that Disabled people get will lead to devastating consequences, including serious deterioration of people's quality of life, physical and mental wellbeing and the loss of lives.

We are calling on the government to show responsibility and compassion to protect Disabled people's lives, dignity, inclusion and rights by ruling out further

¹ By Disabled people we mean people with physical, sensory, neurological and other impairments, people with learning difficulties or autism, people with experience of mental distress/trauma and other people with impairments or health conditions who face disabling barriers in society.

cuts to essential services and support and by committing additional targeted support to help Disabled people survive this cost-of-living crisis. **The government must make different political choices – austerity is the problem not the answer.**

We are asking you as a Member of Parliament to stand up for Disabled people and our quality of life, dignity, inclusion and rights. We need you to:

- Protect services that are essential to Disabled people’s equality, independence, choice and control by raising awareness of the impact further cuts to public services will have on Disabled people and by voting against any measures that would lead to cuts to essential support for Disabled people;
- Call on the government to conduct a thorough Cumulative Impact Assessment on any proposed public spending cuts and take positive steps to mitigate any disproportionate impact on Disabled people.
- Be an advocate for Disabled people in debates and lobby the government to support Disabled people in the cost-of-living crisis and lobby for:
 - Increase to benefits in line with inflation.
 - Protect non-means tested status of PIP, DLA, AA.
 - Stop councils taking people’s disability benefits to pay for social care.
 - Protect Disabled people and families from eviction.
 - Put in place targeted support for those who have higher energy bills.
 - Abolish “no recourse to public funds”.
 - Protect access to education.

Background information and evidence

We all want to live in a society where everyone has the right to live and is treated with dignity and respect, where people do not starve, freeze or struggle in squalid conditions because they cannot afford food, heating or care services.

Disabled people were among the hardest hit by cuts to public services and changes to welfare benefits since 2010.

There is a growing body of evidence that real term reduction in health and social care spending since 2010 led to tens of thousands of excess deaths².

The research by Disability Benefits Consortium found that Disabled people were four times worse off as a result of welfare benefits changes from 2010 compared to non-disabled people on average losing £1200 per year with those who have highest support needs losing £2100 in benefits income. Households in London with one child and at least one Disabled person lost £3800 per year on average³.

Research by the Equality and Human Rights Commission found that Disabled people with high support needs, especially single mothers and other lone parents and single mothers of colour were among the groups who lost the most financially as a result of cuts to public services and changes to welfare⁴.

- Massive reductions to community services and support led to devastating consequences to Disabled people's rights and opportunities:
- Disabled single mothers are more at risk of our children being taken into care, as poverty is wrongly treated as neglect. Funding for keeping families together was cut while "child protection" spending has massively increased⁵.

² Lewer, D., & Bibby, J. (2021). Cuts to local government funding and stalling life expectancy. Retrieved from [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(21\)00136-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(21)00136-5/fulltext)

³ Disability Benefits Consortium (2019). The impact of welfare changes on disabled people, <https://disabilitybenefitsconsortium.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/disability-benefits-consortium-cumulative-impact-report.pdf>

⁴ The HERC (2018). The Cumulative impact of tax and welfare reforms. <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/cumulative-impact-assessment-report.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/childrens-home-council-funding-social-care-b2212175.html>
<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/aug/28/councils-england-wales-pay-1m-pounds-a-year-to-house-child-in-private-care-home>

- The number of people detained in institutions⁶ and the use of physical restraint⁷ has increased.
- Cuts to Special Educational Needs budgets⁸ have compounded a shortage of educational specialists⁹, loss of essential SEN-focused staff¹⁰ and pushed an increasing number of Disabled children into segregated education¹¹. Further cuts to education budgets will put additional pressure on household budgets in food, heating, access to social care and childcare costs, and impact Disabled people disproportionately for decades to come.

Following a two-year investigation, the UN Committee on the rights of Persons with Disabilities found that austerity measures caused gross and systemic violations of Disabled people's human rights¹².

Disabled people suffered the most during Covid pandemic

The pandemic starkly highlighted discrimination against Disabled people, which in turn led many of us to question whether our lives are of an equal value in the face of rationing of medical treatment, imposition of advance “do not resuscitate” notes, the disregard shown about social care users and issues resulting in Disabled people accounting for 60% of COVID-related deaths¹³. After social care was

⁶ BBC News (2021). Autism: Number of people stuck in hospital 'national scandal'. *bbc.co.uk*, [online] 14 July. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-57722356>

⁷ : <https://www.cqc.org.uk/news/releases/cqc-calls-action-fix-closed-system-leads-people-learning-disability-or-autism-being>

⁸ Schools Week (2021). Councils in deficit told to find SEND savings in exchange for £100m bailouts. <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/councils-receive-conditional-send-special-needs-school-funding-bailouts/>

⁹ RCSLT (2022). RCSLT leads coalition calling for investment in the specialist workforce. <https://www.rcslt.org/news/rcslt-leads-coalition-calling-for-investment-in-the-specialist-workforce/>

¹⁰ The Guardian (2022). Schools in England risk losing TAs to supermarkets over 'chronic' low pay. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/sep/08/schools-risk-losing-teaching-assistants-to-supermarkets-chronic-low-pay-report>

¹¹ *Special educational needs in England*. [online] 24 June. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england>

¹² Moreover, **current UN Special Rapporteur, Olivier de Schutter. He has described the current time as the worst possible time for more austerity in the UK and has emphasised that further austerity could (again) violate human rights.**

¹³ ONS (2020). *Coronavirus (COVID-19) related deaths by disability status, England and Wales: 2 March to 14 July 2020*. [online] Available at:

deprioritised by the Coronavirus Act, the death rate of people on the homecare register doubled or even tripled in some areas, mostly not from COVID¹⁴.

Disabled workers were over-represented among redundancies during the pandemic¹⁵ and 2 million Disabled people on legacy benefits did not benefit at all from the temporary £20 uplift to Universal Credit. Since then, support and access to services has dramatically reduced, leaving many of us in on-going isolation, debt and deepening poverty

Disabled people are among the most affected by the cost-of-living crisis

Even before the current crisis 4 million Disabled people lived in poverty¹⁶, with six in ten people referred to foodbanks being Disabled and over 600,000 Disabled people living on less than £10 per day for food and essentials.

Now the rising cost of living is leaving Disabled people in dire poverty and forcing many to make an impossible choice between heating, eating or getting essential support with meeting basic needs:

- 55% struggle to pay their energy bills¹⁷ and despite Ofgem guidance some are being forced onto more expensive pre-payment smart meters

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/coronavirus-covid19relateddeathsbydisabilitystatusenglandandwales/2marchto14july2020>

¹⁴ <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2021-05-10/revealed-thousands-of-pandemic-deaths-in-home-care>

¹⁵ ONS (2021). *Coronavirus and redundancies in the UK labour market: September to November 2020*. [online]. Available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/labourmarketeconomicanalysisquarterly/december2020#redundancies-among-different-groups-of-employees-and-industries>

¹⁶ JRF Poverty 2019=2020., https://www.jrf.org.uk/reports?gclid=Cj0KCQiAsvTxBRDkARIsAH4W_j9Fier-VfWXkis4BMhGu-fTaUIMXb4kU84f_ZyZwRd9yLr-N7Oc5qUaAvbwEALw_wcB

¹⁷ ONS (2022). Impact of increased cost of living on adults across Great Britain: June-September 2022. Available at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/expenditure/articles/impactofincreasedcostoflivingonadultsacrossgreatbritain/junetoseptember2022>

- 90,000 are in social care charging debt¹⁸ and many more are stopping their essential support because they cannot afford it¹⁹.
- A survey by Greater Manchester Disabled People's Panel in 2022 revealed that 'one in five Disabled people can't afford essentials...Disabled people are being "forgotten and effectively abandoned", forced to rely on foodbanks, and having to cut back on how much they eat²⁰.
- 36% Disabled people find it difficult to pay their mortgage or rent²¹.
- Pressures are particularly acute for Disabled asylum seekers who are excluded from mainstream benefits. Asylum support is only £40.85 per week with no additional element for the extra costs of being Disabled, and no right to work.

The cost-of-living increase is having an even more disproportionate and negative impact on Disabled women (particularly single mothers), Disabled children, Disabled carers, Disabled people of colour, Disabled people with complex needs, people given mental health diagnosis, Disabled people living in rural areas and older Disabled people.

The extra cost of disability

Impairment and long-term health conditions coupled with the many barriers in society mean that many Disabled people have significantly higher living costs because of disability, including buying and using specialist equipment and technology like powered wheelchairs, paying for extra support and paying additional for energy and other utilities to cover running specialist equipment, extra heating and washing costs. Scope's research estimated on average Disabled people facing £583 in extra costs per month, and one in five facing extra cost of

¹⁸ Jayanetti, C (2022) 87,000 people can't keep up with care bills as cost of living soars, Open Democracy <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/cost-of-living-social-care-bills-people-cant-pay-exclusive-england/>

¹⁹ <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/millions-older-brits-cutting-stopping-28395027>

²⁰ GMDPP (2022) Big Disability Survey <https://gmdisabledpeoplespanel.com/>

²¹

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/expenditure/article/impactofincreasedcostoflivingonadultsacrossgreatbritain/junetoseptember2022>

over £1,000²². With an increase in the cost of living, these costs of disability are rising steeply too.

Supporting organisations

Inclusion London

Disability Rights UK

Disabled People Against Cuts

Shaping Our Lives

WinVisible (women with visible and invisible disabilities)/Disabled Mothers' Rights Campaign

Bristol Reclaiming Independent Living [BRIL]

Cheshire Disabled People Against Cuts

Disability Positive

Bromley Experts By Experience

Birmingham Disability Resource Centre

WECIL (West of England Centre for Inclusive Living)

Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance (ROFA)

Equal Lives

South Gloucestershire Disability Equality Network

Liberation for people experiencing mental distress/trauma

Alliance For Inclusive Education (ALLFIE)

National Survivor User Network

Manchester Disabled People Against Cuts

People First

Inclusion Barnet

Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People

²² Scope, (2019). The disability price tag.