



SPECTRUM NEWS

The Disability Manifesto

General Election 2015

Edited By Lesley Long-Price

Think you know

Disabled People...

Think Again

From the Editor:



Centre for
Independent
Living CIC



Gerry Zarb from SPECTRUM has been working with the South East Network of Disabled People's Organisations (SENDPO) to produce a, '**General Election 2015, Disability Manifesto, What Disabled People want from our Political Parties**', on behalf of Disabled People in the South East. This special edition of SPECTRUM's Newsletter publishes the Disability Manifesto in full.

Contents:

Page 3: Introduction to the Manifesto.

Pages 4 to 13: Covers the areas of employment, welfare reform, care and support, National Health Service, education, immigration, housing, law and order and political participation. Under each area covered we call upon all political parties to make commitments to Disabled People.

Page 14: Highlights a number of areas where the United Kingdom is failing to meet it's convention obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Pages 15 to 18: Provides some background notes.

Pages 19 to 22: References.

This is a very important document and SENDPO and SPECTRUM and our networks are publishing it widely. SPECTRUM is for example sending the Manifesto to Hampshire and Southampton politicians.

For all YOU Hampshire and Southampton politicians out there you can contact SPECTRUM for advice about your campaigns and your own Manifesto promises that affect Disabled People (please see contact details on the back cover of this Newsletter).

The Disability Manifesto

What Disabled People want from our Political Parties

Introduction

There are more than 12 million Disabled People and people with long-term health conditions in the UK – a very sizeable part of the electorate in 2015.

We believe it is essential for Disabled People's voices to be heard in the debates around the 2015 General Election – not only because they represent a large number of votes but, more importantly, because they are deeply affected by so many of the key issues at the heart of political debate.

Disabled People have a valuable contribution to make, not only to the democratic process, but also to the UK's social and economic well-being. Yet, far too often our voice is marginalised or ignored altogether. This is thoroughly undemocratic – and is simply not acceptable.

The 'Disability Manifesto' has been produced by the South East Network of Disabled People's Organisations (SENDPO) – a coalition of over 30 Organisations run and controlled by Disabled People from across the Region. It sets out what we – as Disabled People, citizens and voters – believe to be the key issues in the 2015 General Election and what commitments we would like to see from our Political Parties.

We encourage everyone to join in the debate on our social media sites using the following hashtags:

#GE2015

#12MillionVotes

Employment

Reducing unemployment – especially long-term unemployment – and making the workplace fully inclusive and accessible to all are both vital to the UK's economic recovery. But, many Disabled People face a range of barriers to work and there is a still large and persistent disparity in the employment rates of Disabled People compared to non-disabled people. Only half of Disabled People in Britain are in work compared to four-fifths of non-disabled people.

The next Government needs to address the gap between rhetoric on the need for more Disabled People to work and the lack of effective support for the many Disabled People who want to do so. Supporting Disabled People to work reduces dependence on benefits and increases the number of tax paying citizens contributing to the nations economy.

We call on all political parties to commit to halving the employment gap for Disabled People over the course of the next Parliament.

We call on all political parties to commit to doubling the number of Disabled People benefiting from Access to Work support in the next 3 years.

Funding for Access to Work, which is proven to be effective in helping Disabled People to move into, and stay in work should be increased. This can be paid for by transferring some of the funding that currently goes into ineffective programmes, like the Work Programme.

We also call on all political parties to commit to ensuring that Disabled People with complex support requirements have equal access to all employment support programmes.

Welfare Reform

Since the Government's Emergency Budget in 2010, Disabled People have seen massive cuts to their benefits and support services, including £18 billion from the benefits budget.

Disabled People and Carers' have already experienced a drop in income of £500 million since 2010 and most recently one calculation is that with six simultaneous welfare cuts taking place up to 3.7 million Disabled People will lose £28.3 billion of support by 2018. Twice as many Disabled adults live in persistent poverty compared with non-Disabled adults.¹

These changes represent a serious threat to independence, social inclusion and quality of life. There are also serious risks to the economy with more Disabled People dropping out of work or education, increased poverty and isolation, with the associated health risks; and rising costs elsewhere, such as unemployment benefits, social care and the NHS.

What is even more unfair is that Disabled People are taking a bigger 'hit' from the cuts than any other group in society. A recent report by the Centre for Welfare Reform found that Disabled People, who make up 8% of the population, are being hit by a massive 29% of all cuts being implemented.² This cannot be allowed to continue.

We call on all political parties to commit to undertaking – at the earliest opportunity – a cumulative impact assessment of the impact of welfare reform, changes to social care funding and eligibility criteria and the closure of the ILF on Disabled People. All further cuts to welfare benefits for Disabled People should be put on hold until this has been completed.

We further call on all political parties to commit to a government-led inquiry into the incidence of suicides amongst Disabled People linked Benefit sanctions and cuts in services.

We also call on all political parties to commit to guaranteeing that no Disabled People will lose vital support as a result of the change from Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

Care and Support

As the population ages and the prevalence of disability becomes more widespread, demand for care and support will inevitably increase. The next Government will need to prioritise investment in care and support if we are going to have any chance of meeting this challenge.

Yet, at a time when demand is increasing Disabled People are also having to deal with big cuts in public services, especially care and support - including the closure of the Independent Living Fund, which provides vital support to thousands of Disabled People.

Social care has already seen £8 billion in cuts. While some local councils have been able to use efficiency savings to protect public services from the impact of budget reductions, the capacity to make further reductions without impacting on front-line services is now running out. We are already seeing direct withdrawal of services, with more to come.

For Disabled People who rely on support to live their lives, the consequences are potentially devastating. These cuts create a real risk to their independence, social inclusion and equality of opportunity and raise the prospect of a return to the dark old days of placing people who need support in care homes. This would be nothing short of disastrous. It does not make economic sense in the long run either as making people more dependent will inevitably increase costs further down the line for other services like health care and housing support.

An alarming number of incidents have also occurred in which Disabled and Older People in health and social care settings have been subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment and abuse.³ This should never happen in a modern civilised society.

We call on all political parties to commit to extending the timetable for reductions to local government budgets. This would give councils time to reconfigure services and develop more preventative support, allowing them to deliver services more cheaply while still protecting people who are most in need.

We also call on all political parties to commit to increase the funding for social care in line with the EU average as soon as public finances allow. Spending on social care in Britain currently lags well behind, at just 0.9% of GDP, compared to an average of 2% in comparable EU countries.

We also call on all political parties to commit to reinstate the Independent Living Fund – which currently supports over 19,000 Disabled People with the highest needs to live independently. In the interim, we also call on all political parties to ensure that the budget that has been devolved to local authorities is ring-fenced to ensure it is not absorbed into general council budgets.

We also call on all political parties to commit to guaranteeing the safeguarding of Disabled People in care settings and legislating to introduce a new criminal offence of ill-treatment or willful neglect of people in health and social care settings.

The NHS

Disabled People, particularly People with Learning Difficulties or Mental Health Conditions, experience significant and persistent health inequalities and are likely to die younger than other people.⁴ They are also much less likely to receive health checks, screening tests and other routine healthcare treatment.

There is also considerable evidence of low levels of disability awareness among NHS staff, inadequate healthcare treatment⁵ and access barriers to health services.⁶

We call on all political parties to commit to eliminating health inequalities faced by Disabled People by 2025. This is a challenging target but one that can be achieved if the will is there to do so.

We also call on all political parties to commit to ensuring that Disabled People are able to access NHS services on an equal basis as everyone else. This can be achieved as part of a wider improvement programme – particularly in primary care, where many people face difficulty accessing services because of restricted opening times and procedures.

We also call on all political parties to guarantee to close within the first year of the next Parliament the remaining hospitals in England where people with Learning Difficulties are still being sent, despite promises to end the practice in the wake of the Winterbourne View abuse scandal.

Education

Education is vital for all citizens – including Disabled People - to achieve their full potential, participate equally in society and play their part in economic growth. But Disabled People are more likely to have poorer educational outcomes at all stages of education, particularly during their school years,⁷ while deficiencies in language competence of teaching staff contribute to particularly poor outcomes for Deaf children. Research into school exclusions across the UK has also identified that Disabled children are more likely to be excluded from school, sometimes unlawfully.⁸

At a time when the UK needs a skilled workforce to meet the challenges of an increasingly competitive global economy only 1 in 20 Disabled People are in further or higher education, compared to 1 in 10 of the rest of the population.⁹

We call on all political parties to commit to reducing the gap in educational outcomes for Disabled school leavers and achieving parity of access to further or higher education for Disabled People by 2025. This is a challenging target but one that can be achieved, if the will is there to do so.

We also call on all political parties to commit to delivering a fully inclusive education system with a range of mainstream and specialist provision to meet the needs of all Deaf and Disabled students.

We also call on the next Government to carry out an urgent review of exclusions of Disabled children and those with additional needs, and commit to ending unlawful exclusions.

Immigration

While it is of course important to ensure that immigration is well managed, freedom of movement is a fundamental right – and one that plays a valuable role in the UK's social and economic well-being.

Many economic migrants – both skilled and unskilled - make a crucial contribution to the health and social care economy, which many Disabled People rely on for support.

In the NHS approximately 30 per cent of doctors and 40 per cent of nurses are born outside the UK.¹⁰ In social care, the proportion of migrant workers can be even higher. According to the British Medical Association (BMA), without the contribution of non-British staff, "many NHS services would struggle to provide effective care to their patients".¹¹

Cultural diversity also potentially contributes to creating a more tolerant society, to the benefit of all – but this is being undermined by increasingly toxic political and public debates about immigration.

We call on all political parties to promote a more constructive and inclusive approach to immigration, which recognises the social and economic benefits of immigration and cultural diversity.

We also call on all political parties to commit to ensuring that Disabled Asylum Seekers displaced as a result of conflict or political oppression will always be treated sympathetically by the UK immigration authorities.

Housing

There is a severe shortage of accessible housing across the UK¹² and no mechanism in the planning system to rectify this. As a result many Disabled People struggle to secure suitable housing and this, in turn, creates additional strain on public services such as health and social care. It is also a barrier to social mobility – which is bad news for the economy.

Changes to the Housing Benefit under occupancy deduction – the ‘Bedroom Tax’ – have also had a disproportionately negative impact on Disabled People, many of whom require a second bedroom for a personal assistant or carer to stay overnight or to store disability related equipment.

We call on all political parties to introduce legislation in the next Parliament to require all new housing developments to be built to lifetime home standards, with at least 10% of new housing to be fully wheelchair accessible.

We also call on all political parties to urgently amend the rules on Housing Benefit under occupancy deductions to prevent Housing Benefit being cut for Disabled People who have a legitimate need for a second bedroom.

Transport

Many Disabled People still face significant barriers to accessible transport, particularly public transport. This has a negative impact on all aspects of daily life, including participation in education or training and employment. This restricts choice and life opportunities, and it is bad news for the economy as Disabled People are unable to play their part as full and active citizens.

We call on all political parties to commit to an urgent review of the effectiveness of legislation and public initiatives aimed at improving access to transport (including bus, rail, taxi and transport by air and sea) for Disabled People and to set out what steps they will take in Government to ensure compliance with the UK’s obligations on accessible transport under the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons.

Law and Order

Many Disabled People face significant difficulty securing equality of access to the Criminal Justice System and have been disproportionately affected by cuts to Legal Aid. Deaf People who use British Sign Language (BSL) are also disproportionately denied access to justice as a result of lack of communication support.

Disability Hate Crime is also a major concern. While research across the UK suggests that Disabled People routinely face harassment, the numbers reporting hate crime incidents to the police is disproportionately low.¹³ And, while some progress has been made in relation to recording of Disability Hate Crime, prosecution and conviction rates remain unacceptably low.

In schools, Disabled Pupils are nearly three times more likely as other pupils to experience bullying and harassment.

We call on all political parties to set out the steps they would take in Government to improve access to the legal system for all Disabled People.

We also call on all political parties to set out what steps they would take in Government to improve the reporting and prosecution of disability-related Hate Crime and to tackle disability-related harassment and bullying in schools.

Political participation

Being able to participate in democratic elections is one of the most important rights in a free society. Yet many Disabled People are still prevented from playing their full part in the democratic process because of access barriers such as inaccessible polling stations or the lack of political campaign information in accessible formats, such as Braille or British Sign Language (BSL).

This is inexcusable in a country that prides itself as being one of the beacons of democracy in the world.

We call on all parties to make a firm commitment to ensure that all of their campaign meetings and election materials are accessible to Disabled People during the forthcoming election.

We also call on the Government to guarantee that all polling stations will be accessible so that no Disabled Person who wishes to vote is prevented from exercising their democratic right.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The latest independent monitoring report on Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) highlights a number of areas of where the UK is failing to meet it's Convention obligations.¹⁴

In particular:

- The closure of the Independent Living Fund (apart from in Scotland) will have a potentially negative impact on the realisation of Article 19 (Living independently and being included in the community), but no adequate steps have been taken to ensure this right is protected.
- Disabled women experience disproportionate levels of all forms of violence and abuse, in contravention of Article 6 of the UNCRPD.
- Lack of recognition for the use of sign languages and lack of access to adequate communication support for Deaf People who use British Sign Language (BSL) restricts their rights under Article 4 (Education), Article 13 (Access to justice) and Article 30 (Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport).
- The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has highlighted concern that there is no comprehensive national strategy for the inclusion of disabled children, as required by Article 7.¹⁵ Concerns have also been raised about the UK Government's welfare reform programme leading to increasing levels of poverty experienced by disabled children.¹⁶
- Disabled People experience particular disadvantage in relation to both the civil and criminal justice systems and have been disproportionately affected by changes to Legal Aid and Employment Tribunals. There are also particularly low conviction rates for cases involving victims with a Mental Health condition or Learning Difficulties, in contravention of Article 13 (Access to justice).¹⁷

We call on all political parties to state a firm commitment to ensuring full compliance with the UK's obligations under the UNCRPD and to set out what steps they will take in Government to address those areas where the UK is not fully compliant.

Background notes

Employment

Over 50% of working age people who are out of work are Disabled People (either unemployed or economically inactive).

The economically inactive rate for working age Disabled People is 44.3%. This figure is nearly 4 times higher than for non-disabled people (11.5%).

The unemployment rate for Disabled People is 12%, compared to 7.6% of non-disabled people.

Access to Work is proven to be effective. But it serves only 35,000 people a year compared to 3.3 million Disabled People of working age. For every £10,000 the Government spends on welfare benefits, only 92 pence is spent on ATW.

Latest figures show almost 90% of Employment and Support Allowance claimants (mainly Disabled People) on the Work programme have not moved into employment.

The Government accepted in full recommendations from the Sayce Review in 2011, designed to double the numbers supported by Access to Work. This has not happened. In fact there are 2,000 less people on ATW than there were in 2009-10.

Welfare Reform

The Local Government Association (LGA) estimate that the income of households claiming benefit will be on average lower by £1,615 a year – or £31 a week – in 2015/16 as a result of welfare reforms (excluding the impact of Universal Credit).

According to a report from Sheffield Hallam University, when the present welfare reforms have come into full effect they will take nearly £19bn a year out of the economy. This is equivalent to around £470 a year for every adult of working age in the country, but sickness and disability claimants will be hit by several different elements of the reforms.¹⁸

The government's own figures on the change from DLA to PIP reveals nearly one million Disabled People undergoing reassessment will lose some or all of their DLA support by 2018. Of those who will be re-assessed, 510,000 on DLA will receive a lower award under PIP, and 450,000 on DLA will receive no award at all under PIP. Scope have estimated that the figure will be 607,000.

There is a range of research highlighting the disproportionate impact of the changes to welfare benefits on Disabled People across the UK¹⁹ and the reduction in incomes and services.²⁰

The European Committee of Social Rights has expressed concern that these reforms will lead to an increase in poverty amongst Disabled People.²¹

Poverty figures from DWP and the National Statistics Office (NSO) in 2013 revealed that 40% of disabled children are already living in poverty and a third of disabled adults are living in poverty.²² This extends to families too; working-age adults are almost twice as likely to have low incomes if their family has a disabled member.²³ 31% of families with disabled children are going without food and 33% are going without heating.²⁴

The Government has resisted the calls to carry out a cumulative impact assessment, arguing that that modelling difficulties prevent it from undertaking an assessment that would be sufficiently robust. However, there is a substantial body of evidence that shows this can be done.²⁵

Care and Support

Half a million Older and Disabled People who would have received social care five years ago are no longer eligible to receive appropriate support.²⁶

The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services in England say that they have already had to cut 20 per cent of their budgets for Adult Social Care since 2010 - at a time when pressures are increasing as the number of older and disabled adults continues to grow at three per cent per year.

According to the Centre for Welfare Reform in 2013, Disabled People needing social care have lost an average of £6,409 in income or support per year as a result of the cuts.²⁷

Real terms spending on social care has fallen by around £770 million since 2010 and organisations supporting Disabled People have seen a steep rise in the length of time people are waiting for care home places, home care and home adaptations. A report by Scope in 2013 found that 40% of people using social care don't have basic needs met like washing, dressing or getting out of the house. 47% said the services they received do not enable them to take part in community life, like seeing friends or volunteering.²⁸

Education

The latest published figures for numbers of disabled students in higher education, for the academic year 2001/2, show 4.6% of the student population had a declared disability.²⁹ In further education, the figure for the academic year 2000/1 was just over 6%.³⁰

Only one in twenty Disabled People are in further or higher education, compared to one in ten of the rest of the population and, according to the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities only half as many Disabled People are entering higher education as would be expected according to general population trends.³¹

Housing

Two-thirds of Housing Benefit claimants affected by the under occupancy deduction are Disabled People.³²

Although the Government has stated that Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) can be awarded to people facing hardship in paying their rent, there are inconsistencies in the eligibility rules and how different local authorities apply them. The DHP is, in any case, only a transitional measure so help with rent payments in the future cannot be guaranteed.³³

Law and Order

In 2011/12 there were 1,744 Disability Hate Crimes reported to the police in England and Wales.³⁴

A survey by Mencap found that nearly 9 out of 10 People with Learning Difficulties had been victims of hate incidents or crimes.³⁵

The EHRC inquiry into disability-related harassment, carried out between 2009 and 2011, found that harassment was a commonplace experience for Disabled People and that a culture of disbelief and systemic institutional failures were preventing it from being tackled effectively.³⁶

The EHRC disability harassment inquiry also reported that whilst over four-fifths of disabled pupils report being bullied compared to under two-thirds of non-disabled pupils, bullying on the basis of disability was often not acknowledged as an issue by schools or local authorities.³⁷

Political participation

At the last General Election in 2010, the Polls Apart campaign by the charity Scope surveyed disabled voters at almost 1,000 polling stations across the UK, and found that 67% had one or more significant access barriers. This is only a 1 per cent improvement from the previous General Election and 2 per cent from the General Election of 2001.³⁸

Despite the widespread assumption that postal voting is the most accessible way of voting for disabled voters, almost half of disabled voters who used the postal voting system reported one or more significant access problems.³⁹

While a number of accessibility measures have been brought in to make voting easier, including large print ballots and tactile voting devices, these are often poorly publicised and many Disabled People do not know they can ask Polling Station staff for help. Some polling station staff may also be unaware of their obligations to assist disabled voters, with people with Learning Difficulties, for example, reporting that they have been turned away.⁴⁰

As a result, for some groups of Disabled People, such as People with Learning Difficulties, turnout is extremely low, with only an estimated 15-30% voting in the last two elections.⁴¹

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