**Treasury hides documents that show equality impact of Sunak’s spring statement**

The government is refusing to release information that would show the impact on disabled people and other equality groups of the chancellor’s spending decisions in March’s spring statement.

Disabled people [reacted with disbelief](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/disbelief-at-chancellors-appalling-refusal-to-target-support-on-disabled-people/) in March to the chancellor’s “cruel” decision to all-but-ignore those who rely on benefits, even as the [Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR)](https://obr.uk/overview-of-the-march-2022-economic-and-fiscal-outlook/) was warning that the real value of benefits was set to fall by five per cent in 2022-23.

Following the spring statement, Disability News Service (DNS) submitted a request under the Freedom of Information Act to see any equalities impact assessment (EIA) carried out by the Treasury on the measures announced by chancellor Rishi Sunak.

DNS also asked to see an analysis of the overall impact of the spring statement on lower-, middle- and higher-income households.

But the Treasury has refused to release those documents.

It is claiming an exemption under freedom of information laws.

Although it accepts there is “clear public interest in the work of Government departments being transparent and open to scrutiny to increase diligence”, it argues that revealing the equality impact of Sunak’s decisions “would be likely to have a detrimental impact on the ongoing development of policy”.

DNS has called on the Treasury to think again, arguing that neither EIAs nor household distributional analyses are subjective advice but are instead objective assessments whose authors should not be affected in any way by the possibility that their reports could eventually be published.

Vicky Foxcroft, Labour’s shadow minister for disabled people, also called for the Treasury to release the two documents.

She said: “The [unlawful National Disability Strategy](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dpos-ask-minister-for-reset-after-court-ruling-that-disability-strategy-is-unlawful/) admits that the government doesn’t hold enough data on disabled people.

“Ministers claim this is something they are looking to address.

“Yet time and time again, we see their reluctance to release this data.

“Most recently they refused to release the NatCen Social Research report on The Uses of Health and Disability Benefits until forced to do so by the work and pensions committee.

“[That] report [clearly demonstrates](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/secret-dwp-report-reveals-unmet-needs-of-disability-benefit-claimants/) how many disabled people have been struggling with their finances, even before the current cost-of-living crisis.

“Ministers need to stop hiding behind different protocols and admit that they need to get their act together.

“Transparency is key to ensuring disabled people know that policymakers are truly considering their needs.”

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has refused to criticise the Treasury.

Days [after it emerged](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/trio-of-disabled-women-say-ehrc-has-failed-them-and-other-families-over-benefit-deaths/) that the commission had refused to follow through on plans for an inquiry into multiple deaths linked to the failings of the Department for Work and Pensions, the watchdog refused to comment on the Treasury’s failure to release the two documents, and failed to call for them to be released.

In his [3,500-word speech](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-03-23/debates/5794DE1D-BBED-49D3-943C-84CFE39A2526/FinancialStatement#contribution-A4DFD944-D187-498B-B9C1-DAB10090B335) in March, Sunak announced a rise in the starting threshold of national insurance and a temporary 5p per litre cut in fuel duty, as well as an extra £500 million for the [Household Support Fund](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils).

But there was [no mention in his speech of disabled people](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/disbelief-at-chancellors-appalling-refusal-to-target-support-on-disabled-people/) and how many of them were struggling to survive, and no attempt to increase benefits to match the sharply rising rate of inflation.

[Inclusion London](https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/) called Sunak’s failure to provide any specific support for disabled people “truly appalling” while [Disability Rights UK](https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/) said disabled people had been left “living on bare bones benefits such as employment and support allowance and universal credit with nothing to cover the shortfall produced by rocketing costs of living”.

**5 May 2022**

**Rail platform safety risks set to continue for seven more years, despite inquest findings**

The government has refused to promise to accelerate the long-delayed installation of tactile paving on railway platforms across the country, despite an inquest finding that the lack of safety markings played a part in a disabled man’s death.

The government has promised only to instal tactile markings on all rail platforms by 2029, even though an inquest jury found this week that the lack of tactile paving caused or contributed to the death of 53-year-old Cleveland Gervais, at Eden Park station, south-east London, in February 2020.

The jury concluded that if there had been tactile paving, Gervais would have been aware of how close he was to the edge of the platform.

And they found that the failure of rail operator Southeastern to take any steps to mitigate the absence of tactile paving, such as providing audio warnings, also caused or contributed to his death.

The government’s new National Disability Strategy – [since declared unlawful by the high court](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dpos-ask-minister-for-reset-after-court-ruling-that-disability-strategy-is-unlawful/) – included a pledge last year to “develop proposals for the accelerated upgrade of rail station platforms with tactile paving”.

But the Department for Transport – which refused to comment on the inquest findings this week – admitted last year that it had set a deadline of 2029 to instal tactile safety markings on every rail platform in Britain.

Network Rail said last year that all its regions had plans to complete the work by March 2029, but this was subject to the government providing the funding.

A Rail Accident Report into Gervais’s death, [published last year](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/report-012021-person-struck-by-a-train-at-eden-park-station), found that only about three-fifths of British mainline station platforms were fitted with tactile surfaces.

Gervais, who was blind, with just six per cent vision in one eye, had been waiting for a train to arrive and moved closer to the track because he was unaware of where the platform edge was.

He had then walked along the platform but fell into the path of the train as it arrived.

The jury found there had then been an avoidable delay of at least 10 minutes in confirming the power to the track had been switched off, which caused or contributed to his death.

He was pronounced dead from his injuries about half an hour after ambulance staff were finally allowed onto the track.

But it has now emerged that a similar incident involving a blind rail passenger – who survived his fall – had taken place at New Eltham, a Southeastern station just a few miles from Eden Park, eight years earlier.

Software architect [Artur Ortega](https://twitter.com/DesignedByBlind) said his first thought when he heard of Gervais’s death had been: “This could have been me – hit by an oncoming train at a Southeastern station because of missing tactile pavings on the platform edge – like Cleveland – just eight years earlier.”

He had been on his morning commute to work with his guide dog on 30 August 2012.

He was walking parallel to the platform edge but did not realise how close he was because of the lack of tactile markings.

Ortega slipped and fell onto the track, and although he avoided serious injury, his assistance dog was left badly bruised and “screaming” in pain on the track.

They were both helped from the track by commuters, and his assistance dog eventually recovered, but Ortega says that tactile markings were still not installed at New Eltham until another blind passenger lodged a complaint several years later.

He told Disability News Service yesterday (Wednesday) that he was convinced tactile markings would have prevented his own accident.

And he said he “firmly” believed that Gervais’s death could have been avoided if Southeastern, Network Rail and the Department for Transport had taken the necessary action after his own accident.

Instead, he said, it had been ignored.

Ortega said it was “incomprehensible” that it was taking so long to instal tactile markings on all rail platforms, even though national guidance had been in place since 1998.

He said: “It only shows that the rail industry doesn’t care enough about the  
health and safety of disabled passengers or accessibility in general.”

A Southeastern manager told rail accident investigators examining the circumstances of Gervais’s death that she had been unaware in 2019 of any previous such accidents, but Ortega said that Southeastern must have known about his 2012 incident.

Gervais was described this week by his partner, Sekha Hall, as a “kind, generous and loving family man who had incredible determination” and “was always helping other people and had a great sense of humour”.

He said: “We were together for over 19 years and we loved each other very much. He was my rock and I am lost without him.

“I am grateful for the jury’s careful deliberations and welcome their findings that the lack of tactile paving, or any other adjustments for blind and visually impaired people, caused Cleveland’s death.

“Cleveland’s death was a huge blow to me and all that knew him. I hope that from his death lessons will be learned and that rail stations will become… safer places for those with visual impairments.”

[Kate Egerton](https://www.leighday.co.uk/about-us/our-people/senior-staff/kate-egerton/), from solicitors Leigh Day, who represented Hall at the inquest, said: “It was concerning to hear that despite national guidance on tactile paving being in place since 1998, that Network Rail do not consider that they have any legal duties to instal it across the network.

“While we understand that plans for installing tactile paving across the rail network have been accelerated following Cleveland’s death, it is unacceptable that platforms are not consistently safe for passengers with disabilities.”

The Department for Transport yesterday (Wednesday) refused to comment or answer questions about the inquest, the Artur Ortega incident, and its failure to ensure tactile markings are installed on all rail platforms.

Southeastern refused to answer questions about its failings or its current plans.

But Steve Lewis, head of safety and environment for Southeastern, said in a statement: “We extend our sympathies to the family and friends of Mr Gervais.

“Safety and accessibility are hugely important to our railway, which is why we’ve worked closely with Network Rail to accelerate the tactile paving works at our stations.”

Network Rail also refused to answer questions about the rail industry’s failings and what they showed about the importance it placed on the safety of disabled passengers.

But Allan Spence, Network Rail’s director of regulator liaison, said: “Our thoughts are with the family and friends of Mr Gervais, and we know that whatever we do to make the railway better after his death can’t change the pain they feel.

“At the time of the accident, we were already fitting tactile paving strips on station platforms in that area, and now the whole of south-east London and Kent are fitted.

“We have around 5,500 station platforms across the country, over 60 per cent of which are fitted with tactile strips.

“We have now secured the extra funding needed to fit them all.

“Every passenger is valuable to us and we want everyone to have a safe and comfortable journey on our railway.

“We’re making progress in making our railway more accessible for everyone, but we know there is a lot more to do.”

**5 May 2022**

**DPO to call for London’s mayor to do more for disabled people on cost-of-living**

A pan-London disabled people’s organisation (DPO) is to call on the capital’s mayor to do more to support disabled Londoners hit by the unfolding cost-of-living crisis.

[Inclusion London](https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/) said this week that food and energy bills have been rising sharply over the last six months, with further increases expected, while London has faced the highest levels of inflation across the UK since April 2021.

It believes the Greater London Authority (GLA), which is led by Labour’s Sadiq Khan, could take action to help disabled Londoners.

Initial findings from a small Inclusion London survey of advisers from London DPOs suggests disabled people have been struggling financially more than ever in the last few months, even before the latest energy price rises.

One adviser reported referring as many people to food banks in the four months between the start of November and the end of February as in the previous 12 months, and said that more people had approached her about problems paying fuel bills within the last month than in the previous year.

Another adviser reported that the number of disabled people seeking help with fuel costs had “increased dramatically”.

Many disabled people who face extra impairment-related energy costs have not been able to meet their basic needs because of large increases in their fuel bills, says Inclusion London.

Inclusion London, and other DPOs, will be meeting GLA next week to discuss the cost-of-living crisis and other key issues affecting disabled people.

Among its recommendations, Inclusion London is set to call for GLA to work with DPOs to increase awareness of existing advice, information and support for disabled people living in fuel poverty, and to improve the accessibility and disability-related content of the mayor’s [cost of living hub](https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/communities/help-cost-living).

It also wants GLA to commission research into the disproportionate impact of the crisis on disabled Londoners, and ringfence a third of the mayor’s [Warmer Homes programme](https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/housing-and-land/improving-quality/warmer-homes) for properties occupied by disabled people.

Laura Vicinanza, Inclusion London’s policy and stakeholder engagement manager, said the cost-of-living crisis was having a significant impact on disabled people.

She said: “They are the worst-hit by this crisis, and they are struggling to make ends meet with the cost of food, and of fuel. They are really struggling.”

She highlighted the UK government’s refusal to raise benefits by the full rate of inflation, and its decision to [remove the right to the Warm Home Discount](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-caught-planning-to-claw-back-vital-support-through-universal-credit-migration/) from 290,000 claimants of disability living allowance and personal independence payment, both of which will have “a negative impact on Deaf and disabled people”.

She said London’s mayor could play an important role in easing the crisis.

She said: “The GLA can’t do what the national government can do, raising benefits or changing the eligibility of the Warm Home Discount, but the mayor can lobby national government to do that, and there are other things he can do.

“We need to make sure people have the means to be able to access advice and information, because we know digital exclusion is a very important issue.

“There is much more that can be done from a research perspective, with the lack of data on the numbers of disabled people affected.

“We look forward to engaging further with the GLA on this and working with them to implement our recommendations.”

Another key issue to be discussed by DPOs at next week’s GLA meeting is the [planned expansion of the ultra low emission zone](https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayor-sets-out-london-wide-ulez-plans) (ULEZ) across the whole of the capital next year.

Although many disabled people [will benefit from a temporary exemption](https://tfl.gov.uk/modes/driving/ultra-low-emission-zone/discounts-and-exemptions?intcmp=52218) from the ULEZ daily charge of at least £12.50 for using older, more polluting vehicles, many others with significant mobility impairments will not.

Inclusion London wants to see all disabled people with blue parking badges exempt from the ULEZ charge.

It says the planned move could cause “real financial hardship to many deaf and disabled Londoners who already live in poverty and experience significant deprivation”.

Disabled people have already faced a “disproportionate adverse impact” from the expansion of ULEZ from central to inner London [last autumn](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/expansion-of-air-pollution-scheme-could-have-drastic-impact-on-disabled-people/), it says.

Vicinanza said Inclusion London welcomed GLA’s initiatives to improve air quality in the city but was concerned that Deaf and disabled people would be worst hit by the expansion of ULEZ unless “significant changes” were made to the scheme and “necessary measures” put in place by GLA to mitigate the impact on Deaf and disabled Londoners.

**5 May 2022**

**DPO sector is in ‘perilous financial state’, says new report**

Disabled people’s organisations (DPOs) across the UK are “constantly threatened” by a lack of core funding, despite the “crucial” services they provide, according to a new report.

[The report on the state of the UK DPO sector](https://www.disabilitycornwall.org.uk/about-us/research) suggests that its annual income is about £150 million, but that it is still in a “perilous” state, with organisations closing “on a fairly regular basis”.

Despite the lack of core funding faced by many DPOs, they are relied upon by many local authorities, says the report.

But it says that the “tight margins” faced by DPOs and their limited ability to create financial reserves mean many cannot plan ahead and develop their organisations.

Their financial insecurity is “compounded” by the lack of legislation that recognises the value of the DPO sector.

Estimates suggest that as many as one-third of DPOs have closed over the past decade.

The report says the sector demonstrated its “flexibility, agility, and ability to respond to local needs of disabled populations” during the pandemic – [as analysed in a previous report](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/agility-and-versatility-of-dpos-helped-them-deliver-vital-pandemic-services-says-report/) – but is still “built on a most fragile, and potentially existentially threatening, financial framework”.

The report, by Dr Theo Blackmore, from Disability Cornwall, says that DPOs provide “significant social return on investment” for their local communities.

And it says that if DPOs across the UK could be “mobilised” as a group, they would provide the “largest, and most reliably informed” body that central and local government could consult with on disability issues.

The report suggests that the large number of disabled people employed by DPOs could be a “greater achievement” than any recent government employment programme.

As part of a continuing National Lottery-funded project that examines how DPOs worked together through the pandemic, Blackmore has tried to identify as many UK DPOs as he can and has then located them [on an online map](https://www.disabilitycornwall.org.uk/about-us/research).

His research found 309 DPOs and showed how some parts of the country appear to be “much better served than others”, with fewer DPOs in the north-east and south-west of England compared with the West Midlands and south-east.

He says this means that disabled people in some parts of the country may not be able to access good quality information and advice, or secure support in crises such as the pandemic, while local authorities may be deprived of expertise from local DPOs that could otherwise help with their service delivery.

Of the 309 DPOs Blackmore found, he randomly selected 100, and analysed the financial status of the 92 of them that were charities.

* 1. He found 26 had an income of less than £100,000; 28 had an income of between £100,000 and £500,000; another 18 had an income of between £500,000 and £1 million; and 20 had an annual income of between £1 million and £3 million.
  2. The report says that about half of the DPOs he found provide information and advice services.
  3. An annual grant of just £100,000 for each of these DPOs would cost governments only about £15 million a year, which would be “a very small amount of money for the amount of direct and indirect value it would produce across the country”.
  4. The report says this would “go a long way to providing some stability for a sector that finds itself on a precarious funding knife-edge for much of the time and ensure sustainability of essential life-line services for many disabled people at this critical time”.
  5. It also calls for the government to produce a “legislative framework” that recognises the value of DPOs, which would boost them in a similar way to Labour**’s** [Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People white paper](https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20100407165048/http:/www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/work_areas/disability.aspx) in 2005, which called for every local authority area to have a user-led organisation modelled on existing centres for independent living by 2010.
  6. Blackmore told Disability News Service that DPOs need “core funding” to provide “security and consistency into the future”, which as a minimum “should be available to organisations with an information provision role”.
  7. He said: “We have seen losses over the years, and as the financial situation gets tougher for everyone, I fully expect the DPO sector to be battered over the coming months and years.”
  8. **5 May 2022**

**Report calls for disability poverty action plan for Glasgow**

Disabled people’s organisations (DPOs) are set to play a key role in drawing up a plan to address disability poverty in Glasgow.

The call for an action plan is one of the recommendations from a report for Glasgow City Council’s Social Recovery Taskforce.

[The report\* by the taskforce’s Disability Workstream](https://gda.scot/resources/ending-poverty-and-removing-barriers-to-work-for-disabled-people-in-glasgow-beyond-covid-19/), which was co-convened by Glasgow Disability Alliance (GDA), points out that nearly one in four (24 per cent) of Glasgow’s working-age population are disabled people.

It concludes: “None of the major challenges Glasgow faces today can be solved without tackling disabled people’s poverty and unemployment.”

It makes a series of recommendations for public services, DPOs and other partners to tackle disability poverty and remove the barriers to employment that disabled people face in Glasgow.

The taskforce was set up to tackle the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on society and equality in the city.

GDA’s own research during the first year of the pandemic found that that 57 per cent of disabled people in the city were worried about money, and 47 per cent were worried about access to food.

The new report, by the Glasgow DPO Network and the University of Glasgow’s Dr Richard Brunner, says that the city’s disability pay gap – where disabled employees earn less than their non-disabled peers – is even higher than in the rest of the UK (24.8 per cent against 19.6 per cent).

It also points out that responsibility for some disability benefits has been devolved to the Scottish government, which provides an opportunity to ensure payments are set at an “appropriate level to meet disabled people’s needs and extra costs”.

The report includes evidence that emerged from an online event last spring which was attended by disabled people, public service and third sector workers, city councillors, and DPOs.

It heard of disabled graduates with qualifications but years of unemployment, disablism at job centres, and prejudiced job interviewers.

One participant at the event, who described how they were thrown into poverty after becoming disabled, said: “There seems to be so many obstructions put in your way just to get what you’re entitled to… I want somewhere I can live, that allows me to be able to get to some places like a library, or a shop.

“I’m not wanting the Earth. I just want to be seen as human. To be honest, the way I’ve been treated, had I been an animal, I would’ve been taken away from the owner.”

[Tressa Burke](https://gda.scot/team/gda-staff/tressa-burke/), GDA’s chief executive, told the event that the pandemic had exposed the extent and impact of digital exclusion.

She said: “The internet is one connection, but connections to people and relationships are the things that sustain us all. Disabled people are so far removed from this.

“I was shocked myself when we realised that 60 per cent of the people we spoke to were digitally excluded.

“Disabled people aren’t looking for the Earth. They’re looking for some of what others have. It starts with the connections and relationships.”

A Glasgow city councillor said during the event that addressing disability poverty required action across public services.

They said: “I think poverty and the discriminatory issues were there anyway. The pandemic has simply shone a light on that.

“It’s a light that we cannot and should not want to put back out.

“We have to work out how to address and fix some of those problems. The council can’t solve everything on its own.”

The report calls for a plan to reduce disabled people’s poverty in Glasgow, co-produced with DPOs, and for action to increase the uptake by disabled people of financial support and advice.

And it suggests piloting a scheme that would maximise the uptake by disabled people of all eligible income-related support, again co-produced with DPOs.

Among the report’s other recommendations are for organisations including Glasgow City Council, local NHS bodies, housing associations, charities, and major private sector employers in the city to increase the number of disabled people they employ; and for these organisations to increase their disability equality training.

It also calls for pilot schemes that could allow disabled people to be in control of their own funding for employment training and support.

Brian Scott, GDA’s head of employability and anti-poverty, said: “Disabled people and those with long term health conditions make up at least 25 per cent of Glasgow’s population and implementation of the recommendations within the report could significantly reduce the poverty experienced by disabled people and reduce the disability employment gap.

“We are confident that the report gives key partners (Glasgow City Council, Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership, employers, etc) the solutions identified by disabled people themselves that could help them achieve our shared aspirations around reducing poverty and supporting more disabled people to enter and sustain good quality employment.”

Responsibility for implementing the recommendations will now pass to [Glasgow Community Planning Partnership](https://www.glasgowcpp.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=2511), which includes representatives of the city council, education, housing, NHS, business and other organisations.

A city council spokesperson said: “Tressa Burke from Glasgow Disability Alliance and Richard Brunner from University of Glasgow presented their report to the Glasgow Community Planning Partnership executive group on 27 April.

“It was agreed that the executive group would consider the recommendations in more detail at a future meeting and consider other community planning structures that it should be presented to, as well as the appropriate council committee.”

*\*Ending Poverty and Removing Barriers to Work for Disabled People in Glasgow beyond Covid-19*

**5 May 2022**

**Government ‘must tighten the law to stop discrimination’ by ferry companies**

The government is being asked to tighten the law to stop the “horrendous” discrimination disabled people are facing from ferry companies that refuse to allow them to travel for safety reasons.

Matthew Smith, a retired lecturer in marine engineering and health and safety, who lives on the Isle of Wight, has repeatedly been denied permission to board a ferry by both the island’s two ferry companies – Red Funnel and Wightlink – for safety reasons.

Smith, who has a spinal injury and uses a wheelchair, always asks in advance if he can stay in his adapted motorhome on the vehicle deck during the crossing.

But ferry companies often refuse this request and say they cannot guarantee he will be able to stay in his vehicle for safety reasons.

When he turns up to travel, he is often told he will not be able to stay in his motorhome because there will be a hazardous goods vehicle on the same deck during the crossing, and that he will need to wait an unspecified amount of time for a ship’s captain who will allow him to remain in his motorhome.

His options are to leave the vehicle and lie on the floor on the upper decks – which can cause significant pain for days afterwards – wait for the next ferry, or return home.

He usually waits for the next ferry and then, if he is again told there will be a hazardous goods vehicle on board, decides he will leave the vehicle and lie on seats or the floor of the passenger deck during the crossing.

He says that passengers with other impairments can also be denied permission to travel, such as those who carry oxygen cylinders, and wheelchair-users who are not travelling by vehicle and would find the ramps to board the ferry too steep at low tide.

Now Smith is hoping to force Red Funnel, Wightlink and other UK operators to change their practices so that disabled passengers who have booked in advance, and alerted the company to their access needs, are always allowed to travel.

He has now launched a parliamentary petition in the hope of persuading the government to act.

[His petition](https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/614906?fbclid=IwAR0zS6tjJfDFnBSyMckJQPrTVHhXP9XGOZDXkOVzSe7WSVPAcWdnMoOdKgo) calls for all ferry companies to be legally obliged to make reasonable adjustments for disabled passengers under the Equality Act, rather than relying on the regulations and guidance that currently provide protection for disabled passengers.

He said: “All I am asking is for the companies to make reasonable adjustments. That’s the least we can expect of them.

“I think it’s horrendous. Some ferry companies have no interest in making reasonable adjustments for disabled people because it costs them money.”

Smith said: “There is no understanding of the impact this has.

“If you were travelling on a plane or by train you would know if you were going to be able to travel. It’s absurd.

“Disabled people do not need complex designed engineered solutions, just a little consideration and the ability to book a ferry with the certainty of being able to travel.”

Only last year, the government announced that it would provide up to £1 million to improve the accessibility of seaports on the Isle of Wight and the Isles of Scilly.

Last month, Red Funnel [launched an internal investigation](https://www.iwradio.co.uk/news/isle-of-wight-news/red-funnel-investigating-video-showing-passengers-mobility-scooter-fall/) after a video emerged that appeared to show staff laughing as they watched CCTV footage of a disabled passenger falling from a mobility scooter as they tried to climb a steep ramp on one of the operator’s ferries in 2020.

Red Funnel had failed to say by noon today (Thursday) if it believed it discriminated against disabled passengers, and if it believed there was a need for the law to change.

But Fran Collins, Red Funnel’s chief executive, said: “The safety of our passengers and teams is our number one priority and we are committed to providing bespoke and personal support to anyone requiring assistance due to a disability, reduced mobility or other health conditions.

“To ensure we follow guidance set out by the Department for Transport, our policy states passengers must leave their vehicles during crossings, and travel on upper decks.

“However, we understand this is not always possible and our customer services team is on hand to arrange ‘stay in vehicle’ requests.

“Since January 2022, we have handled over 400 requests and we welcome conversations with passengers requiring more information on this process.

“As a vital supply link to the Isle of Wight, we transport hazardous freight. We are unable to allow passengers and hazardous goods to travel on decks together.

“This is strictly governed by the MCA [the Maritime and Coastguard Agency] and is in place to protect the safety of our passengers and crew.”

Red Funnel has been awarded a grant through the government’s £1 million fund.

Collins said the internal investigation into the video was ongoing, and that Red Funnel had reported the incident to the Information Commissioner’s Office.

She said: “The video shows an incident from 2020. Teams at the time followed health and safety procedures and first aid-trained colleagues on board supported the customer.”

Wightlink had failed to say by noon today if it believed there was a need for a change in the law.

But a Wightlink spokesperson said: “Wightlink does not discriminate against disabled customers and has made reasonable adjustments to its services to assist them to cross the Solent with us.

“We ask them to give us a minimum of 48 hours’ notice to make arrangements.

“As Mr Smith needs to remain in his vehicle during the crossing, he books space in advance and we arrange for him to travel on a sailing that does not also carry a vehicle such as a petrol tanker or lorry carrying bottled gas or other hazardous material, which are known as ‘dangerous goods’.

“Only the customers inside one vehicle per sailing are permitted to remain in their vehicle for medical reasons.

“Legally, customers in their own vehicles are not allowed on vehicle decks at the same time as dangerous goods vehicles for safety reasons.

“Wightlink captains always carry out a dynamic risk assessment at the time of the sailing as he or she is responsible for the safety of the vessel.

“Conditions such as high winds or fog may affect this decision. This is why we cannot guarantee customers will be permitted to remain in their vehicle in advance of the sailing they have booked.”

The Department for Transport (DfT) said that ferries do not usually allow passengers to remain in their vehicles during crossings because of the possibility of vehicles moving and crushing others on board, under a requirement of the International Maritime Organization, which is enforced by MCA.

But it accepted that a ferry company can allow a passenger to remain in their vehicle at the captain’s discretion.

DfT said it did not accept that the current legal situation allowed ferry companies to discriminate against disabled customers because “disabled passengers are provided with rights to travel and to assistance under the [EU regulation] that has since been adopted into UK law”.

He added: “We always keep accessibility regulations under review and ferry operators on the Isle of Wight and Isles of Scilly have recently been able to bid for funding as part of a £1m [fund] to make their services accessible to those who require further assistance on board and in ports.”

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**Other disability-related stories covered by mainstream media this week**

Parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) have told ITV News that they “feel completely let down” and “gaslighted by a broken system that’s weighted against them”. Extreme financial pressure on cash-strapped councils means some pupils with additional needs are being denied vital help. A joint investigation by ITV News and The Bureau of Investigative Journalism reveals the true scale of the SEND funding crisis; the financial black hole facing councils in England has exceeded £1 billion: <https://www.itv.com/news/2022-04-28/children-with-special-educational-needs-denied-education-due-to-funding-crisis>

The 93-year-old father of an immobile and vulnerable woman who died in “horrific” conditions in a bedroom has been convicted of allowing her death. After deliberating for more than 15 hours, jurors at Leicester Crown Court also found Julie Burdett’s brother Philip, aged 59, guilty of gross negligence manslaughter. Her father Ralph Burdett was unanimously cleared of manslaughter on Friday, but was found guilty of the lesser offence of allowing the death of a vulnerable adult: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/philip-leicester-crown-court-leicester-b2068614.html>

Horrific videos of a family’s mouldy flat have sparked outrage as the blind, bed-bound tenant and her NHS worker daughter have been forced to live in the revolting conditions for years. Housing activist Kwajo Tweneboa’s footage of the home attracted widespread condemnation after it was posted on social media: <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/horror-footage-blind-womans-mould-26868269>

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**News provided by John Pring at** [www.disabilitynewsservice.com](http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com)