**DWP hands hundreds of millions more to firms linked to claimant deaths… but not Atos**

The government has awarded five-year disability assessment contracts worth more than £560 million to the outsourcing giant Capita, on the same day that a safeguarding review linked the company to the death of a young disabled mum.

[Last week](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/disabled-mum-took-her-own-life-after-actions-of-dwp-and-capita-magnified-anxiety/), the safeguarding review into the death of Philippa Day in October 2019 found the actions of Capita had had a “profound impact” on the 27-year-old and caused her “debilitating anxiety”, thanks to systemic problems in the personal independence payment (PIP) assessment system.

A coroner later found that flaws in the PIP system – many of them due to Capita’s actions – were “the predominant factor and the only acute factor” that led to Philippa taking her own life.

Also on the same day, 25 May, the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) [raised concerns](https://ico.org.uk/about-the-ico/media-centre/news-and-blogs/2023/05/ico-statement-on-capita-incident/) about [two serious data protection breaches](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-65746518) linked to Capita, one following a cyber-attack and the other relating to allegations that it left data unsecured online.

Capita also failed to meet DWP’s target for the proportion of assessment reports considered to be of an acceptable quality in November last year, more than nine years after it started providing PIP assessments.

Capita [has also been linked](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/pip-investigation-200-cases-of-dishonesty-and-still-dwp-atos-and-capita-refuse-to-act/) previously to widespread reports of dishonesty by its healthcare professionals while assessing PIP claimants.

But despite the safeguarding review, the data protection concerns, missing its quality target, and the previous reports of dishonesty by its staff, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) [has awarded Capita](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2023-05-25/hcws807) two five-year contracts to carry out assessments of disabled people, one across Wales and the Midlands (£450 million), and the other in Northern Ireland (£110 million).

In each of five UK regions, private sector contractors will carry out both work capability assessments (WCAs) and assessments for PIP\*, as well as assessments for other disability-related benefits, from 2024 to 2029.

The Wales and Midlands contract means Capita will continue to provide assessments in Nottingham, where Philippa Day lived.

The US company Maximus has been awarded the contract to carry out assessments in the north of England and Scotland, worth an estimated £650 million over five years, and it will work as a “delivery partner” to Capita in Wales and the Midlands, worth another £150 million.

Maximus has also been linked to the deaths of disabled claimants, including [Jodey Whiting](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/jodey-whiting-dwp-ignored-five-safeguarding-chances-before-wca-suicide/), [Alan McArdle](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/grave-concern-over-coroners-refusal-to-hold-inquest-into-maximus-wrag-death/) and [Philip Pakree](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/partner-of-distraught-esa-claimant-says-dwp-drove-him-to-his-death/), through its provision of work capability assessments (WCAs) since 2015 and its actions as a Work Programme contractor.

The fourth contract has been awarded to [Ingeus](https://ingeus.co.uk/about/social-impact), which provides employment, skills and health services in the UK and has so far not been associated with the provision of benefit assessments in this country, although it is part of the Australian multinational APM Group which delivers assessments in Australia.

This contract, across south-east England, London and East Anglia, is worth £400 million over five years.

So far, no contracts have been awarded to the discredited outsourcing company Atos, although one assessment contract – covering the south-west of England – has yet to be awarded.

Atos has an even worse reputation than Capita and Maximus, having earned more than £465 million from delivering work capability assessments before it withdrew from the contract in 2015, following years of negative publicity [and multiple links](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-the-case-for-the-prosecution/) between the actions of the company and its staff and the deaths of disabled claimants.

Atos healthcare professionals were also repeatedly accused of dishonesty in the provision of PIP assessments, following a Disability News Service (DNS) investigation.

In all, the five assessment contracts will be worth more than two billion pounds over the five years from 2024 to 2029.

[Announcing the award](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2023-05-25/hcws807) of the four contracts, Tom Pursglove, the minister for disabled people, said: “These important new contracts have been subject to a rigorous and competitive process in line with public contract regulations.”

DWP said the bids were assessed on a combination of quality and pricing.

But a DWP spokesperson declined to answer questions about the process, including whether Pursglove was comfortable awarding contracts to Capita and Maximus in the light of their respective track records.

The wider failings of Atos, Capita and Maximus have been exposed through [research](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/peoples-review-of-wca-finds-its-way-to-frys-five-million-followers/) and [direct action](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/london-2012-paralympian-will-put-atos-sponsorship-under-the-spotlight/) by grassroots groups of disabled people, inquiries by [parliamentary committees](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/atos-maximus-and-capita-forced-to-admit-assessment-failures/), concerns [raised by individual MPs](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/maximus-has-falsified-results-of-fitness-for-work-tests-says-mp/), the release of [government statistics](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/atos-maximus-and-capita-forced-to-admit-assessment-failures/), [television documentaries](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/capita-faces-fresh-calls-to-be-stripped-of-pip-contracts-after-documentary/), and the lengthy DNS investigation into the PIP assessment practices of Atos and Capita.

Performance figures released to DNS in January showed that all three current providers are continuing to provide a significant number of sub-standard assessment reports.

Independent audits carried out on behalf of DWP show that less than 80 per cent of WCA reports carried out by Maximus “fully conformed” to “professional standards” between September and November 2022, with the figure falling below 78 per cent in November 2022.

With Capita, nearly one in four (24.4 per cent) PIP assessment reports sampled in November 2022 were found to need amendments because of significant flaws, with another 3.3 per cent said to be of “unacceptable” quality, breaching DWP’s three per cent target.

Asked if it believed it was a suitable organisation to be providing assessment services to disabled people, a Maximus spokesperson said: “We are pleased to be continuing our partnership with DWP to deliver health and disability assessments.

“Through our delivery of the [WCA] since 2015, we have delivered significantly reduced waiting times, improved assessment quality and achieved record customer satisfaction.

“We remain committed to providing a sensitive, respectful and expert service to customers, working with disabled people and their representative groups to deliver improved customer experience.”

Neither Capita nor Atos had responded to questions by noon today (Thursday).

*\*Except in Scotland, where the Scottish government will continue to take responsibility for adult disability payment, its replacement for PIP*

**1 June 2023**

**Review finds multiple agencies failed over Whorlton Hall abuse scandal**

Multiple agencies have been criticised by a long-awaited review for failing to expose a regime of physical and psychological abuse at a private hospital for autistic people and people with learning difficulties.

The abuse at Whorlton Hall, near Barnard Castle, County Durham, was only halted after the regime was exposed by undercover footage that featured in a BBC Panorama documentary broadcast on 22 May 2019.

A delayed [safeguarding adults review](https://www.safeguardingdurhamadults.info/article/18039/Latest-news) has now described how failings by multiple agencies, including the Care Quality Commission (CQC), Durham County Council adult and health services and Durham police prevented the abuse being halted earlier.

Although the review only focused on a 16-month period between February 2018 and May 2019, concerns about standards at Whorlton Hall were first uncovered by CQC in 2015.

The review found there was “insufficient multi-agency working” when safeguarding inquiries were carried out in subsequent years.

When police investigations decided there was not enough evidence for further action, this was wrongly taken by the county council “as evidence that there were no safeguarding concerns or need for protection”.

The review also found that coordination between the council and CQC was “poor”.

The review concludes that if the Panorama documentary had not been broadcast, the council would probably have continued its series of “repetitive stop-start” responses to safeguarding concerns at Whorlton Hall, which had been occurring since at least 2016.

The 87-page review is also critical of some of the health bodies and local authorities that had secured places at Whorlton Hall for disabled people from other parts of the country.

The safeguarding report makes it clear that its conclusions do not reflect any changes or developments that have taken place since April 2022, when its findings were agreed by Durham Safeguarding Adults Partnership (DSAP), which commissioned the report.

The report’s publication was delayed by more than a year by a police investigation and criminal trial.

The review makes seven key “systemic” findings, including the need for closer working between CQC and local authorities on safeguarding inquiries at specialist hospitals.

It also highlights the lack of national standards for provider-led safeguarding investigations into the kind of “toxic, intimidating sub-cultures” seen at Whorlton Hall, which closed in May 2019.

It points to the need for disabled people in specialist hospital settings to have a named, independent professional with whom they can develop a “sustained relationship of trust”.

It also points to the “illusion of advocacy provision” for autistic people and those with learning difficulties who are inpatients in specialist mental health hospitals, which it says is “inadequate” and creates “a false security that advocacy is in place”.

And it says that the absence of national oversight of urgent hospital closures following care scandals means there is “little learning about what is working well and what needs to improve”.

It also criticises the lack of a “clear national approach” that will translate into “real change” for autistic people and those with learning difficulties in specialist hospitals.

The first concerns about Whorlton Hall appear to have been raised in 2015, when a CQC inspection rated it as “requires improvement”. But CQC failed to publish the report, a decision a review for the watchdog later concluded was wrong.

A CQC inspection in early 2018, following whistleblowing concerns, raised some concerns, including about an over-use of restraint, but it failed to carry out a “rigorous investigation” of the so-called “alpha group” of staff, whose members were at the centre of allegations of bullying, cover-up and abuse. CQC also failed to inform the council about the allegations.

There was then a botched investigation by Durham police, and a “misguided” decision by the council to allow The Danshell Group – which owned the hospital until 2018 – to carry out an internal investigation rather than carrying out a statutory safeguarding inquiry itself.

The council’s repeated failure to fully implement the “spirit” of Care Act safeguarding guidance caused “missed opportunities to focus on hearing the voice of people living at Whorlton Hall” and “created particular risks for the people identified as making and retracting allegations of abuse”, the review found.

This also meant that “significant levels of trust were placed in Whorlton Hall management to report accurately on events, evidence and judgements”.

The review draws attention to a “postcode lottery” of service provision that leads to “patients being placed for long periods in large hospitals that claim to be specialist, often at a distance from their family, [which] provides an opportunity for abuse to occur”.

And it is critical of Cygnet Health Care, which took over Whorlton Hall in August 2018, but refused to share the findings of its internal investigation into the abuse or information it had obtained when it bought the hospital from Danshell.

The review was completed in April 2022 but not published until now because of the ongoing trial of nine former Whorlton Hall staff members.

The trial ended in April, with five former members of staff cleared of all charges, [but four others found guilty](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tees-65416650) of ill-treating patients. They will be sentenced next month.

**1 June 2023**

**Regulator tells government’s access advisers to act on unlawful secrecy**

The government’s accessible transport advisers have been told by a regulator that they have been behaving unlawfully for years by failing to publish controversial reports, minutes of key meetings and letters they have exchanged with ministers.

Campaigners believe the Department for Transport (DfT) is behind the failure of the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) to meet its legal freedom of information duties.

They believe DfT has prevented DPTAC releasing key documents that would show what action ministers are taking to improve accessible transport, and the advice the committee is giving the government over its repeated and serious failings.

[The Association of British Commuters (ABC)](https://abcommuters.com/) had complained to the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) about DPTAC’s “flagrant” unlawful actions, which were probably a result of government pressure.

ABC lodged the complaint after DPTAC failed to implement the pledge made in May 2022 by its previous chair, Keith Richards, to improve the committee’s transparency, a decision that was supported by the committee.

Richards resigned from the role soon after making the pledge.

But DPTAC’s new chair, [Matthew Campbell-Hill](https://www.matcampbellhill.com/), has questioned whether it is right to release research that exposes the discrimination faced by disabled passengers.

In an interview with Disability News Service soon after his appointment, he [also said that](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/governments-new-access-adviser-questions-release-of-discrimination-evidence/) deciding whether DPTAC would do more to release its research reports and letters to ministers was not high on his list of priorities.

ABC also highlighted the urgency of the issue because of the expansion of DPTAC’s role.

It told ICO that this role had “greatly expanded” in the last five years and that it now provided advice to DfT ministers; DfT civil servants; the regulator, the Office of Rail and Road; and Great British Railways, the new over-arching body that will run the rail system.

DPTAC also liaises with the transport industry, charities, and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC).

ABC found that DPTAC has published just 17 documents online in the last 12 years.

This contrasted with DPTAC’s equivalent body in Scotland, the [Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland](https://www.transport.gov.scot/our-approach/accessible-transport/mobility-and-access-committee-for-scotland-macs/), which regularly publishes consultation responses, minutes, reports, strategic plans and formal letters.

Under the Freedom of Information Act, public bodies like DPTAC must introduce a wide-ranging [publication scheme](https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/foi-eir-and-access-to-information/guide-to-freedom-of-information/publication-scheme/), which describes the information they will publish “proactively”.

But DTAC has no such scheme, and it has kept key documents secret for years, including letters and reports in which it has criticised the Department for Transport’s access failings.

Much of that information has only become known after it was released in response to freedom of information requests from ABC.

In the complaint to ICO, ABC’s co-founder, Emily Yates, pointed the regulator towards a string of controversial documents she secured through such requests, including letters to ministers, DPTAC responses to government consultations, and the committee’s own reports.

[Among those documents](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/staff-levels-completely-inadequate-for-rail-access-say-government-advisers/) was DPTAC’s draft Rail Workforce Reform report, which found that staffing levels on a section of the rail network were “completely inadequate to deliver an accessible railway”.

Another was DPTAC’s response to a consultation on the government’s plans for the railways over the next three decades, [which the committee said](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/ministers-advisers-criticised-poverty-of-ambition-on-rail-access/) displayed a “poverty of ambition” on accessibility.

ABC also secured [an April 2019 DPTAC letter](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/ministers-plans-on-toxic-impact-of-driver-only-trains-fall-way-short-says-dptac/) which showed the committee had told ministers they were falling “a very long way short” with their plans to ease the “toxic” impact on disabled people of running driver-only trains through unstaffed stations.

In the complaint to ICO, Yates said DfT’s legal department had been overseeing DPTAC’s freedom of information practices since late 2018, and there was “strong evidence to suggest DPTAC is denied control over publishing decisions”.

ABC provided the regulator with evidence showing selected members of DPTAC involved in rail reform had been told to sign non-disclosure agreements, which meant it had not been able to discuss rail accessibility properly as a committee since 2019, in breach of its legal duties.

Yates said in her complaint: “After five years lobbying the DfT and DPTAC for transparency on accessibility issues, we have exhausted every avenue for change.

“Yet the stakes have never been higher, in the context of rail reform, budget cuts, and pending legislative change under Great British Railways.”

Now ICO has accepted ABC’s concerns and has told DPTAC it needs to “proactively implement an appropriate publication scheme, made easily available to the public”.

Yates told Disability News Service yesterday (Wednesday): “The DPTAC publications featured in our ICO report are the most important documents on transport accessibility in the UK today, leading to multiple EHRC and parliamentary interventions over the last five years.

“Yet these documents – and even the committee itself – do not officially ‘exist’ to the public.

“DPTAC’s breach of its transparency duties is now so severe that it can only be seen as the exclusion of disabled people and their issues from political and cultural life.”

Asked to confirm that it will ensure DPTAC now produces a publication scheme, and if it would apologise and confirm that it was responsible for DPTAC’s failings in this area, a DfT spokesperson said: “The department and DPTAC remain committed to supporting the transport needs of disabled people.

“We have received correspondence from the Information Commissioner’s Office and will respond in due course.”

**1 June 2023**

**Government breaks pledge to consult on improvements to housing adaptations**

The government has refused to explain why it has not met its pledge to consult on three planned improvements to the scheme that funds disabled people to make access improvements to their homes.

The [People at the Heart of Care white paper](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/people-at-the-heart-of-care-adult-social-care-reform-white-paper), described as the government’s “10-year vision for adult social care” in England, promised in December 2021 to consult on the three improvements to the disabled facilities grant (DFG) scheme “in 2022”.

But none of those consultations have yet been launched, 18 months after the white paper was published.

One pledge was to increase the upper limit for a DFG for an individual adaptation, currently set at £30,000 in England – although councils can increase this on a case-by-case basis – which will mean “that more people who need the grant across the country will be able to access it”.

An [independent review of DFGs](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disabled-facilities-grant-and-other-adaptations-external-review), commissioned by the government, recommended an increase to the upper limit in December 2018.

Another pledge was to simplify the means test underpinning the DFG system, which the government said was “complex and can be difficult to navigate”.

And the third was to examine how DFG funding is allocated to local authorities to “help ensure better alignment with local demand so that more adaptations reach those who need them most”.

Consultations on all three were supposed to take place in 2022, but none of them have yet been launched by the government.

The white paper also included plans to fund a new service to make minor repairs and changes in disabled people’s homes to “help them stay safe and independent and reduce demand for more substantial adaptations through the DFG”.

The four proposals were described in the white paper as “the next important steps towards our 10 year vision for transforming the role that housing plays in adult social care”.

The government has increased funding for DFGs from £220 million in 2015-16 to £505 million in 2019-20 and £573 million in 2022-23, although the 2018 review pointed to concerns that local authority contributions towards DFGs had fallen and so the number of homes adapted had not significantly increased.

[In April](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adult-social-care-system-reform-next-steps-to-put-people-at-the-heart-of-care/next-steps-to-put-people-at-the-heart-of-care) this year, the government announced another £102 million in funding over two years.

In response last week to a written question [from Labour’s Imran Hussain](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-05-17/185650) about the consultation on increasing the upper DFG limit, care minister Helen Whately said only that the government would “continue to keep the upper limit under review”.

She added: “Local areas also already have discretion to increase the cap on the grant on a case-by-case basis or in line with a locally published housing assistance policy*.*”

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) refused to explain why it had failed to launch the three consultations, although it said the government would continue to keep the upper limit, funding allocation and means test under review.

It also failed to comment on progress on the minor repairs service.

But a DHSC spokesperson said: “Providing high quality, safe, and suitable homes remains central to our vision for the adult social care system.

“Suitable housing can help people stay independent and healthy for longer and reduces their need to draw on care and support.

“As part of our social care reforms, we are continuing to provide funding to support people to remain independent at home.

“In addition to the £573 million invested annually in the disabled facilities grant, we are making £102 million of new money available for local housing authorities to increase their funding for home improvement services.”

**1 June 2023**

**Broadcaster’s silence over ‘rabblerouser’ tweet on disability benefits**

The broadcaster Jeremy Vine is facing angry calls for a personal apology after a member of his team published a social media post in his name that asked if it was time to “crack down” on sick and disabled people on out-of-work benefits.

The post on Twitter – which has since been deleted – even asked if such payments should be stopped.

It was the latest example of politicians and the media scapegoating disabled people for the country’s economic struggles.

And it echoes years of similar comments across the media and politics that have been blamed for driving an increase in disability hate crime.

The post from the “Jeremy Vine on 5” account – linked to his Channel 5 daytime discussion programme – said: “Is it time to crack down on jobless benefits?

“Nearly four million people in the UK are being supported by the state without ever having to look for a job.

“That’s because they’ve been deemed too sick to work. Is it wrong for taxpayers to fund them indefinitely?”

The post drew an immediate response from disabled campaigners, accusing the broadcaster of disablism, “trolling” and “demonising” sick and disabled people, and of being a “rabblerouser”.

Soon after Disability News Service asked Channel 5 if Vine would apologise for the tweet, [it was deleted](https://twitter.com/JeremyVineOn5/status/1661697517296185346).

The post came two weeks after a safeguarding review [criticised the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/errol-graham-dwp-criticised-by-report-into-disabled-mans-starvation-death/) for failings that contributed to the death of Errol Graham, a disabled man from Nottingham who starved to death after it wrongly stopped his out-of-work benefits\*.

In April, Tom Pursglove, the minister for disabled people, posted a “hostile” video on social media suggesting disability benefit fraud was a serious problem, even though his own department [released figures just weeks later](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/miniscule-benefit-fraud-stats-show-ministers-hostile-video-was-shameful-and-disablist/) showing only a tiny proportion of spending was paid out to fraudulent claims.

Rick Burgess, campaigns lead at [Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People](https://gmcdp.com/), said: “It is no accident that as the government plans to cut support for disabled people, the media again regurgitate hateful smears that demonise disabled people.

“This was not journalism, it was populist rhetoric to excite a baying mob.

“Jeremy Vine needs to apologise and do extensive work to make this right; simply deleting the tweet does nothing.”

Black Triangle, which was launched 13 years ago to defend disabled people from similar attacks, also condemned the tweet.

John McArdle, co-founder of [Black Triangle](https://blacktrianglecampaign.org/), accused the programme of “defaming” and “scapegoating” disabled people and called on Vine to retract the statement.

He said the return of the narrative that disabled people were a “burden on the economy” was “unbelievable” and “exhausting”, and he called on the Labour opposition to end its silence on such attacks.

Paula Peters, a member of the national steering group of [Disabled People Against Cuts](https://dpac.uk.net/), said: “For 13 years, disabled people have endured hateful rhetoric from the government and mainstream media; we’ve been called scroungers, fraudsters and a lot worse.”

She said this had contributed to reports of disability hate crime to police [doubling in just four years](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2021-to-2022/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2021-to-2022).

Speaking before the tweet was removed, she said that it “shows the vile rhetoric towards disabled people is still very much prevalent among the mainstream media, which continues to cause considerable distress to disabled people today.

“The offensive tweet should be removed without delay and Jeremy Vine should immediately apologise to disabled people for the distress [the] vile remarks have caused.”

[Tori](https://twitter.com/skatothecore), founder of Ehlers-Danlos Teesside, and another disabled campaigner who saw the tweet, said that “ramping up the anti-welfare rhetoric” by the media “sets a dangerous precedent to allow people to question disabled and chronically ill people’s validity”.

She said that allowing the media to portray such a line of questioning as “legitimate debate” was “abhorrent” in a society where the government has “already overseen the active persecution of not only disabled but actual dying human beings, where suicide rates are skyrocketing”.

Tori said such rhetoric “encourages ableism and in turn eugenics”.

Vine has so far failed to comment, apologise for the tweet put out under his name, or say what action he will take to ensure that such posts are not repeated.

Channel 5 has also failed to explain how the tweet was posted, what action it will take to avoid a repetition, and whether it understands the depth of anger about the post.

In a statement that appeared to repeat the disablism of the original tweet, a spokesperson for Channel 5 said: “The issue of benefits was front page news that morning after reports that millions of people were receiving benefits without ever having to look for work following a surge in claims of mental health issues and joint pain during lockdown.”

She said the tweet had been removed as it “could have been misconstrued, so [Channel 5] would like to apologise to anyone offended”.

She said the issue was eventually covered by a fellow presenter, Alexis Conran – whose programme comes under the “Jeremy Vine on 5” umbrella – and not by Vine, with what she said was a “fair and balanced” debate.

And she said the tweet had not come from Vine’s personal Twitter account.

Tori said Channel 5’s response was “absolutely ridiculous”.

She said: “It’s infuriating because you’ve got the government putting out videos of a minister in a fake police uniform with DWP on it and then you’ve got ableds discussing disabled people as if they are disposable and contribute nothing to society.

“Debating it is not OK. We’re living through a pandemic which is creating more disabled people.”

She said the [amount of unclaimed benefits](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/apr/30/uk-households-missing-out-on-19bn-a-year-in-unclaimed-welfare-benefits) was “significantly larger” than [the amount lost due to benefit fraud](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fraud-and-error-in-the-benefit-system-financial-year-2022-to-2023-estimates/fraud-and-error-in-the-benefit-system-financial-year-ending-fye-2023).

She said: “Why don’t they talk about that? It’s absolutely vile what they are doing.”

*\*Labour’s Debbie Abrahams has secured a parliamentary adjournment debate* [*on Tuesday (6 June)*](https://whatson.parliament.uk/event/cal43766) *into the safeguarding review and evidence secured by Disability News Service that DWP hid vital evidence from the review*

**1 June 2023**

**Met’s mental health emergency warning ‘risks creating serious harm’**

A warning from the Metropolitan police that it will stop responding to many mental health-related emergency calls within three months has sparked serious concern among campaigners.

The warning came in a letter sent on 24 May to health and social care services across London by Metropolitan police commissioner Sir Mark Rowley.

He said his officers were spending 10,000 hours a month dealing with mental health-related issues such as waiting to hand patients into medical care.

In his letter, [first reported by the Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/may/28/met-police-to-stop-attending-emergency-mental-health-calls), Rowley said the situation was “untenable” and that he had told his team that the force would “withdraw from health related calls by no later than 31 August”.

The force will instead introduce the Right Care, Right Person scheme (RCRP), which is [backed by the government](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health-and-policing-letter-from-the-home-secretary/letter-to-chief-constables-and-police-and-crime-commissioners-accessible).

The scheme was first tested by Humberside police and is now being introduced by other forces.

Under the scheme, police refuse to respond to concerns about a person’s mental health unless there is a threat to life or a risk of significant harm.

In other cases, support must be provided by health or social care agencies.

Mary Sadid, policy manager for [National Survivor User Network (NSUN)](https://www.nsun.org.uk/), a network of groups and people with experience of mental distress, said Rowley’s letter reflected the level of underfunding of mental health services, but she warned that his warning to remove emergency responses in many situations risked causing further “serious harm”.

She said: “We know that [police involvement](https://www.nsun.org.uk/being-with-not-doing-to-violence-harm-and-police-involvement-in-mental-health-services/) in mental health emergencies can result in criminalisation, punishment and deaths.

“The system is not fit for purpose, and police involvement and its punitive or fatal consequences are a symptom of a deeply cruel and broken system.”

But Sadid said NSUN did not think that health and social care services would be able to introduce plans to fill the gaps left by the police by 31 August.

She said: “We are deeply concerned about the state of mental health emergency response and crisis care.

“The latest announcements reflect the reality of dangerous underfunding and understaffing as well as a deep lack of care and compassion when responding to people in crisis.

“We do not believe that police are the appropriate first responders for people in crisis, but we also do not see adequate alternatives being put forward.”

She added: “The number of mental health beds available has fallen by over 50 per cent since 2000.

“Community services, including grassroots groups, have been decimated by austerity policy.

“People are also being pushed to the brink by a punishing and ableist welfare system.

“In this context, the withdrawal of emergency response risks creating further serious harm.

“We need a response proportionate to the risk people continue to face that values the lives and dignity of the people affected.”

Professor Peter Beresford, co-chair of the disabled people’s and service-user organisation [Shaping Our Lives](https://shapingourlives.org.uk/) and himself a long-term user of mental health services, said his posts on social media about Rowley’s letter had drawn a “massive response” which was “mostly fearful”.

Many of the responses highlighted that the need for police involvement in such emergencies showed the “inadequacy of mental health services”, which was “seen as getting worse and relates to the defunding and low priority of mental health policy and services”.

But he said there had also been a recognition that the police were facing cuts themselves and had inadequate officers “for all the tasks they are expected to take on”.

Beresford said there were comments about both positive and “problematic” treatment from police in such situations, as well as concerns at how some mental health services have responded.

He said: “Clearly mental health policy and provision is in long term crisis.

“If nothing is done about this by government, the police withdrawal from responsibility can only make things worse.

“The government must act on this and other matters with urgency and implement mental health reform, increasing support and funding to make it possible.”

Dr Adrian James, president of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, [expressed sympathy with the Met](https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/news-and-features/latest-news/detail/2023/05/29/rcpsych-reaction-to-met-police-plans-not-to-attend-999-mental-health-incidents) at their “challenges”, but said that he and his colleagues were “surprised and concerned by the unilateral declaration by Sir Mark Rowley to withdraw the police from attending emergency related mental health incidents”.

He said: “It is simply unhelpful and impractical to make decisions like these before we have worked out what will happen in some very concerning situations, both for patients with mental illness, but also for the public and police officers alike.”

Rowley said police officers across all forces were spending nearly one million hours a year with mental health patients in hospitals waiting for them to be assessed, which was time which “could have been spent conducting the initial attendance at 500,000 domestic abuse incidents or 600,000 burglaries”.

In a statement, the Met police said its officers were “not trained to deliver mental health care and spend an average of 10 hours with a patient when they are sectioned under the Mental Health Act”.

Despite government “attention and support” and increased health spending, the Met said that “in the interests of patients and the public, we urgently need to redress the imbalance of responsibility, where police officers are left delivering health responsibilities”.

It added: “Health services must take primacy for caring for the mentally ill, allowing officers to focus on their core responsibilities to prevent and detect crime, and keep communities safe and support victims.”

**1 June 2023**

**Call for direct action protests to build support for ‘radical’ social care reform**

A disabled activist has called for a new campaign of direct action to build public support for a “radical overhauling” of the social care system.

Ellen Clifford, a member of the national steering group of [Disabled People Against Cuts](https://dpac.uk.net/) and author of [The War on Disabled People](https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/war-on-disabled-people-9781350348165/), said disabled activists and users of social care needed to “start putting our messages and our demands out there”.

She said campaigners needed to learn from the achievements of disabled anti-cuts activists through [their campaign of direct action](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dpacs-universal-credit-crime-scene-protest-is-fresh-call-for-action-to-disabled-people/) over welfare reform changes.

Clifford was taking part in an online event hosted by Policy Press, part of a series on developing “participatory, inclusive and sustainable” public and social policy.

She said it had been difficult to engage those in positions of power with the [National Independent Living Support Service proposals](https://www.rofa.org.uk/independent-living-for-the-future/) produced by the disabled people’s movement.

She said this was because it was “not in the interests of any parties that control local councils” to get rid of the current system, which relies on outsourcing and privatisation.

She said: “We do need to look to build public support and to put pressure on those politicians from outside.”

In response to a question from Disability News Service, Clifford said she did not think the Labour party would move towards supporting an end to social care charges until activists have “made space for them to do that by changing public opinion”.

Donald O’Neal, an adult social care user for more than 35 years, and author of [The Lack of Care Act 2014](https://www.amazon.co.uk/kindle-dbs/entity/author/B092R1148X?_encoding=UTF8&node=266239&offset=0&pageSize=12&searchAlias=stripbooks&sort=author-sidecar-rank&page=1&langFilter=default#formatSelectorHeader), said he believed Labour was “not interested in making social care free because they feel they have won the race already”.

He said: “I think if they were put in a position where they thought they were going to lose a lot of votes then they might want to change their mind.

“Labour have just said time and again they are [the party of the working people](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/anger-as-starmer-focuses-again-on-working-people-in-major-speech/) and beyond that they don’t really care because they feel that is enough votes to win an election.”

The Secret Welfare Rights Worker, who was taking part anonymously and has worked previously in the social care system and now provides welfare rights advice to older and disabled people, said: “We somehow have to convince [Labour] that it will be popular if changes are made and then they will have the guts to go forward because they are gutless and they won’t want to go forward unless they think it’s going to be OK for them.

“Somehow we have to engage people and encourage people to see that these are issues that affect all of us and we all might need social care and we all might need benefits, and nobody is safe from that.”

O’Neal said earlier in the event that he believed the way to highlight the need for reform was to enlist the support of celebrities with connections to social care and use social media to “embarrass the government”.

He said: “It sounds idiotic… but unfortunately this is the way our society works.

“We’ve tried co-production, we’ve tried working in partnership, we’ve tried other buzzword methods and they just have not worked.”

He added: “I’m not a fan of co-production. They are happy to work with you as long as you say what they want to hear. Co-production is just greenwash.

“I do believe that every local authority ought to have a user-led organisation that is there to run the local authority adult social care service [and] to provide other things such as advocacy.”

[Dr Sally Witcher](https://twitter.com/salwitcher?lang=en), disabled author of [Inclusive Equality](https://policy.bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/inclusive-equality), and a freelance consultant and former chief executive of [Inclusion Scotland](https://inclusionscotland.org/), said the experience of social care reform in Scotland under the SNP showed it was “not enough to have a good vision for social care, declared political support for human rights and independent living, acceptance of the importance of involving end-users in policy development, and doing that increasingly well.

“It’s not enough to have a manifesto commitment to remove social care charges or multiple stakeholder advisory groups, some of them chaired by ministers, and it isn’t enough to have legislative action to create a National Care Service and remove the postcode lottery.

“Right now, despite all of the above happening, outcomes for people in Scotland who are using or needing social care support are no better, I would say, and possibly even worse than before.”

She said disabled people’s social care outcomes have been negatively impacted by the Covid pandemic and Brexit-related staff shortages, with “entrenched power struggles between local and national government” and between healthcare and social care due to integration of the two systems, all “compounded by the current attempts to legislate for a National Care Service”.

She said the “dysfunctional system” meant that “good quality conversations about personal outcomes” had “hit against financial realities” and a “vastly complex bureaucratic system” with “little if any transparency”.

She compared social care reforms with social security reforms in Scotland which have also involved “innovative participatory approaches” but have “translated and worked well and are now delivering improved services”.

The event yesterday (Wednesday) was chaired by Professor Peter Beresford, co-chair of [Shaping Our Lives](https://shapingourlives.org.uk/), who said social care “feels like the policy that politicians want to forget”.

He said the present government had “made a habit” of overlooking and ignoring social care, “repeatedly promising reform and never quite getting round to it”.

He stressed the importance of grassroots engagement and said that “people engaging with each other” is “absolutely critical”.

Richard Humphries, author of [Ending the Social Care Crisis](https://bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/richard-humphries), a senior policy advisor to the Health Foundation and a former director of social services, stressed the importance of a “long-term approach” to social care reform, and securing public support for the significant investment that was needed so as to “make that politically possible for whoever forms the next government”.

He said: “Reform will not work without the active engagement of people with lived experience, who should very much be driving the changes.”

Clifford added: “Disabled people, our organisations, people who use social care services, absolutely have to be involved in designing and co-producing what we would seek to replace the current system with.”

**1 June 2023**

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

The depth of suffering in care homes in England as Covid hit has been laid bare in a court case exposing “degrading” treatment with residents being “catastrophically let down”. Care levels at the Temple Court care home in Kettering collapsed so badly in April 2020, when ministers rushed to free up NHS capacity by discharging thousands of people, that residents were left lying in their own faeces, dehydrated, malnourished and suffering necrotic, infected wounds, the Care Quality Commission found: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/may/29/cqc-case-reveals-degrading-conditions-in-england-care-home-as-covid-hit>

Disabled people are paying “a tax on disability” by being forced to fund soaring care charges out of their benefits as the cost-of-living pushes care users into financial crisis. Charities and disabled people’s organisations, including Inclusion London, WinVisible, Scope and Mencap, told the Observer that disabled care users are being pushed into severe financial hardship, with some forced to go without essential home care because they can’t afford the fees. Others face up to £20,000 of arrears to their local authority, with some seeing bailiffs called in over care fee debts: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/may/28/tax-on-disability-rising-uk-social-care-costs-debt>

A man with cerebral palsy who was told not to “play the disability card” in his job at Home Bargains has received £25,000 after alleging discrimination. Ryan Walker, who worked as a sales assistant at its Armagh shop, took the case after his duties were changed. He had informed the firm that he needed to be physically active to manage his disability but he was later moved from stacking shelves to working on tills. Home Bargains settled the case without admitting liability: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-65770209>

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