**Watchdog receives hundreds of complaints over Telegraph’s ‘toxic’ benefits article**

A press watchdog has received hundreds of complaints about a “toxic” article by the Daily Telegraph which asked its readers to calculate how much disabled people on out-of-work benefits were contributing to the country’s “tax burden”.

[The Telegraph wrote that](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/tax/news/britain-working-costing-calculate-pay-benefits-tax) millions were claiming benefits “without ever having to look for work” and it produced an automatic calculator that allowed readers to discover “just how much of our hard-won salaries are spent on the benefits of those who do not work”.

More than 600 people have so far complained about the article to the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), which is currently assessing the complaints.

Disabled campaigners warned this week that the news story, following [a “hateful” Twitter post](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/broadcasters-silence-over-rabblerouser-tweet-on-disability-benefits/) by Channel 5’s Jeremy Vine show last month, marks a return to “divisive” and “damaging” media coverage that incites hatred of disabled people.

[Dr Jay Watts](https://twitter.com/Shrink_at_Large), a disabled activist and consultant clinical psychologist, [drafted a letter](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfrifNOQVWQYGXq9JMEG2HStx2rAUBOejKZ7TsspaA18pyctw/viewform) to the Telegraph that has been signed by nearly 300 mental health professionals and describes the “distress” the “divisive” story has caused.

The letter says it is “troubling to observe the return of a divisive narrative last seen at the height of austerity politics, which is likely to lead to an increase in hate crimes and have a profound impact on psychological well-being and societal cohesion”.

It says: “The insinuation that benefit claimants are ‘lazy’ or ‘undeserving’, reminiscent of tropes seen in TV shows like ‘Benefits Street’, oversimplifies and misrepresents the realities of their lives.

“The level of shaming in the public sphere is now so bad that we as clinicians sometimes have to beg people in desperate need to apply for benefits so fearful are they of being seen as a burden.”

[In a statement](https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/end-disability-hate-speech), Disability Rights UK (DR UK) – one of the organisations [to complain to IPSO](https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/press-complaint-independent-press-standards-organisation-disability-rights-uk) – said there had been “an increase in incitement of hatred against disabled people from some sections of our media”, including the Telegraph.

It said the aim of the article was “to vilify people who are too sick to work by angering those who are paying taxes that go towards disability benefits”, and it warned: “We must resist these toxic narratives that only lead to further abuse and vilification of disabled people.”

Kamran Mallick, DR UK’s chief executive, said: “Disability hate speech is totally abhorrent and must stop.

“We urge the Telegraph to cease their campaign against disabled people unable to work.”

The National Union of Journalists’ disabled members’ council also [issued a statement](https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/nuj-disabled-members-council-statement-on-representation-of-disabled-people-in-the-media.html), although it did not mention the Telegraph directly.

[Natasha Hirst](https://twitter.com/HirstPhotos), a disabled journalist and recently elected president of the union, said: “Recent negative reporting on out of work sickness benefits has reinforced a damaging narrative that blames and punishes disabled people for situations that are not of their making.

“Disabled people are rightfully angry to be the target of inhumane and degrading rhetoric in print and broadcast media.

“Journalism is a crucial tool to scrutinise and hold those in power to account and there is no place for toxic reporting that undermines and further marginalises a significant proportion of the population.”

Asked if the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) shared the concerns of those who complained to IPSO that the Telegraph coverage was reinforcing a damaging narrative that blamed disabled people for situations that were not of their making and targeted them with “inhumane and degrading rhetoric”, a DWP spokesperson declined to comment.

Meanwhile, the same “Jeremy Vine on 5” Twitter account that asked last month if it was time to “crack down” on sick and disabled people on out-of-work benefits, [has now asked](https://twitter.com/JeremyVineOn5/status/1666017207334182912) if the increasing number of young adults who are not in work because of illness means they should be described as the “‘sick-note’ generation”.

The post again caused widespread anger among disabled people on social media, with activists describing it as “appalling”, “anti disabled” and an “attack on disabled people”.

It is 12 years since disabled activists [demonstrated outside the central London offices](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/protesters-call-on-daily-mail-to-stop-the-lies-about-benefits-claimants/) of the Daily Mail to protest about that newspaper’s “disablist” and “defamatory” coverage of the government’s push to force people off incapacity benefits.

[Lord Justice Leveson’s report](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/leveson-inquiry-report-into-the-culture-practices-and-ethics-of-the-press) into press standards later [highlighted the “significant tendency”](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/leveson-offers-new-hope-in-fight-against-hostile-newspapers/) among newspapers to publish “prejudicial or pejorative” references to disabled people and other minorities.

Leveson included three examples of “misleading articles” on incapacity benefit reform, which he said were examples of the “harmful” practice in parts of the media of “prioritising the worldview of a title over the accuracy of a story”.

One of them was a Daily Telegraph news story.

Activists now believe the government is again using the media to scapegoat disabled people for the UK’s economic problems, and to try to distract the public from its own difficulties.

It comes only weeks after the minister for disabled people, Tom Pursglove, [faced calls to resign](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/disability-minister-faces-resignation-calls-after-posting-dangerous-and-hostile-video/) after uploading a hostile and “dangerous” post about benefit fraud on social media that warned claimants his department would “track you down” and “bring you to justice”.

Following the spate of distressing media “messaging” about benefit claimants, the grassroots, user-led mental health group [Recovery in the Bin (RiTB)](https://twitter.com/RITB_) put out a call for testimony of what life is like for DWP claimants.

Some of that testimony was published this week.

One claimant told RiTB: “I know that I only deserve to live if I’m employed, that’s the message.”

Another comment described how the impact of “DWP processes and their media has had a direct impact on my mental health to the degree that I would rate it worse than my illness, worse than being sectioned and forcibly medicated, worse than being stitched with no local anaesthetic, worse than surviving a suicide attempt”.

Several of those who contacted RiTB spoke of how they felt like a “burden” and “undeserving”, with one describing the disability benefits system as “a special kind of hell on earth designed to make us feel subhuman, which is what most people think we are”.

One claimant said that watching the Pursglove video had caused a “psychotic episode” and led to a police welfare check.

And one of those who responded to RiTB wrote: “I’ve attempted suicide, been paranoid and psychotic and detained under the [Mental Health Act].

“I think that there is more threat to my life from the benefits system than anything else.”

One claimant told RiTB: “Am not on benefits anymore but I can still feel that fear.

“The recent video from the DWP brought it all back. The feeling of being watched, never knowing who or when. Being told by a support worker that I was worrying over nothing.

“Feeling like a fraud and doubting myself all the time. It was exhausting.”

DNS asked the Telegraph if it would correct at least one obvious inaccuracy in its article, whether it regretted its coverage, and if it would apologise in print and take action to ensure that further such articles are not published.

The Telegraph declined to answer those questions, but a spokesperson said that “more than 600 complaints have been referred to IPSO, we will await to hear from the regulator regarding the matter”.

**8 June 2023**

**Government’s ‘unacceptable’ response hides winter blackout plans**

The government is refusing to reveal any plans it had to protect disabled people who rely on life-saving medical equipment in their homes if there were power blackouts during the winter fuel crisis.

Even though the risk of power cuts is now over until next winter, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) is refusing to say what action it was proposing to take if the threatened [three-hour blackouts](https://www.energynetworks.org/newsroom/how-planned-emergency-power-cuts-would-work) had taken place.

This means that there will be no opportunity to hold the government to account over the plans – and to push for improvements – ahead of next winter.

Disability News Service (DNS) has been trying for months to secure information from the government on how it proposed to protect those who rely on equipment in their homes such as ventilators and dialysis machines.

When DNS asked DHSC in November for those plans through a freedom of information request, it refused to release the documents because they related to “the formulation and development of government policy” and so engaged an exemption under the Freedom of Information Act.

It argued that the information related to “policy options not taken forward at that time which Ministers may choose to pursue in future” and therefore to “ongoing policy formulation and development” and so the public interest “lies in favour of withholding this information”.

DNS resubmitted the request after the winter finished and there was no longer the possibility of power blackouts.

But DHSC has refused again to release the information.

It is now arguing that “national-level power outages can occur at any time and from a range of causes not limited to winter” and so the information “continues to relate to ongoing policy formulation and development”.

It concludes: “We therefore consider that the public interest lies in favour of withholding this information.”

[Baroness [Sal] Brinton](https://twitter.com/SalBrinton), the disabled Liberal Democrat peer who has previously raised concerns about the lack of planning in the House of Lords, told DNS: “This is an extraordinary letter from the Department of Health and Social Care, which if taken literally would mean no information would ever be published again.

“Those people living with electrical appliances need to know how they would be protected in the event of large power supply failure.

“This response shows that yet again ministers just don’t care.”

[Alan Benson](https://twitter.com/AlansTweets), a leading disabled campaigner, particularly on accessible transport, relies on a collection of vital equipment at home, including a day-time and a night-time ventilator, two powered wheelchairs, and an electric hoist, while he also needs to stay warm for health reasons.

He said: “What I need from government is a plan on how I am protected in the event  
of power-cuts, or at the very least reassurance that a plan exists that can be quickly activated.

“Instead I conclude from this response that plans are still being formulated.

“What’s worse is that these cuts are clearly still a real possibility. I feel less safe now than going into winter.

“As we push towards carbon free energy electricity, demand will continue to rise, increasing the risk of supply failure all year round.

“It’s unacceptable that disabled people are being hung out to dry. We need answers for our safety and sanity.”

Mark Baggley, manager of [Choices and Rights Disability Coalition](https://choicesandrights.org.uk/) in Hull, who uses a ventilator at night while he’s sleeping, said: “I think it is disgraceful that the government are refusing to release the relevant documents and wonder what they are trying to hide, or is it simply [that] there is no plan?”

He is registered as a customer in a vulnerable situation with his electricity supplier, EDF, which referred him during the winter to [advice from the Energy Networks Association](https://www.energynetworks.org/newsroom/how-planned-emergency-power-cuts-would-work) which says customers in his position “should seek advice from their local health service provider”.

He told DNS: “It appears clear to me that the government has not thought about and probably doesn’t care [about] the effect any power cuts would have on disabled people in this situation.”

He said he had spoken to several people at the hospital he attends for treatment about his situation during the winter and they had “no clear solution”.

He said: “My ventilator has a two-hour battery backup and after that time, I wouldn’t be able to use it and would have to get up as I can’t sleep without it.”

Government departments have repeatedly referred to [priority services registers](https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/get-help-your-supplier-priority-services-register), which are maintained by individual power companies, but the energy industry has been unable to explain what protection the registers would offer those who signed up, other than the usual “extra help, including advance notice of planned power cuts and priority support”.

The industry made clear that customers on the register would not be exempt from any blackouts, and that those who need a continuous supply of electricity for medical reasons “should seek advice from their local health service provider”.

**8 June 2023**

**Report for Labour rules out early end to care charges**

A report set to have a significant influence on Labour’s adult social care policy at the next general election has ruled out an immediate end to care charges in favour of a more gradual move towards “affordability”.

[The report](https://fabians.org.uk/publication/support-guaranteed/), launched this morning (Thursday) by the Fabian Society, was commissioned by the public service union UNISON after shadow health and social care secretary Wes Streeting asked the think tank to examine how to introduce a National Care Service in England.

As suggested in a draft version of the document [leaked to Disability News Service in March](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/labour-linked-inquiry-set-to-rule-out-scrapping-care-charges/), the report rules out an immediate end to care charging under a Labour government.

Instead, the union-commissioned report suggests that the priority for a new Labour government should be “addressing the immediate workforce crisis” by ensuring “sufficient, properly rewarded and well-trained staff”.

It concludes that, due to the “competing financial pressures facing the system”, charging reform “should not be the first priority for extra money” and should only be “progressed gradually alongside other changes”.

It adds: “The launch of a National Care Service should not mean immediately jumping to a position where most support is free at the point of need.”

The Fabian Society appears to have dropped the recommendation in the draft report that spending on social care should increase by at least six to seven per cent above inflation each year for 10 years.

Instead, it merely suggests that the government should make “a 10-year spending commitment to significantly raise expenditure in real terms every year, and commission independent advice on the amount needed”.

Today’s report also suggests that a new Labour government should take some “immediate steps” on charging reform, such as making all short-term care free or uprating means-testing thresholds.

But rather than offering an end to care charges, the report suggests that the National Care Service (NCS) should provide “services for everyone with support needs, regardless of their means, and affordable to all”.

It adds: “The central task for social care reform should be to ensure that the right support is available to everyone who needs it.

“Achieving fair and affordable care payments can follow.”

But despite painting a grim picture of social care in England, with local authorities being forced to ration care and support, and a £6.1 billion funding gap, there appears to be no mention in the report of the debt crisis facing disabled people who pay for social care in their own homes.

[Research by disabled campaigners](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/tens-of-thousands-driven-into-debt-by-care-charges-new-figures-show/) showed last year that tens of thousands of disabled people across the country every year were having debt collection action taken against them by their local authorities over unpaid care charges.

But instead of an immediate end to charging, today’s report suggests that “one or two” significant care charging reforms could coincide with the eventual launch of the National Care Service.

This might take place in the summer of 2028 – likely to be four years after an election – with the government then announcing a “timetable of further charging changes”.

Options for these initial reforms could include offering free care and support for all people who become disabled before the age of 25, or funding free support for people with “very significant support and clinical needs”.

It suggests that ministers should then “develop a timetable of further charging changes so that people will know that the affordability of support will improve over time”.

[Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance](https://www.rofa.org.uk/) was critical of the report’s failure to address the “inequity of social care charging” when the draft version was leaked to DNS, saying then that “charging for social care is regressive and is a tax on disability” and that a National Care Service “needs to be free at the point of use, like the NHS”.

Despite the likely frustration over its suggestions on charging, some proposals in today’s report could appeal to the disabled people’s movement.

It emphasises the importance of “choice and control” for disabled people who use care and support services so they have new rights to choose where they live, while the National Care Service (NCS) would be “rights based”.

It also says that co-production should be placed at the centre of the NCS, with a new co-production duty for ministers and an independent “scrutiny, evidence and engagement body” led by people who require support and carers.

And it calls for a new legal right to independent living, as laid out in [article 19](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-19-living-independently-and-being-included-in-the-community.html) of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The proposals are described as a “roadmap” towards a National Care Service, and the paper will feed into Labour’s policy review in the run-up to the general election.

At this morning’s launch, Streeting said he needed “to make it crystal clear that today’s report is not Labour party policy” and that the party’s general election manifesto would be “fully costed and fully funded”.

He said Labour “won’t be making any promises in our manifesto unless we are 100 per cent sure we can keep them”.

Streeting added: “People who receive and deliver care have been let down time and again by broken Tory promises. I’m not going to repeat their mistakes.”

He said Labour would be consulting with “care providers, care workers and, crucially, with care users” in “the coming months”.

He said: “I am committed to making sure that our policies are co-produced in partnership with them, people who are experts by experience, either of receiving care or of delivering care.”

One of the two authors of the report, Ben Cooper, is disabled, but the report’s acknowledgements section suggests there were few meetings held with other disabled people and disabled people’s organisations.

Party members approved a motion at last autumn’s Labour conference that called for a National Care Service that was co-produced with service-users, publicly funded, and free of charge.

[Labour’s party conference in 2019](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/labour-conference-activists-set-for-fight-to-persuade-leadership-on-independent-living/) approved plans for a [National Independent Living Service](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/tuc-disabled-workers-conference-unions-back-plans-for-national-support-service/) model for social care reform, devised by the disabled people’s movement and [backed by Labour leader Keir Starmer](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/labour-leadership-starmer-backs-calls-for-free-social-care/) during his Labour leadership campaign three years ago.

But Labour has since backed away from the idea of free social care, with the party’s shadow leader of the Commons, Thangam Debbonaire, [telling female party members](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/labour-says-calling-for-free-social-care-would-just-give-tories-a-stick-to-beat-us-with/) in 2021 that introducing free social care for disabled and older people would just “give the Tories a stick to beat Labour with”.

**8 June 2023**

**DWP criticised in parliament for ‘hiding’ information on starvation death**

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has been criticised in parliament for its “serious” failure to provide crucial information to a statutory safeguarding review about a disabled man who starved to death after his benefits were wrongly removed.

Nottingham City Safeguarding Adults Board [confirmed last month](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-hid-vital-evidence-from-starvation-death-inquiry-board-confirms/) that DWP failed to share key documents from 2014 with the independent consultant who carried out the review into the 2018 death of Errol Graham.

His benefits had been stopped in October 2017 after he failed to attend a face-to-face work capability assessment.

[Tuesday’s adjournment debate](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-06-06/debates/086EF28F-7C31-4AF3-93B8-F24B83B807D8/ErrolGrahamDWPAndSafeguardingAdultsBoardInquiry) was secured by Labour’s Debbie Abrahams after Disability News Service (DNS) drew her attention to DWP’s actions.

Abrahams said the information in the 2014 assessment report “expressed in the clearest language that he would not be fit to work indefinitely”.

And she pointed out that the 2014 documents were also not shared with the inquest into Errol’s death.

Abrahams told MPs that Errol’s daughter-in-law, Alison Burton, had said that DWP’s behaviour raised “serious questions” about its honesty and transparency.

The MP also highlighted [another DNS investigation](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/caxton-house-cover-up-dwp-hid-benefit-deaths-papers-from-wca-review-team/) which has previously revealed how key documents linking DWP to the deaths of multiple disabled claimants were not shared with the department’s own independent reviewers of the work capability assessment, Professor Malcolm Harrington and Dr Paul Litchfield.

She said: “Errol’s story is an example of the department’s failure to safeguard claimants, and subsequently to avoid any form of scrutiny or accountability.

“Any government who were confident in their policies would be open to scrutiny, but there is a pattern of avoidance by the department, including the refusal to provide various reports and data to the work and pensions committee, on which I sit.”

She added: “[The seven Nolan principles of public life](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life/the-7-principles-of-public-life--2) apply to us all – ministers and MPs.

“Two of them are openness and transparency, but unfortunately, those principles are absent from the minister’s department.”

Abrahams asked again for ministers to order an inquiry into “the scale and causes of the deaths of social security claimants”.

Nottingham South MP Lilian Greenwood, who was Errol Graham’s MP, criticised DWP for failing to share the information about his “shocking and disturbing” death.

She told MPs: “The purpose of a safeguarding adults review is not to hold an individual or organisation to account, but it is about agencies learning lessons to improve future practice.

“If tragedies such as Errol’s death are to be prevented in future, which I am sure is what we all want, surely all agencies must share the relevant information with the board.”

She read out a letter Errol had written before his death – but never sent – in which he explained to the person who was going to assess his fitness for work the depth of his mental distress and the poverty he was enduring.

Tom Pursglove, the minister for disabled people, claimed DWP had “co-operated fully and openly” with the safeguarding board on “this very sad case” and said that he was “incredibly moved and concerned” by what had happened to Errol Graham.

He claimed it was “simply not true” that “officials hid information from the board”, but he offered no explanation for why DWP shared information from earlier assessments with the safeguarding review but not documents from Errol’s most recent work capability assessment in 2014, just three years before DWP removed his benefits.

The 2014 documents showed he was experiencing significant mental distress, including active suicidal thoughts.

Those documents would have shown that Errol had explained that he could not cope with “unexpected changes” which left him feeling “under threat and upset”, and that he felt “anxiety and panic in new situations”, while a doctor who assessed him on behalf of DWP described his “active suicidal thoughts”, “very low mood” and how he was “hearing voices all the time”.

Pursglove told MPs that DWP had “no reason” to hide this information from the safeguarding review because it had shared other – earlier – documents, and that “the board had the information that it requested”.

DNS has previously shown how the information DWP shared with the safeguarding review failed to show the level of distress Errol was experiencing, which would have been clear from the 2014 reports.

Pursglove attempted to blame the safeguarding review for not being clearer in its request for information.

He also said it was “not our intention to set up an independent inquiry, but there are steps we have taken as a department to improve matters in relation to safeguarding”.

He highlighted the appointment of more than 30 advanced customer support senior leaders “to support colleagues when dealing with customers who may be vulnerable or at risk”; setting up a DWP “serious case panel”; adding an extra safeguarding stage when “vulnerable” claimants like Errol Graham fail to engage with DWP; and improving mental health training for staff.

Pursglove also confirmed that DWP had accepted the safeguarding review’s recommendation that it should work with the national network of safeguarding adults boards to produce a “protocol” that would ensure they alert each other to relevant cases.

**8 June 2023**

**Evidence to inquiry exposes ‘inadequate’ consequences of transport discrimination**

Disabled campaigners have exposed the widespread – and unpunished – discrimination that passengers face across the rail, bus and taxi sectors, in written evidence to an MPs’ inquiry.

Many of the concerns were focused on the rail sector, with evidence highlighting the distress caused by delays, significant access barriers, and the repeated failure to enforce breaches of the Equality Act.

The evidence is included in [more than 60 written submissions](https://committees.parliament.uk/work/6805/accessible-transport-legal-obligations/publications/written-evidence/) to an ongoing inquiry by the Commons transport committee into accessible transport and the legal obligations of the transport industry.

In its submission, the disabled people’s organisation Transport for All described the “weak language, limited implementation, and inadequate legal consequences” of current legislation on accessible transport.

It said that disabled people faced “significant barriers on every mode of transport” and warned that regulators “do not have significant enough powers” to enforce legal obligations.

It particularly pointed to rail companies, which it said “flagrantly breach the Equality Act”.

[Transport for All](https://www.transportforall.org.uk/) said the fines handed to those companies that breached the act were “insufficient to ensuring effective enforcement”, and it called for the penalty for discrimination to be “equal to the seriousness of the offence”.

[Christiane Link](https://twitter.com/Christiane), a disabled consultant, who has advised the transport industry on access for more than 20 years, told the committee in her written evidence that the key issue for disabled rail passengers was the unreliability of the assisted travel service.

She said these failures were a “health and safety issue and a significant barrier” for disabled people, some of whom are forced to try to disembark trains themselves, which has “severe safety implications”.

She said the rail industry should mirror the air travel sector, where airports must report to the regulator each time a passenger misses a flight because assistance was not provided on time.

Link said the Department for Transport (DfT) and the public “should have constant and transparent information about why failed assists are happening and where”.

And she said that “performative” actions by the rail industry such as lighting up stations in purple once a year or providing “sunflower buggies” should no longer receive public funding because they are “a smokescreen for poor service and a waste of taxpayers’ money”.

She also called for all new train carriages to provide level boarding.

Another disabled campaigner, [Tony Jennings](https://twitter.com/LordOrk), co-founder of the [Campaign for Level Boarding](https://www.levelboarding.org.uk/) and co-chair of the Avanti accessibility panel, also spoke of the importance of only buying new rail carriages that offered level boarding.

He said: “The DfT need to specify low floored trains in future with a legislative deadline and rolling programme to modify platforms to the UK standard to deliver level boarding in a reasonable timescale.”

He said train companies should be “heavily fined” and risk losing their franchise if they fail to enforce access laws in areas such as the safety of ramps, booking wheelchair spaces and failing to provide passenger assistance.

Jennings said: “Disabled people are fed up with complaining when passenger assistance fails when nothing changes.

“Compensation or free tickets is pointless if lessons aren’t learnt and processes and [accessible travel policies] aren’t enforced.”

He added: “The government need to take equal access seriously, action and investment is needed now to deliver an inclusive railway that is fit for purpose.”

Accessible transport campaigner [Doug Paulley](https://twitter.com/Doug_Paulley) submitted written evidence that covered buses, taxis, the rail sector, air travel and London Underground.

He warned that, despite the “23-year-old regulations on the physical accessibility of buses and coaches and accessibility obligations on drivers, mass noncompliance with the regulations has gone unnoticed and unenforced”.

He told the committee: “There is no meaningful mechanism for discriminated-against disabled people to challenge or enforce when providers fail to comply with our rights, or when enforcers and regulators fail to enforce them.

“Disabled people need and deserve statutory bodies to reliably and simply realise and enforce our rights to access buses and coaches.”

Paulley said the laws on the accessibility of taxis were “a mess, as are the regulatory and enforcement mechanisms”, which “let disabled people down, resulting in colossal distress and iniquity”.

And he said that rail station accessibility information systems were “not fit for purpose”, while the “drive for destaffing stations creates specific problems for disabled people, especially where the station is served by driver-only trains”.

The disabled people’s organisation [Wheels for Wellbeing](https://wheelsforwellbeing.org.uk/) said complaints processes were often “inaccessible, time-consuming and rarely result in any significant change to practice or provision”.

It told the committee in its written evidence: “Disabled people are often fobbed off with paltry compensation such as a discounted or free train ticket for their next journey.

“Because legal action is so costly and time and energy consuming, few Disabled people are in a position to undertake it.”

The disabled women’s organisation [WinVisible](https://winvisible.org/) told the committee that inaccessibility and understaffing of transport was “a huge problem”.

It wrote: “Many of us can’t go where we want, when we want to or need to. We spend a lot of time worrying about journeys beforehand and arranging them. We have to allow extra time for the journeys themselves, and they are stressful.

“It is clear that the current legislation is not effective, neither is it being enforced by regulators.”

It told the committee that cuts to rail staff and asking them to carry out “multiple roles” would lead to them becoming “overworked, distracted and tired from long shifts” and would result in “more preventable deaths and injuries”.

Iain Stewart, the transport committee’s chair and a Conservative MP, said: “The huge amount of written evidence we received on accessible transport has made it clear that current legislation doesn’t do enough to support disabled people who need to safely use buses, trains or even pavements to get around and live their lives.

“Many people are denied the ability to travel as easily as they should and end up avoiding going out altogether, causing them to miss out on socialising and work opportunities.

“The evidence has also shown the importance of our inquiry investigating legal obligations and enforcement of accessible transport legislation.

“Currently, the enforcement of accessibility rules and laws is inadequate, and passengers shouldn’t shoulder the expensive and stressful burden of bringing court action against operators when they are mistreated.”

**8 June 2023**

**Guidance ‘will boost confidence’ of employers who want to recruit disabled people**

New guidance that stresses that employers are allowed to reserve jobs for disabled people should help narrow the disability employment gap, say the disabled people’s organisations (DPOs) that asked for the legal advice to be published.

Inclusion Barnet’s chief executive, Caroline Collier, realised there was a “genuine hole” in people’s knowledge of the law on recruiting disabled people, even among those who specialised in employment law.

She approached the independent employment advice and conciliation service Acas to ask if it would produce new guidance.

With support from Collier and Inclusion London’s Tracey Lazard, Acas has now produced [new guidance for employers](https://www.acas.org.uk/hiring-someone/using-protected-characteristics), which makes it clear that they can “specifically advertise for and recruit a disabled person without the risk of disability discrimination”.

Collier said the law that allows employers to treat disabled candidates more favourably by reserving roles for disabled people – under the Equality Act – could help narrow the disability employment gap, which still hovers at around 30 per cent.

She said Acas had been “really supportive” and the advice on the Acas website now “puts it beyond doubt” that any employer can make it clear that they wish to recruit a disabled person.

The guidance makes it clear that employers can also seek to recruit a disabled person with a specific impairment if there is a “genuine occupational requirement” for them to do so.

Collier said she hoped other DPOs will find the guidance useful, by giving them the confidence to reserve roles for disabled people, rather than “fudging it” by saying that lived experience was “desirable”.

And she praised Acas for being “responsive and ready to listen” on the issue.

She added: “With the current rate of employment for disabled people almost 30 per cent lower than it is for those who are non-disabled, we hope it will encourage many more employers to reserve roles in this way.”

The guidance was made possible through funding from [City Bridge Trust](https://www.citybridgetrust.org.uk/).

Paul Hawkins, head of skills development at Attitude is Everything, which campaigns to improve access to music and other live events, said: “Attitude is Everything welcome this hugely important clarification from Acas.

“We know that one in five of the adult working-age population are disabled yet disabled people are underrepresented across the UK workforce.

“Our [Beyond the Music project](https://attitudeiseverything.org.uk/professionals/) seeks to remove barriers for disabled people looking to work in the music and live events industry and we frequently find that employers are keen to have a fully representative workforce but worry that actively advertising for disabled talent may put them in breach of the Equality Act.

“We are extremely grateful to the teams at Inclusion Barnet and Inclusion London for working with Acas to clarify that the Equality Act does allow employers to reserve roles for disabled people.

“This gives us greater confidence when supporting employers to address the disability employment gap.”

Tracey Lazard, chief executive of [Inclusion London](https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/), said: “We welcome the clarified guidance from Acas.

“They have made clear that you can specifically advertise for and recruit disabled people to any role, without the risk of disability discrimination and without the need to demonstrate that there is an occupational requirement for a disabled person.

“You can also treat a disabled person more favourably compared to a non-disabled person in the hiring process.

“This guidance gives organisations confidence that they can prioritise people with lived experience of disability for any job role, and is something that the government should be promoting and supporting, to reduce the disability employment gap and disability pay gap.”

Acas adviser Gary Wedderburn said: “Inclusion Barnet approached us after they identified a gap in publicly available online advice on what the Equality Act says about recruiting disabled people.

“We worked with the charity to expand our existing advice in this area, which now includes practical workplace examples around how the law on disability discrimination applies when an employer wants to recruit someone.

“It’s important for recruiters to be aware that the Equality Act allows an employer to specifically advertise for a disabled person and a non-disabled job applicant cannot then claim disability discrimination.

“The law allows recruiters to treat a disabled person more favourably compared to a non-disabled person for any type of job role.

“However, if an employer wants to recruit a person with a specific disability then they would have to justify that there’s an occupational requirement for that specific disability in the role, otherwise a job applicant with a different disability could claim disability discrimination under the law.

“We were happy to update our advice in this area and I am pleased to hear that it has had a positive impact.”

***This news story is part of an ongoing Disability News Service series that highlights the vital work of the UK’s disabled people’s organisations***

**8 June 2023**

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

Health ministers are to recruit a new volunteer army for social care to ferry medical equipment and drugs to people’s homes in a bid to free up congested hospital wards. Volunteers will also be sent to, though not into, people’s homes to tackle loneliness and carry out shopping and other errands. Under the plan, members of the public will be able to sign up on the [GoodSam app](https://www.goodsamapp.org/) for roles such as “check in and chat”, which involves support over the phone for people struggling with loneliness: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jun/06/ministers-seek-volunteer-social-care-army-to-speed-up-hospital-discharges>

Disabled children are being forced to go without electricity or heating because their families are being disproportionately harmed by the cost-of-living crisis, according to research by a children’s charity. The Childhood Trust said that the rising costs of energy bills and other inflation was affecting the families of disabled children even more than their mainstream counterparts: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/jun/04/disabled-children-disproportionately-affected-uk-cost-of-living-crisis>

Lincolnshire County Council has been ordered to apologise for failing to consult disability groups over a controversial active travel scheme. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman said the council had not complied with guidance over the removal of parking spaces in Louth. The council removed three accessible parking spaces in March last year as part of changes to make the town more accessible to cyclists and pedestrians. Two of the spaces were reinstated in August after an outcry: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lincolnshire-65778481>

A council has been given a £6.3 million bailout for its special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) services. Wokingham Borough Council applied for the government cash amid a predicted overspend caused by increased demand. The payment has been revealed in council papers, published ahead of an audit committee meeting. A report said the money would be spent on SEND facilities in mainstream schools so children would not have to travel such long distances: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-berkshire-65820565>

**8 June 2023**

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