**PIP investigation: Woman took her own life two days after learning of failed PIP appeal**

A disabled woman who lost her disability benefits because of a controversial reassessment process took her own life just two days after being told her appeal had failed.

The body of Susan Margaret Roberts was discovered by a care worker at her warden-assisted flat near Tunbridge Wells, Kent, surrounded by letters telling her that she would not be entitled to the government's new personal independence payment (PIP).

The long-term claimant of disability living allowance (DLA) had also placed a "do not resuscitate" (DNR) note by her side.

There have been [many cases involving deaths](http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/green-party-calls-on-government-to-launch-benefit-deaths-inquiry/) connected with claims for out-of-work disability benefits and the work capability assessment (WCA) system, but this appears to be the first time a death has been closely linked to someone losing their support in the move from DLA to PIP.

An inquest into the 68-year-old's death did not record a verdict of suicide, and no-one from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) or its assessment contractor Atos gave evidence at the hearing last September.

But her daughter, Hayley Storrow-Servranckx, is convinced that she would still be alive today if it was not for the flawed PIP assessment system.

She told Disability News Service (DNS): "If it wasn't for PIP, my mum would still be here."

DNS has collected more than 100 cases of PIP claimants who have raised serious concerns about their assessments, following a two-month investigation that suggested an institutional problem that spreads across DWP and the two private sector contractors – Atos and Capita – that assess PIP eligibility on its behalf.

Susan Margaret Roberts died on 19 May last year, just two days after receiving a letter from a benefits tribunal telling her she had lost her appeal against the PIP decision.

She had had to return her Motability vehicle several weeks earlier, as a result of the DWP decision to refuse her PIP claim.

Storrow-Servranckx is determined to secure answers from DWP and Atos, the company that carried out her mother's face-to-face PIP assessment.

She said: "I want their apologies, and I want to know that they are going to try their hardest to change things, so it doesn't happen to other people.

"There needs to be a change. They are killing people. It can't happen to other people.

"It has just left so much destruction. I wouldn't wish that on anybody."

She added: "I don't want them to get away with it. I want them to know that my mum existed.

"I feel like they killed her. That's how I feel."

Her mother had a number of long-term health conditions, including significant mental distress and "very severe" fibromyalgia - which meant she often slept all day and night, except for a few hours every evening - had had four major heart attacks, and had a serious bowel disorder that meant she needed daily colonic irrigation.

She had previously received an indefinite award of DLA, at the higher rate of mobility and the lower rate of care.

But after her PIP assessment last year, she was awarded just six points for the descriptors that are used to decide eligibility, which meant she was told she was ineligible for PIP, even though her impairments meant that she had to be visited by care workers every day.

Storrow-Servranckx, who is herself disabled and receives PIP, said: "When they found her, she was surrounded by her PIP letters and her DNR letter.

"Her PIP letters were never out. She always kept them filed away."

John McArdle, co-founder of [Black Triangle Campaign](http://blacktrianglecampaign.org/), said the case was "utterly heart-rending".

He said: "The catalyst for the establishment of Black Triangle Campaign was the suicide of our friend Paul Reekie of Leith, Edinburgh, following a WCA carried out by Atos.

"These circumstances are remarkably similar to what happened to Paul, only this time the suicide occurred following a PIP assessment carried out by the same firm.

"Like the WCA, the PIP assessment is underpinned by the so-called 'biopsychosocial model' of disability created by the corrupt and predatory US medical insurance industry.

"It was designed with the express purpose of denying disability claims so as to maximise profits: it is as far away from evidenced-based medicine as it is possible to get. It is also lethal.

"If we truly lived in a civilised society operating under the principles of justice and the rule of law there would  be an immediate police investigation into all the circumstances surrounding Susan's death - leading to the prosecution of all concerned, including crown servants and ministers working out of the DWP."

He added: "We cannot even begin to imagine the suffering that this tragedy has inflicted upon Hayley.

"There can be few things in this life more painful than losing a mum before their time, owing to the despicable actions of this government and it's henchmen and women who operate this disability assessment regime.

"What have we as a country become? We demand justice for Susan and for all victims of this barbaric and hateful system."

Storrow-Servranckx believes there are important questions over the way her mother's PIP claim was dealt with.

Among them are an apparent refusal to accept further evidence that she wanted to submit about her claim.

On an envelope containing a letter her mother said she was not allowed to submit to DWP was written a scribbled note in her hand-writing, which said: "This is my evidence that the DWP would not send to them in response to their first letter of refusal of my claim.

"It contains information that is crucial to my claim. Reconsideration ie the mandatory notice was made without this.

"I would be very grateful if you could consider the contents yourselves."

Her family have not yet seen the assessment report that was completed by an Atos assessor and led to her being given only six "descriptor" points and therefore ineligible for PIP.

A DWP spokeswoman said: "Suicide is a tragic and complex issue. Our thoughts are with Mrs Roberts' family but there is no evidence to suggest any link between her death and her benefit claim.**"**

She said neither DWP nor Atos believed they had made any mistakes in this case, and pointed out that the independent tribunal had "upheld the original decision".

Asked if DWP believed that the report written by the Atos assessor was fit for purpose, accurate and an honest representation of the impact of the claimant’s impairment, she said: "Decisions for PIP are made following consideration of all the information provided by the claimant, including supporting evidence from their GP or medical specialist.

"The independent tribunal upheld the original decision."

She said the department did not accept that Roberts was refused permission to submit further medical evidence.

She said: "Claimants are always welcome to supply further medical evidence, but it is not guaranteed that it will change a PIP decision.

"Mrs Roberts was informed of this during [a] phone call on 24 February.

"We want to use the widest range of evidence when we assess PIP claims, so we encourage claimants to provide us with any relevant evidence or information they already have that explains how their condition affects them."

A spokeswoman for Motability said: "We were unaware of Miss Roberts’ death before your email and would like to offer our condolences to her family.

"Although Motability works closely with the DWP on issues related to the Motability scheme, Motability has never had any role in determining who should receive DLA or PIP; that is solely the responsibility of the DWP.

"As such, we are unable to comment on the assessment process."

**16 February 2017**

**PIP investigation: 100 cases, and still DWP refuses to accept the dishonest truth**

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has denied there is any dishonesty among the healthcare professionals who carry out its benefits assessments, even though Disability News Service (DNS) has now collected 100 cases where such allegations have been made.

Disabled people have continued to come forward with their personal stories since DNS [published the results of a two-month investigation](http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/pip-investigation-assessment-reports-show-widespread-dishonesty-by-nurses/) into claims that nurses and other healthcare professionals had lied in reports they wrote after face-to-face assessments for personal independence payment (PIP).

This week, DNS was made aware of the 100th case in which a PIP claimant has alleged that a health professional working for government contractors Capita and Atos produced a dishonest assessment report.

One PIP claimant told DNS this week: "When I received the DWP decision, I couldn't believe what I was reading.

"For example, 'I was observed to drink from a cup and that I had shown good grip, gripping the assessor's fingers.'

"I never touched the man, and he never touched me.

"When I finally received the full assessor's report, I was flabbergasted at the inaccuracies, misinformation and at worst, blatant fabrication.

"Even general information, about my home, layout of my home, aids in my home and aids that weren't even in my home, were reported as fact. It was completely made up, even the type of clothing I wear."

Another PIP claimant wrote on the DNS Facebook page how she had broken down and cried three times at her assessment, how her husband helped with her notes, how she was unable to answer many of the questions because she was so exhausted and distressed, how she had to wear dark glasses during the assessment because the light was too bright, and how she had only looked at the assessor once.

But she said: "She wrote in her report that I coped well, had good eye contact, didn't appear anxious or distressed, answered all the questions unprompted and well.

"She lied about almost every single aspect of the assessment.

"Now I've lost my car (my independence) and will have to fight this at a tribunal, which I'm dreading."

The wife of another PIP claimant described how the assessor twice ignored all of the medical evidence he provided, and lied about contacting her husband's consultant and cardiac nurse.

She said the system was "a bloody nightmare", and added: "He has a severe heart condition and heart failure, but PIP totally ignored what he told them.

"The assessor was one of the rudest people I have ever come across, told me to shut up and be quiet or he would stop the interview.

"My husband was really struggling with the situation but I wasn't allowed to help him or say anything."

A PIP claimant who commented on the investigation through the DNS website said: "The report detailed that I spoke with confidence and cracked jokes, when actually it was my brother who spoke.

"The report detailed a physical examination in which she claimed she examined my ankles, knees, hips, back, shoulders, elbows, wrists and dexterity.

"No such examination was carried out.

"She also claimed to witness me bending down to sign out, when my brother is the one who signed us out."

The Commons work and pensions select committee is due to make a decision in the next few weeks on whether to launch an inquiry into the allegations of dishonesty in the PIP assessment process.

And DNS has submitted anonymised evidence to the independent review of PIP being carried out by former civil servant Paul Gray on DWP's behalf.

But asked if ministers were still insisting that there was no dishonesty among their assessors, and that they had no concerns about the issues raised by the investigation, a DWP spokeswoman said: "We expect the highest standards from the contractors who carry out PIP assessments.

"We do not accept it to be the case that there is dishonesty amongst them.

"We are committed to making sure the PIP assessment process works fairly and effectively, which is why we welcome independent reviews such as the ones led by Paul Gray, the second of which is expected in April 2017.

"Anyone not happy with their benefit decision can ask for it to be looked at again, and then appeal to an independent tribunal.

"There is also a comprehensive complaints procedure in place."

**16 February 2017**

**Council boss in Capita care cuts storm admits one in five had support reduced**

A council leader has admitted that one in five of the disabled people whose care packages were reassessed by the discredited outsourcing company Capita have had their support cut.

Simon Letts, the Labour leader of Southampton City Council (SCC), also admitted that none of the 90 service-users whose direct payments packages have been reassessed by Capita have seen their support increased.

Letts was forced to speak out as activists from [Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC)](http://dpac.uk.net/) and their allies protested outside his council's offices after a Disability News Service (DNS) story revealed how freelance social workers were offered an "extra incentive scheme" by a Capita manager last September if they increased the "savings" they achieved by cutting people's support.

Although that email offer was later withdrawn - the council and Capita insist it was never approved - another leaked Capita email passed to DNS showed how the council continued to pressure the company to cut care packages.

The second email, sent on 8 November by the same Capita manager, said: "The senior [council] managers who are leading this transformation want to know why we are failing to realise the results in service delivery and savings they anticipated by commissioning this project.

"They in turn are being asked to explain to Councillors of SCC."

Letts told DPAC that the emails made "disturbing reading" and later admitted that their "style and tone" was "not acceptable".

But before DNS released the emails to DPAC and the council - with the permission of the whistleblower who leaked them - Letts had attacked the story as "false news" and said that Labour Party members who planned to protest should "know better".

The protests against Capita have come as a DNS investigation continues into separate claims that healthcare professionals carrying out disability benefits assessments for Capita - and fellow outsourcing company Atos - have been guilty of widespread dishonesty in how they have compiled their reports for the Department for Work and Pensions.

Actvists who protested outside the council's offices yesterday (Wednesday) said they believed the local authority's actions had breached the Care Act.

And they called on the council to reinstate the support packages of everyone who has seen their care cut because of a Capita reassessment.

Tim Geering, from Southampton DPAC, one of the organisers of the protest, called on Letts to consider resigning.

He said: "We wanted to lay down a marker today that DPAC and our supporters are going to put pressure on the council to restore the care packages of people who have had them taken away.

"We want an end to using contractors like Capita, who have an abhorrent record in their dealings with disabled people."

Kathy, a council service-user who has not herself been reassessed by Capita, said she was concerned by the council's contract with the company.

She said: "Without help, we wouldn't survive. I am just concerned about the older generation who are too scared to voice an opinion."

Bobby Noyes, president of Southampton Trades Union Council, told fellow protesters: "The information from the whistleblower potentially brings into question the legality under the Care Act of every person assessed by Capita.

"Our demand is for the council to reinstate all packages cut by Capita.

"We want to see the packages restored, to ensure people can have a dignified existence and not suffer the consequences of austerity."

One disabled protester, Ba Lupton, said Capita were "just a rogue firm. They are just making millions out of tax-payers' money."

Independent councillor Andrew Pope, a former Labour council member, told DNS: "Social work in the city of Southampton has been in chaos for many years, whether Conservative or Labour.

"This is what happens when you don't have control over what is happening in your offices."

The whistleblower told DNS last week that Capita had piled pressure on its team of freelance social workers - while paying them more than £1,000 a week, after tax, and putting them up in three-star hotels - to cut care packages, on the council's orders.

The council had employed Capita to clear a backlog of annual reviews of the care packages of disabled and older people.

The whistleblower said her bosses made it clear that team members would only keep their jobs if they produced enough cuts to the packages of the people whose care needs they were assessing.

Both the council and Capita have continued to deny there was any pressure placed on the social workers to cut people's support packages.

A council spokesman said: "The style and tone of the emails to social workers in the review team is not considered acceptable and this has been addressed with the sender."

But he denied that the council had asked Capita to cut people's support, or that the council had told Capita that the contract would only continue if it produced a certain amount of cuts.

He said: "The purpose of this project was to comply with the Care Act.

"The aim of the project was not to cut people’s care and support packages but to address a backlog of reviews.

"As the care packages had not been reviewed for over a year, it was anticipated that some would reduce.

"The reason for the project was to bring additional capacity to enable overdue reviews to be completed in a timely way.

"Social workers were not encouraged to recommend the reduction of people’s packages, but to carry out a thorough review of needs to ensure that care and support was appropriate and being delivered in accordance with the council’s adult social care and support planning policy.

"The locum social workers employed by Capita on the project were paid at rates that are consistent with the cap on social worker agency fees proposed by the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services for social workers with two years’ experience.

"The hotels used are booked by Capita at their contract rates for social workers who are working away from home."

A Capita spokesman said in a statement: “Capita and its employees delivering this service have never been incentivised to deliver savings, and our overall contract performance is measured on the delivery of needs based assessments that ensure people are receiving the appropriate type and level of care as well as meeting the requirements of the Care Act (2014).

"We always encourage all of our employees to consider how our services to customers could be improved or delivered differently.

"However, in this case the employees’ idea was clearly inappropriate and they did not have the authority to suggest it, share it with the team nor action it.

"The scheme was never considered an appropriate proposal and was rejected outright."

**16 February 2017**

**Spartacus exposes work and health green paper 'smokescreen'**

Campaigners have published a withering 237-page attack on the government's work, health and disability green paper, accusing ministers of creating a "smokescreen" to disguise their intention to cut support and force sick and disabled people into inappropriate work.

The response from the Spartacus Network of disabled campaigners has been submitted to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) as part of the public consultation on its [Improving Lives green paper](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/564038/work-and-health-green-paper-improving-lives.pdf), which was published last October.

The authors say in the report that it was "truly shocking" that ministers had "touted" the green paper as "mitigation" for cuts to employment and support allowance (ESA) that are due to be introduced in April, when there was "very little evidence that the cuts would be mitigated at all".

The report is in stark contrast to the generally positive responses to the government's ideas from the big disability charities, with Scope even welcoming the green paper and praising it in a government press release for setting out "some bold ideas for reform".

[The Spartacus report, Smokescreen](https://spartacusnetwork.wordpress.com/2017/02/15/smokescreen-response-to-green-paper/), says the green paper threatens to increase assessments and introduce stricter conditions for disabled people claiming ESA, the out-of-work sickness and disability benefit.

And it says the green paper promotes the idea of "work as a cure", and suggests the government intends to "deny increasing numbers of sick people the financial support they need".

It criticises the government's plan to use "the same outsourced payment-by-results system as failed under the Work Programme and has been failing in Australia for nearly two decades".

The Spartacus report says the green paper is both "suggestive, prejudicial and misleading" and "fatuous, disingenuous and a smokescreen for its real intentions".

The green paper, the report says, is "designed to give the appearance of helping sick and disabled people whilst actually cutting and restricting access to their income, increasing conditionality, removing choice and imposing an ideological goal of being in paid work on every chronically sick or disabled person, regardless of the appropriateness of this goal for the individual".

They add: "Healthy disabled people need social care packages, Access to Work packages, training and specialized job brokers.

"Those with long-term health conditions, whose condition is incompatible with work, should not be forced into further assessments and financial deprivation."

Responding to the green paper's threat that the government could for the first time introduce compulsory work-related activity for people in the ESA support group, it says: "What sick people in the support group need is the provision of decent healthcare, and an adequate, stable income that will give them the freedom to manage their health and wellbeing appropriately.

"People in the support group must never be mandated to employment support."

The report is the latest in a series of research papers responding to government welfare reforms that have been produced by the Spartacus Network over the last five years.

The first of them, [Responsible Reform](http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/government-admits-failing-to-analyse-results-of-dla-consultation/), revealed in 2012 that the government had misled parliament and the public about the scale of opposition to its disability living allowance reforms, while last year's [Crippling Choices](http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/appalling-consultation-shows-governments-pip-plans-are-deplorable/) helped persuade the government to abandon plans to cut spending on personal independence payment (PIP).

Smokescreen, written by Caroline Richardson and Stef Benstead, with contributions from fellow campaigners David Gillon, Catherine Hale and Jonathan Hume, says the government "talks as though most people on ESA are latent labourers", implies that sick and disabled people "do not need the support that in fact we do need", and "marginalises us as unworthy unless we work".

They say the green paper deliberately fails to address the workplace needs of healthy disabled people - such as many of those who are autistic or have learning difficulties or sensory impairments - because ministers know that employing such groups would probably require upfront and ongoing support costs.

Richardson and Benstead say in the report that a "central theme" of the green paper is the implication that "work is a cure for illness", which they say is "fundamentally flawed and wrong", and "a major reason why this entire Green Paper is so poor".

The green paper says the government is trialling "partnerships between local health service commissioners and providers, Jobcentres, and councils", which will "test if health-led support services are effective at supporting disabled people and people with health conditions into work".

Richardson and Benstead say the focus on "transferring healthcare away from the NHS towards JobCentres is fundamentally wrong and irresponsible".

They also say there is no evidence in the green paper that the government intends to address the barriers disabled people face by improving its Access to Work (AtW) scheme or providing more support to meet their extra costs through PIP.

Instead, they say, AtW is "notoriously slow and poor on delivery", while PIP was "deliberately designed to remove considerable numbers of working-age sick and disabled people from the extra-cost benefit they need".

Richardson, one of the report's co-authors, told Disability News Service that the green paper appeared to have been deliberately written to obscure "what the government is really going to do, and regularly contradicts itself as a result".

She said: "What was most shocking was the lengths the paper goes to introduce hypotheses which it then later states as facts in order to justify what it is proposing.

"It's the most outrageous spin, using terms that suggest serious illness is minor and common, and hence easily and quickly cured."

She said that one of the major risks if the green paper's proposals were implemented was the "underestimation of the severity of the conditions in both groups of ESA.

"From the outset it portrays a huge subset of people as easily curable, and that charities and community groups have the capability and capacity to help people much quicker and cheaper than the NHS, and that work will be some form of rehabilitation.

"We have been here before with work programmes, and people have been very damaged as a result of overestimating claimants'  capability.

"It's this determination to portray people as easily cured and supported, whilst social care and the NHS flounder due to underfunding, that is the most striking message."

Benstead said she was "deeply saddened" by the green paper.

She said: "The government had an opportunity to do something positive.

"It had the opportunity to make sure that every person in this country has access to all the forms of support they need - whether financial, health, employment, social, personal, household or anything else.

"The Conservatives are supposed to be the party of personal responsibility.

"This paper removes the option of personal responsibility.

"People cannot take responsibility if the things they would choose - such as accessing healthcare, investing in themselves, freeing up their time for productive activities - are not available."

Benstead said the green paper contained "many risks".

She said: "It requires people to engage in much higher levels of activity that they have been assessed as capable of.

"It risks harming the patient/doctor relationship by all-but forcing every doctor to tell every (working-age) patient that they would be better if they were in work.

"It downgrades the severity of illness experienced by people on ESA, misleading the readers as to the depth and extent of support that is actually needed, and thus absolving itself of its responsibility to do far more."

**16 February 2017**

**Questions over DWP's further medical evidence pilot secrecy**

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is facing questions over why it failed to release the results of a pilot project that was supposed to correct a fatal flaw in its "fitness for work" test.

DWP had promised a judge that the pilot project would test ways of making the work capability assessment (WCA) safer for claimants with mental health conditions and learning difficulties, by ensuring that the necessary medical evidence was collected from their healthcare professionals.

Many disabled people claiming out-of-work disability benefits have been unable to prove they could not work because the WCA process has been focused on an unfair and discriminatory face-to-face assessment, and they were unable to provide enough written evidence to back up their cases.

Ministers [promised a tribunal appeal hearing two years ago](http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/six-years-on-and-still-no-dwp-progress-on-further-medical-evidence/) that they would carry out the pilot project, but nine months after it ended they do not appear to have passed on its findings to the lawyers representing the two disabled people who took the long-running legal case, or even informed them that the pilot project had finished.

The [Mental Health Resistance Network (MHRN)](https://www.facebook.com/MHResist/), the user-led group that was behind the legal case, said this week that this apparent failure was "extraordinary".

Denise McKenna, MHRN's co-founder, said this suggested that DWP had not addressed the WCA's fatal flaws.

She said: "I am not confident that what they have come up with is going to be robust enough, that it's going to include other medical evidence in enough cases.

"The other thing is I am not confident that they will pay any heed to the medical evidence anyway. They just don't want to take account of medical evidence.

"They just want everything to be resting on that Mickey Mouse interview, that Mickey Mouse assessment."

MHRN and other activists believe that many disabled benefit claimants - particularly those with mental health conditions - [have lost their lives](http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/green-party-calls-on-government-to-launch-benefit-deaths-inquiry/) because of DWP's failure to collect all the medical evidence necessary when assessing whether people were eligible for employment and support allowance (ESA).

The legal case had concluded that the WCA discriminated against some disabled people with mental health conditions and learning difficulties.

DWP has now admitted that it completed this pilot project - which took place in Glasgow - last May.

DWP only admitted that the pilot project had been completed in a response to a Disability News Service (DNS) [story about Mark Wood](http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/mother-of-fit-for-work-victim-calls-for-ministers-to-face-criminal-charges/), a disabled man who starved to death after he was found "fit for work".

His mother, Jill Gant, had questioned why DWP had still failed to act on the issue of further medical evidence, nearly seven years after [a coroner in another case](http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/wca-death-scandal-dwp-and-atos-killed-my-son/) had warned ministers that they needed to address the problem, or risk other disabled people losing their lives.

She had tried for two years to persuade DWP ministers Mark Harper and Priti Patel to act.

Wood died in the summer of 2013, more than three years after the coroner's letter to DWP ministers.

His mother blames his death on the failure of DWP and Atos assessors to collect the medical evidence needed to demonstrate that he was eligible for ESA.

A DWP spokesman said the department had updated guidance for the assessors who carry out WCAs - now carried out by the US company Maximus, rather than Atos - but that he could not say how the guidance had changed.

He said: "The outcomes have been that we’ve updated our general practices and guidance for assessments, which fits in with our ongoing process to ensure the WCA provides the right service for claimants.

"The new guidance provides examples of situations when further evidence should be requested by healthcare professionals in the WCA process, especially for people with a mental health condition."

But he said he could not release the new version because the department was "currently in the midst of discussing guidance and the training for healthcare professionals with our provider".

**16 February 2017**

**G4S, Maximus and 'A4E' all set to win contracts under Work and Health Programme**

Some of the country's most controversial and discredited outsourcing companies are set to win contracts under the government's new programme to find jobs for disabled people and other marginalised groups.

The 11 organisations that have been successful in the bidding process will be allowed to tender for the back-to-work contracts that will be offered under the Work and Health Programme.

They were all bidding for the right to tender for contracts across six regional areas in England and Wales, and a single national contract across the two countries.

The Work and Health Programme will support disabled people, those who are long-term unemployed, and other groups such as ex-carers, ex-offenders, homeless people and those with drug or alcohol dependencies.

Among those successful in the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) [Umbrella Agreement for Employment and Health Related Services](http://base-uk.org/sites/default/files/news/uaehrs_briefing_event_slides.pdf) were Maximus, People Plus (formerly known as A4E) and G4S.

G4S has been successful in every area apart from Wales, while People Plus has been successful in all seven lots.

Maximus, through its UK company Remploy, has been selected only for the Wales lot.

Maximus has a disturbing track record of [discrimination, incompetence and fraud in the US](http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/incompetence-discrimination-and-fraud-the-us-company-that-could-take-over-from-atos/), while Remploy, formerly owned by the government, revealed [plans last year to halve the pay of service-users](http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/care-watchdog-to-subsidise-maximus-plans-to-halve-pay-of-disabled-experts/) who take part in inspections of health and care facilities.

Last year, Maximus [was accused](http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/maximus-has-falsified-results-of-fitness-for-work-tests-says-mp/) in the House of Commons of falsifying the results of "fitness for work" assessments, and of "a disconcerting pattern of behaviour that indicates that the trade-off between cost-cutting and profit maximisation is being felt by very vulnerable people".

People Plus, which has secured places in all seven lots, was formerly known as A4E, but in 2015 was taken over by another company and rebranded, after [10 former A4e employees were sentenced for a back-to-work fraud](http://feweek.co.uk/2015/04/01/ex-a4e-workers-jailed-over-300k-taxpayer-fraud/).

The previous year, [DNS reported allegations](http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/work-programme-provider-a4e-put-lives-risk-cost-cutting-move/) that emerged during an employment tribunal - and were strongly refuted by the company - that A4E had introduced a new policy that forced advisers with no specialist training or experience to start working with "vulnerable" claimants with mental health conditions, learning difficulties and drug and alcohol problems on the Work Programme.

Last year, the disabled crossbench peer Baroness [Jane] Campbell, criticising the decision to hand the government contract to run the national discrimination helpline to G4S, [told fellow peers](http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/minister-misled-peers-over-ehrcs-request-to-run-equality-helpline/) that the company had "an appalling history of abuse and mismanagement".

G4S's track record includes claims of assault and racism [at immigration detention centres](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-13802163), the [failure to provide enough security staff](https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/jul/24/london-2012-olympics-g4s-military) for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, a [coroner's verdict of "unlawful killing"](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/sep/30/g4s-sued-by-ex-flight-attendant-who-witnessed-jimmy-mubengas-death) at the hands of G4S staff after the death of Angolan deportee Jimmy Mubenga in 2010, and [serious allegations concerning G4S staff at secure training centres for children](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/jun/09/scandal-of-g4s-run-medway-youth-jail-deepens-as-five-further-people-arrested).

The other successful organisations are Ingeus, Reed, Shaw Trust, APM, Working Links, The Work Company, Pluss and Prospects.

Many of the country's largest disability charities are likely to seek funding under the Work and Health Programme as sub-contractors for the organisations that win the main contracts, in a move which many activists believe could make it harder for them to speak out on welfare reform.

The Work and Health Programme will replace the mainstream Work Programme and the specialist Work Choice scheme for disabled people, but there have been concerns that it will see a significant cut in funding.

The government has promised £100 million a year by 2020-21 for disabled people found to have limited capability for work - paid for from cuts of more than £1 billion over the four years from April this year to new claimants of employment and support allowance (ESA) placed in the work-related activity group (WRAG) - as well as another £130 million a year for the overall programme.

[But industry research has suggested](http://ersa.org.uk/media/news/new-report-finds-gap-between-government-ambition-and-reality-supporting-disabled) that this will mean a sizeable overall drop from the £750 million spent on employment support in 2013-14.

DWP said yesterday (Wednesday) that it did not recognise this figure but was not able to say how much the overall budget on employment support had been and how much it would be under the new programme.

She said the budget for the new programme was not yet "in the public domain".

Asked about the track records of Maximus, G4S and People Plus, the DWP spokeswoman said the umbrella agreement had been subject to public sector procurement regulations, and was conducted in an "open, transparent non-discriminatory manner".

She said: "Each competition is designed to identify the winning bids over a range of pre-determined criteria."

She said contracts would be awarded this autumn.

Meanwhile, the consultation on the government's work, health and disability green paper - which outlines its plans for the Work and Health Programme - is due to end tomorrow (17 February).

[The green paper revealed](http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/ministers-set-to-force-work-related-activity-on-everyone-in-esa-support-group/) that the government was considering forcing all sick and disabled people on out-of-work disability benefits to take part in "mandatory" activity, including those who are terminally-ill or have the very highest support needs and have been placed in the ESA support group.

It also repeatedly emphasised that the government wanted to "reinforce work as a health outcome", increasing the number of job advisers in healthcare settings and making "the benefits of work an ingrained part of the training and professional approach of the health and social care workforce”.

**16 February 2017**

**EHRC still waiting for its next disability commissioner**

The equality watchdog has been operating without a disability commissioner for the last month, because of delays in recruiting a successor for Tory peer Lord [Chris] Holmes.

A replacement for Lord Holmes was supposed to be in place by mid-January, but the government has yet to announce a successor.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) declined to comment on the delay, but confirmed that Lord Holmes had left his post on 14 January.

Interviews for the post are believed to have been carried out in December.

The government has so far refused to say how many people were interviewed for the role, although it has confirmed that the successful candidate will be someone who is or has been a disabled person.

As well as acting as an EHRC commissioner, the successful candidate will chair the commission’s disability committee, although that committee is set to be disbanded this year and replaced by an advisory group that will not have the same legal powers to make decisions on issues affecting disabled people.

The Department for Education (DfE), the EHRC's sponsor department, had not commented on the delayed appointment by noon today (Thursday).

Disabled activists welcomed Lord Holmes's decision not to seek a second four-year term, when he made the announcement in November.

Concerns about his tenure had first been raised when he was made a Conservative peer, only seven months after his appointment as disability commissioner in 2013.

Those concerns resurfaced last year when EHRC announced that it had [commissioned a major piece of research](http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/equality-watchdog-to-mirror-un-inquiry-into-dwps-rights-violations/) into whether the government’s welfare reforms had harmed the human rights of disabled people and other minority groups.

[Disability Rights UK (DR UK) pointed out](http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/fears-over-government-links-as-equality-watchdog-launches-welfare-probe/) that Lord Holmes had voted in favour of many of those reforms after he joined the House of Lords, including cutting payments by £30 a week for some new employment and support allowance claimants.

DR UK also raised concerns over how disabled people could have confidence in the inquiry "whilst Lord Holmes has his position as a commissioner and chair of the EHRC’s disability committee".

The following week, a letter calling on him to resign as disability commissioner was sent to EHRC by disabled activist Susan Archibald, after being signed by several leading disabled people and campaigning organisations, including [Disabled People Against Cuts](http://dpac.uk.net/), [Black Triangle Campaign](http://blacktrianglecampaign.org/), [Pat’s Petition](https://patspetition.wordpress.com/) and the [Spartacus Network](http://www.spartacusnetwork.org.uk/).

**16 February 2017**

**Sister launches judicial review claim in bid for sanctions death inquest**

The sister of a disabled man who died after being left destitute by having his benefits sanctioned has launched a high court legal challenge over a coroner's refusal to hold an inquest into his death.

David Clapson, who had diabetes, died in July 2013 as a result of an acute lack of insulin, three weeks after having his jobseeker’s allowance sanctioned.

Because he had no money, he couldn’t afford to pay for electricity that would have kept the fridge where he kept his insulin working, in the height of summer, and he had also run out of food.

An autopsy held after his death found his stomach was empty, and the only food left in his flat in Stevenage was six tea bags, a tin of soup and an out-of-date can of sardines. He had just £3.44 left in his bank account.

But despite the circumstances of his death, and clear links with the sanctions system, no inquest was ever held, even though DWP admitted that it knew he was insulin-dependent.

Now Clapson’s sister, Gill Thompson, has issued a judicial review and human rights claim in the high court, challenging the refusal of the senior coroner for Hertfordshire to hold an inquest into her brother’s death.

Thompson has been campaigning for an inquest to be held in a bid to secure answers and change the sanctions system she believes led to her brother’s death.

She has set up [a crowdfunding account](http://www.crowdjustice.org/case/david-clapson) to pay for her legal battle, and needs to raise another £7,000 to reach her target.

Her solicitor, Merry Varney, from human rights lawyers [Leigh Day](https://www.leighday.co.uk/), is arguing that Clapson died an "unnatural death" because of the benefit sanction imposed on him shortly before he died.

Last year, Varney wrote to the Hertfordshire senior coroner, Geoffrey Sullivan, to ask him to overturn the decision not to hold an inquest.

But he refused to order an inquest, and said that "the evidence does not support either a direct or contributory causal link between the imposition of the benefit sanction and Mr Clapson's death", while there was "no evidence as to whether the benefit sanction was imposed properly or not".

Varney said: "A DWP-imposed benefit sanction left David with no income, unable to afford food or electricity, circumstances which diabetes experts agree could easily render his condition fatal.

"The law requires a coroner to hold an inquest into certain deaths and we believe the circumstances of David's death clearly trigger this duty.

"Our client, who has campaigned since her brother's death, is asking the high court to quash the coroner's refusal so that a full, fair and fearless inquest can take place, and so that issues of significant wider public importance concerning benefit sanctions and vulnerable people are properly considered."

Thompson added: "The thing that continues to haunt me is that the DWP knew David was an insulin dependent diabetic, yet they stated: ‘…we followed procedures and no errors were made.’

*"*Diabetes is a serious condition, which in cases such as David's requires both food and insulin to stay healthy.

"I feel that the sanction resulting in my brother being left destitute and having no money to chill his insulin or to buy food, ultimately led to his untimely death.

"Going to court is an option of last resort but I feel compelled to use every effort to ensure that the impact of the DWP imposed benefit sanction on David's death is properly and independently investigated.

"I believe the DWP continue to impose sanctions on diabetic benefit claimants and not only for my brother's sake, but also for others at risk, I hope the high court grants me permission to challenge the coroner's decision."

**16 February 2017**

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