**Errol Graham: Family demand criminal probe into former DWP ministers**

The family of a man who starved to death after his out-of-work benefits were wrongly stopped have backed calls for a criminal investigation into former ministers and senior civil servants they believe are responsible for his and other deaths.

[Last week](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/the-death-of-errol-graham-man-starved-to-death-after-dwp-wrongly-stopped-his-benefits/), Disability News Service reported how Errol Graham starved to death two years ago after the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) removed his employment and support allowance (ESA), leaving him without any income.

A civil servant told an inquest into his death last summer that DWP staff followed departmental guidance and had acted “appropriately” by leaving him with no income.

They had stopped his benefits when they were unable to contact him to discuss why he had not turned up to a work capability assessment (WCA).

Deprived of all financial support, experiencing significant mental distress and unable or unwilling to seek help, he slowly starved to death. He was 57.

Now Alison Turner, his son’s partner, who has led the fight for justice, has called for past ministers and senior civil servants to face a criminal investigation for misconduct in public office in relation to this and other deaths.

She particularly highlighted the actions of Iain Duncan Smith, who failed to act after being alerted by a coroner to the fatal flaws in the WCA process when he became work and pensions secretary in 2010, and has recently been rewarded with a knighthood.

Because of his failure to act, and the failings of employment minister Chris Grayling, [other disabled people lost their lives](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-the-case-for-the-prosecution/), including her partner’s father.

Turner said: “What they have done is give a knighthood to the person who is responsible [for these deaths].

“What kind of message does that give? It’s an insult to all the families that have been part of this mess.

“How he could sit there and accept that award? He may as well knock on my front door and kick me in the face.

“You’re basically saying to the families who are victims of the system that their lives do not matter.”

She said she would like to see a criminal investigation into the actions of Duncan Smith, Grayling and senior DWP civil servants, as demanded by disabled activists.

Turner said: “It’s down to them why this happened in the first place. Despite being told repeatedly, they continue to allow it to happen.”

She said the government had failed to listen to two coroners, who warned DWP in 2010 and again in 2014 of fatal flaws in the WCA that it has refused to fix, and the United Nations, which has repeatedly criticised the UK government over its social security policies, including through reports [in 2016](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/uns-conclusion-that-uk-violated-disability-rights-is-vindication-for-activists/), [in 2017](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/uk-is-going-backwards-on-independent-living-says-un-committee/) and [in 2019](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/disabled-people-driven-to-breaking-point-by-cuts-says-un-expert/).

Errol Graham weighed just four-and-a-half stone when his body was found on 20 June 2018 by bailiffs who had knocked down the front door of his Nottingham flat to evict him. The only food he had left in the flat were two out-of-date tins of fish.

His ESA and housing benefit were halted after DWP made two unsuccessful “safeguarding” visits to his home to ask why he had not attended a face-to-face WCA, following earlier letters, a telephone call and a text message.

An inquest heard last summer that it was standard DWP procedure to go ahead with stopping the benefits of a claimant marked on the system as vulnerable after two failed safeguarding visits.

DWP civil servants had also failed to seek further medical evidence from his GP, just as in many other tragic cases that have sparked repeated calls for an independent inquiry into links between the deaths of claimants and the actions and failings of DWP.

A DWP spokesperson refused to comment on Alison Turner’s call for a criminal investigation.

Meanwhile, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), which has been asked by Labour MP Debbie Abrahams to hold an inquiry into deaths linked to DWP failings, said: “Everyone has a right to an adequate standard of living and we are currently reviewing what potential work we might undertake to tackle discriminatory decision making in the social security system.”

A spokesperson said EHRC had “concerns about anybody who may have tragically died as a result of decision making in the social security system”.

She said: “No one should ever have to suffer in such tragic conditions and our thoughts are with the families of those who have sadly passed away.

“As we laid out last year, we have called on DWP to introduce publically available service delivery standards and recommended that options for independent regulation and accountability of the department should be explored.”

**30 January 2020**

**Errol Graham: Anger over minister’s ‘heartless’ response**

The minister for disabled people has refused to apologise for his “heartless” response to the deaths of two disabled people that have been closely linked to the failings of his own department.

Justin Tomlinson was asked in the House of Commons on Monday whether he would consider an independent inquiry into the deaths of disabled claimants that have been linked to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

He was asked the question by Labour MP Debbie Abrahams, a former shadow work and pensions secretary, following the deaths of [Jodey Whiting](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/expert-links-dwp-fitness-to-work-decision-to-death-of-jodey-whiting/) and [Errol Graham](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/the-death-of-errol-graham-man-starved-to-death-after-dwp-wrongly-stopped-his-benefits/).

She told fellow MPs how Whiting took her own life in 2017 after her out-of-work benefits were stopped following a missed work capability assessment (WCA) she did not know about, while Graham starved to death in 2018 after he missed a WCA and had his benefits removed (*see separate story*).

But Tomlinson [failed to express any sympathy for the families or regret](http://bit.ly/2RW0DM3) over the two deaths when he replied to Abrahams.

Instead, he said the WCA was first introduced by Labour in 2008, and that DWP had implemented more than 100 recommendations made by independent reviews of the WCA\*, and was working with the Royal College of Psychiatrists to ensure frontline staff were “fully trained to be in the best place to identify people at risk of suicide”.

Alison Turner, the partner of Errol Graham’s son, branded Tomlinson “heartless” for his response and said he had “showed no sympathy”.

She said ministers could not deny the links between the actions of their predecessors and the deaths of claimants such as Errol Graham.

She said: “Everybody has tried to tell them. They can’t honestly sit there with a straight face and tell me that that is not their fault. They ignored advice, advice given by experts.”

She said the government had failed to listen to two coroners, who warned DWP in 2010 and then in 2014 of flaws in the WCA that would lead to further deaths if not corrected.

The government refused to make those changes to the WCA process, and as a result [other disabled people continued to lose their lives](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-the-case-for-the-prosecution/).

She said: “We need them to say, ‘We didn’t listen to the coroners, we messed up and it ended up with Errol dying.’”

A DWP spokesperson refused to comment when asked why Tomlinson failed to express any regret or sympathy for the families of Errol Graham and Jodey Whiting.

Meanwhile, Errol Graham’s MP, Labour backbencher Lilian Greenwood, this week expressed shock at the case and said she would be demanding answers from the government.

She said: “This is a tragic and deeply shocking case. The DWP may have followed their own guidelines, but the system clearly failed Errol Graham and sadly his case is not unique.

“The DWP’s safeguarding procedures must be reviewed. They must ensure that vulnerable claimants are properly protected.

“I will be raising this issue with my colleagues in parliament and calling on ministers to act now to ensure lessons are learned.”

*\*DNS*[*revealed last May*](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/caxton-house-cover-up-dwp-hid-benefit-deaths-papers-from-wca-review-team/)*that DWP had finally admitted that two letters written by coroners to warn that the WCA had been linked to suicides, and a series of secret “peer reviews” into the deaths of claimants who had gone through the WCA process, were not passed to the second expert WCA reviewer, Dr Paul Litchfield, in 2013 and 2014.*

*Ministers also failed to pass the first coroner’s letter and peer reviews to the first expert WCA reviewer, Professor Malcolm Harrington, in 2010, 2011 and 2012.*

**30 January 2020**

**Support for ‘amazing’ campaigner whose vital legal case could help thousands**

Disabled campaigners travelled from across the country this week to show support for a fellow activist as she took on justice ministers in the high court over the ruinous costs disabled people can face when they take disability discrimination cases.

If she wins, [Esther Leighton](https://twitter.com/Esther_Leighton) could give hope to thousands of other people who would otherwise have to abandon their discrimination legal actions because of the risk of having to pay their opponents’ costs if they lose.

She was supported by a string of leading disabled campaigners who travelled to the high court in London on Tuesday to highlight the importance of her legal action.

Leighton, co-founder of the disabled-led campaigning organisation [Reasonable Access](https://www.reasonableaccess.org.uk/), has taken many actions against service-providers for discrimination under the Equality Act.

She has often represented herself, to avoid having to pay a lawyer. Her successful cases have often persuaded business to start complying with the Equality Act, and to become accessible to wheelchair-users for the first time.

But she has often had to withdraw from more complex cases because she could be asked to meet the other side’s costs if she loses the case.

Leighton was supported by about 15 disabled people in court for the one-day trial, including as many as nine fellow wheelchair-users.

One of her supporters, [Natalya Dell](https://twitter.com/natalyadell), said the level of support for Leighton showed that she was “not alone” and that one of the government’s planned lines of attack in the case – that she was only taking the case because she was litigious – was simply wrong.

She said: “The government did not raise their ‘only Esther’ argument in their expanded arguments. We clearly made an impact and showed that Esther is not alone.”

She added: “My first discrimination case against HMRC for disability discrimination (settled in my favour) would have been impossible under the current system, so Esther is taking this case for all of us who wish to challenge discrimination using the Equality Act.”

The disabled people’s organisation Inclusion London intervened in the case to share its evidence about the barriers disabled people face when challenging discrimination, and the impact this has on their lives.

Svetlana Kotova, director of campaigns and justice for [Inclusion London](http://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/), said: “It is left to us to police and enforce the Equality Act 2010, but doing it is very difficult and often impossible.

“The risk of having to pay thousands in costs if you lose is a huge barrier which puts people off even before they start.

“This is why the Equality Act largely remains a dead letter, we experience discrimination on a daily basis, and organisations choose to adopt a ‘let’s see what we can get away with’ approach, instead of making their services accessible.

“We are grateful to Esther for bringing this case and we stand in solidarity with her.”

Another of the disabled activists who travelled to the Royal Courts of Justice to show his support for Leighton was [Doug Paulley](https://twitter.com/kingqueen3065), who has himself taken disability discrimination cases through the courts.

He said: “I went to support Esther, who is amazing, and also to support the right of disabled people to take discrimination cases to court.

“For the past seven years, government rules have meant that disabled people usually can't take court cases without significant risk of bankruptcy.

“Under current rules, I could not have started [the case against First Bus](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/two-years-on-from-supreme-court-bus-ruling-protesters-call-for-overdue-action/).

“This could be sorted with a simple and minor rules change, removing one of the many substantial barriers to enforcing disabled people’s rights. It must happen.”

Alan Benson, chair of [Transport for All](https://twitter.com/transportforall), said the Equality Act 2010 was “one of a very few weapons with teeth available to disabled people to assert their rights”, but presented “a very real personal financial risk to exercising that lever”.

He said: “It’s an indication of the importance of this case just how many disabled people with a whole range of impairments came from across the country to be present.

“The government barrister cited a fear that if this case succeeds the courts would be flooded with cases from the country’s over 13 million disabled people.

“If true then this simply emphasises just how necessary this tool is to correct systematic and institutional discrimination.

“We believe that empowering individuals in this way could have a huge positive impact across the transport sector.”

[Eleanor Lisney](https://twitter.com/e_lisney), another of the disabled campaigners who supported her in court, thanked Leighton and her legal team for taking the case.

She said: “I was there to show support for Esther because it is an important case for all of us who face discrimination almost on a daily basis.

“Not many of us have the knowledge, determination, energy and courage to take this on.

“As disabled people, we have rights but access to those rights is something else.”

Leighton said this week: “These cases are important because they are about my daily experience.

“Getting into a cafe or a shop may not sound significant to a lot of people, but it is this daily discrimination that excludes me and many disabled people from society.”

She added: “I can’t pay after filling my car up at many garages because of the single steps they have into their shops, but because of the petrol company’s complex franchise model, it’s impossible for me to challenge it without risking being landed with a large bill.

“This loophole means discriminatory service providers don’t change their practices as they know they won’t be challenged, resulting in thousands of disabled people being unable to access basic services on a daily basis.”

Leighton, who is represented by legal firm Deighton Pierce Glynn (DPG), is hoping her legal challenge will extend a system called Qualified One Way Cost Shifting (QOCS), which DPG says works “very effectively” for personal injury claims, so that it can also cover Equality Act cases.

This would allow disabled people and others to challenge discrimination more easily by reducing the financial risk and increasing access to legal representation.

The case is being funded by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Leighton said: “I’d be delighted if this case improves disabled people’s access to justice.

“Ultimately, I wish the Equality Act was adequately enforced so I didn’t have to take cases, as the costs of doing so vastly exceeds any compensation awarded, but until then I will continue to challenge discrimination to achieve the shifts in society we so sorely need.”

Judgement on the case has been reserved to a future date.

The Ministry of Justice said it would consider any judgement made by the court.

**30 January 2020**

**Many councils unlawfully restrict right to live independently, research suggests**

Many local authorities are unlawfully restricting disabled people’s ability to choose to live independently in their own homes, and are forcing them instead towards residential care, research by a disabled campaigner suggests.

Fleur Perry spent more than six months seeking and analysing information about the independent living policies of more than 230 councils across England, Scotland and Wales, using the Freedom of Information Act.

She wanted to discover their policies on providing choice to disabled people in need of social care.

In those responses, most of the local authorities failed to provide a clear picture of their approach to independent living, and whether their policies risked forcing people into residential care against their will.

But of the 36 councils in Britain that did provide enough evidence, Perry concluded that there were concerns about the approach taken by 22 of them, while the other 14 appeared to respect service-users’ human rights, for example by actively promoting independent living and choice “over and above legal requirements”.

She also found that with every one of the 18 local authorities in England where there were concerns about their independent living policies, each one of them had much higher rates of people living in residential or nursing accommodation than the national average.

One of the responses that concerned Perry came from Bedford council.

The council had told Perry that the maximum weekly amount it would spend on a care package “will be no more than the net weekly cost to Bedford Borough Council of a care home placement that could be commissioned to meet the individual’s assessed eligible needs”.

Jenny Morris, a member of the Independent Living Strategy Group – Perry is also a member – who helped write the Labour government’s Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People white paper, welcomed the new research.

She said the group’s understanding was that policies like Bedford’s breach government guidance on the Care Act because “local councils should not set arbitrary upper limits on how much they will pay to meet a person’s eligible assessed needs”.

Morris welcomed Perry’s research, and said: “It is very worrying that we are seeing more and more examples of the yawning gap between what the Care Act intends to happen and what disabled people are actually experiencing.

“Article 19 of the UN Convention [on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities] – which our government has ratified – states that disabled people should have the right ‘to choose their place of residence and where and with whom they live on an equal basis with others and are not obliged to live in a particular living arrangement’.

“If the policy of councils such as Bedford is not halted we will soon be back to the days when to be disabled meant to be hidden away in an institution.”

A Bedford council spokesperson said: “The Bedford Borough Council Fair Care Policy is used as a trigger for discussion and there is not a limit or a cap.

“We will assist people in choosing the support they want to meet their needs and not push disabled people towards residential care and away from independent living.”

Perry’s research was published this week in the online disability lifestyle magazine [Disability Horizons](https://disabilityhorizons.com), which is run by disabled people.

She decided to [carry out the research](https://disabilityhorizons.com/2020/01/disability-horizons-investigation-shows-some-councils-may-be-limiting-disabled-peoples-choice-of-where-to-live/) after she was [asked by Disability News Service](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/tory-council-set-to-force-disabled-people-into-residential-care-to-cut-costs/) (DNS) last March to comment on concerns that disabled people would be forced into residential homes against their will by Conservative-run Barnet council’s new cost-cutting adult social care policy.

Perry had already raised [concerns about similar policies](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/watchdog-forces-13-ccgs-to-back-down-over-nhs-institution-threat/) in NHS clinical commissioning groups in 2017.

In response to the Barnet concerns, she submitted freedom of information requests to every local authority that funds social care across England, Scotland and Wales.

It took her more than six months to submit the requests, chase up those local authorities that failed to respond, and collate and analyse the results.

Perry said: “Residential accommodation by default is a threat to the independent living movement and to disabled people’s choice and control over their own lives.”

Among the concerns she uncovered were councils putting pressure on disabled people set to be discharged from hospital; councils that would only offer enough funding to pay for one option of where they would live; and councils that failed to make it clear that they recognised the rights of their service-users.

And she said that legislation and guidance failed to protect people’s right to live independently.

She said: “Though ‘genuine choice’ is emphasised as a key principle, restrictions that seem to completely remove or limit choice without justification are not difficult to find.

“Changes must be made to ensure that people can meaningfully make choices about their own lives without undue pressure or restriction.”

In a report based on her research, she calls for the government to introduce a legal right to independent living, and an Independent Living Act, and for policy-makers to engage with disabled people and disabled people’s organisations “to make change happen”.

**30 January 2020**

**Lib Dems admit: ‘Our policy is to legalise assisted suicide’**

The Liberal Democrats have been accused of an “appalling attack on disabled people” after they admitted that their party policy is to call for assisted suicide to be legalised.

The party issued a press release at the weekend welcoming what it said was the announcement by a minister that he was considering issuing a call for evidence on the issue of legalising assisted suicide.

It later emerged that [the comments by justice secretary Robert Buckland](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1233464/assisted-dying-law-review-justice-secretary) – in which he said he would “actively consider” a call for evidence over the next few months – were made during the general election campaign, but were only published this week.

The Ministry of Justice claimed the government’s position had not changed and that no such call for evidence was being considered.

But the Liberal Democrat press release, issued in the name of Christine Jardine MP, its spokesperson in the Commons on both home affairs and on women and equalities, welcomed what she said was the “growing swell of public support” for a change in the law.

When other senior Lib Dem MPs have previously spoken out on assisted suicide, the party [has said only](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/activists-claim-lib-dems-suicide-pledge-deadly-discrimination/) that there should be a free vote on the issue, with MPs and peers allowed to “vote in line with their own views”.

But a Liberal Democrat spokesperson told Disability News Service this week that it had been party policy since 2004 to call for a change in the law, and he added: “That policy remains as does the policy for MPs to have a free vote.”

A spokesperson for [Not Dead Yet UK](http://notdeadyetuk.org/), the leading disabled people’s campaign group opposing the legalisation of assisted suicide, said the Liberal Democrat adoption of a policy in favour of assisted suicide was “one more appalling attack on disabled people by the death lobby”.

He said: “We are disabled people who fiercely oppose the legalised killing of us.

“Scattered across the world, wherever killing has been legalised, the impact on disabled people has been murderous.

“The killing lobby try to argue that it isn’t a slippery slope, but the evidence doesn’t lie.”

He called on all Liberal Democrat members to “protest loudly” about the party’s policy.

Nikki Kenward, campaign director of [The Distant Voices](http://www.thedistantvoices.org/home.html), a user-led campaign group which opposes euthanasia and assisted suicide, said: “Capricious as always, the Lib Dems opt for the easy road.

“Not content with cutting the benefits (in coalition) of the neediest in society, they take the perceived next logical step and try to open the door to further muddying the waters for those needing support at this most critical time.

“No push here for improved palliative care services; this might cost something. [They are] Conservatives at heart.

“Still, they can always backtrack and apologise when the horse has properly bolted.”

[Dennis Queen](https://twitter.com/missdennisqueen), a disabled activist and member of NDY UK, said it was “shocking and disappointing” that the Lib Dems were “not in favour of sick and disabled people’s equal human rights under the law”.

She said: “When is some party going to stand up for our equal right to be supported to live as decent and comfortable life as possible first, instead of promoting a final solution?

“Maybe if we could establish that, then we could talk about this.

“Instead sick and disabled people are actually already dying in droves due to neglect and poverty. We don’t need more ways to be killed.”

Buckland this week told Disability News Service (DNS) in a statement: “I have the utmost sympathy for all those going through the pain of watching their loved ones deal with life-threatening and degenerative conditions.

“Any change in the law around these terribly saddening cases must be for MPs to consider as a matter of individual conscience, rather than a decision for government.”

But he has not yet been able to explain the discrepancy between this statement and the comments he made during the general election campaign.

Only two months ago, DNS revealed how the Liberal Democrats [were unable to explain](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/election-2019-lib-dems-copied-disability-policies-from-2017-manifesto/) why several of their general election policies on disability had been copied word-for-word from their 2017 manifesto.

Yesterday (Wednesday), Jardine said in a statement: “While the Liberal Democrats adopted policy in 2004 to support legislation for medical assistance to die, subject to rigorous safeguards to prevent abuse, this was not in our manifesto in 2019.

“Liberal Democrat MPs all have their own views and any vote in parliament has always respected the right to freedom of conscience for all parliamentarians.

“I believe the current blanket ban on all assisted dying helps nobody and creates a two-tier system where those who can afford the £10,000 price tag can have an assisted death in Switzerland, while those who cannot take matters into their own hands at home.

“I fully appreciate and understand the views of the groups representing the views of the disabled community.

“I am simply backing a review to see how the law could be improved; this would not affect disabled people.”

[In last week’s debate](http://bit.ly/30OQdSt), Tory MP Fiona Bruce pointed out that an annual government report into an assisted suicide scheme in Oregon, USA, found that “more than half of those applying now cite ‘fear of being a burden’ as their major end-of-life concern”.

And, she said, in Canada, in just four years, under a law that has allowed terminally-ill people to request assisted suicide and euthanasia, safeguards had been ignored and removed and the law extended to non-terminally-ill people, including those with depression.

The justice minister Chris Philp told the debate that the UK government’s position had not changed.

He said: “The government are neutral in the debate on this issue and have no policy position on it.

“Although all of us, including me, have our own personal views about this issue, the government’s position is that it is for parliament to decide great issues of conscience, including this one.”

**30 January 2020**

**DWP lied about independence of new deaths panel**

The government lied when it said that a new panel set up to examine deaths linked to the actions of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) would be “independent”, it has been forced to admit.

The proposal was first announced quietly during last September’s spending round, with a pledge that the “new independent Serious Case Panel” would improve DWP safeguarding.

And last week, after Disability News Service (DNS) exposed the horrific circumstances that led to the death of Errol Graham (*see separate stories*), DWP said it took his death “very seriously” and had referred it to its “serious case panel, which includes independent members to help scrutinise and establish any lessons”.

But questions about the new panel that were put to DWP by journalist Steve Topple, [from The Canary website](https://www.thecanary.co/exclusive/2020/01/28/a-secret-dwp-claimant-deaths-inquiry-was-just-blown-open/), produced a different response this week.

He was told instead that the panel “will be chaired by a director and members will be senior civil servants from across the department”.

A DWP spokesperson confirmed yesterday (Wednesday) that all the panel members would be DWP civil servants.

He said: “We are committed to improving our services, especially to the most vulnerable which is why we have set up a serious case panel.

“This is a new process and is currently being established and terms of reference are being formalised.

“The panel will be chaired by a director and members will be senior civil servants from across the department.”

But he refused to explain the discrepancy between this admission that the panel would not be independent, and last week’s statement and the government’s announcement in the spending round document.

He also refused to clarify what he meant by “a director”.

Alison Turner, the partner of Errol Graham’s son, said DWP had been “dishonest” in the way it originally described the new panel.

She said: “It’s certainly not independent. There’s nothing independent about it.

“They are proving to the country that they cannot be open and honest with the public.

“There is not one panel member who doesn’t work for DWP. They are working to scrutinise their own policy. It doesn’t make any sense. You’re just going round and round in a circle.”

She said DWP needed to ensure there were medically-trained panel members and at least one disabled person on the panel with experience of the benefits system and how it can impact claimants.

Paula Peters, a member of the national steering group of [Disabled People Against Cuts](https://dpac.uk.net/), said: “Campaigners have been calling for an independent inquiry into benefit deaths for a long time.

“Now we learn that the DWP panel looking into benefit deaths will be made up of DWP civil servants. This is an outrage. This will amount to a complete whitewash.

“Meanwhile, the DWP still subjects claimants to the horrors of the work capability assessment (WCA). It has not learned lessons and has not put safeguards in place.

“This latest move by the DWP is an insult to every family who mourn their loved ones.

“We will continue the fight for justice, for an independent inquiry into benefit deaths linked to the DWP, and to hold those responsible to account and bring them to justice.”

Graham died after DWP wrongly stopped his out-of-work benefits, leaving him without any income (*see separate stories*).

Deprived of all financial support, experiencing significant mental distress and unable or unwilling to seek help, he slowly starved to death. He was 57.

He weighed just four-and-a-half stone when his body was found on 20 June 2018 by bailiffs who had knocked down his front door to evict him. The only food he had left in his flat were two out-of-date tins of fish.

His benefits had been halted after DWP made two unsuccessful “safeguarding” visits to his home to ask why he had not attended a face-to-face work WCA.

An inquest heard last summer that it was standard DWP procedure to go ahead with stopping the benefits of a claimant marked on the system as vulnerable after two failed safeguarding visits.

DWP civil servants had failed to seek further medical evidence from his GP, just as in many other tragic cases that have sparked repeated calls for an independent inquiry into links between the deaths of claimants and the actions and failings of DWP.

**30 January 2020**

**News round-up: Universal credit, disabled lawyers, Paralympics… and BBC’s red button**

**The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)** has suffered the latest in a long line of legal defeats over its social security cuts and reforms, after a court ruled that disabled people faced discrimination when they were moved onto universal credit (UC).

The court of appeal yesterday (Wednesday) [dismissed the government’s appeals](https://www.leighday.co.uk/News/Press-releases-2020/January-2020/Government-loses-Universal-Credit-appeals-against) against two court judgments which had found that the work and pensions secretary unlawfully discriminated against thousands of disabled people with high support needs who moved onto UC

Two men, known as TP and AR for legal reasons, have been fighting for two years against policies that left them substantially worse off when they were forced onto UC after moving local authority area.

Although DWP could still appeal, AR said: “We hope that the court of appeal ruling will finally bring an end to our fight for severely disabled people not to be disadvantaged by universal credit.

“It is still so shocking to us that we have had to fight so long and so hard just to get the government to see that their policy is unfair.”

**Disabled campaigners are celebrating** after the BBC’s director-general suspended plans to shut the broadcaster’s Red Button text service.

Tony Hall said pressure from [The National Federation of the Blind of the UK (NFB UK)](https://www.nfbuk.org/) and the British Deaf Association, among others, had persuaded him to rethink the issue and “make a fresh decision in the spring”.

An NFB UK petition calling for the switch-off to be halted, and signed by more than 100 organisations, was handed to 10 Downing Street on Monday (27 January).

Disabled people’s organisations are calling on the BBC to keep the TV text service, which was set to be withdrawn at the end of this month.

They say that, although it has largely been replaced by internet use, it is still a “vital service” for visually impaired, D/deaf, disabled and older people and other hard-to-reach social groups, many of whom do not have internet access.

**Many disabled people in the legal profession** face hostility and discrimination at work, and often have to hide their impairments when they apply for jobs or training places, according to new research.

Some requests for workplace adjustments resulted in ill-treatment or discrimination, the research found, with the study adding: “A poverty of imagination, bureaucracy, belligerent managers and outdated working practices prevent often minor adjustments that would make a huge difference for disabled people.”

Researchers at Cardiff Business School, working with the Lawyers with Disabilities division of the Law Society, spoke to disabled solicitors, barristers, trainees and paralegals.

The [Legally Disabled?](http://legallydisabled.com/) study, funded by the disabled-led DRILL ([Disability Research on Independent Living and Learning](http://www.drilluk.org.uk/)) programme, concluded: “Disabled people in the legal profession face – on a daily basis – rituals, practices and attitudes that exclude or undermine them in their roles as trainees, advocates and employees.”

**Disabled campaigners have continued their fight** against Greenwich council’s plans to increase charges and make cuts to social care provision.

[Inclusion London](https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/), [Greenwich Disabled People Against Cuts](https://twitter.com/GreenwichDpac), [WinVisible](https://winvisibleblog.wordpress.com/) and [Metro GAD](https://twitter.com/METRO_gad) lodged a formal complaint about a new consultation on the council’s budget, and called for it to be withdrawn.

Among their concerns, they said that a question asking if the council should deal with funding cuts by reducing “front line services like social care, street cleaning and libraries” was discriminatory and biased and “does not explain the differences of impact for each service, particularly social care”.

The council was due to make a delayed decision on the cuts last night.

**The government this week added the summer and winter Paralympic Games** to the list of sporting “crown jewels” that must be made available to free-to-air broadcasters such as the BBC, ITV and Channel 4 for live television coverage.

Ross Wilson, Para Table Tennis world champion, said: “Ensuring that the Paralympics is available for everyone to watch live on TV is important, not only to me as an athlete, but also to increase participation in Para sport and inspire young athletes with a disability in the future.”

Channel 4 has already secured a contract to broadcast coverage of this summer’s Paralympic Games in Tokyo, but the announcement should ensure that future games are also broadcast on free-to-air television.

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