**Campaigner on hunger strike over care package ‘shows need for reform of abusive system’**

A disabled campaigner is on hunger strike in response to the failure of his local authority and the NHS to provide him with the support package he needs to “just live as a human being”.

Jimmy Telesford said his experience in Lambeth, south London, had convinced him of the need for major reform of the “abusive” and “outrageous” social care system.

He called for a new system that gives disabled people “complete control” over their support.

Telesford ate nothing between 2 October and Monday (12 October) this week and was drinking only diet 7-UP to keep himself hydrated.

He was admitted to St Thomas’s on Monday on the advice of his doctor, and agreed to take on food and fluids.

But he was discharged from hospital later the same day and restarted his hunger strike when he returned home.

He had earlier spoken to Disability News Service (DNS) from his bed at home and said that he had “nothing to lose” and was “prepared to die” unless Labour-run Lambeth council or the local NHS clinical commissioning group (through NHS continuing healthcare) provided him with the support he needed.

Telesford, who was working as an advocacy worker with a disability organisation until June, said: “I don’t want to die but I will if I cannot get the independent living support I need to live as a disabled powered wheelchair-user.

“My key concern is that I am not getting enough support. It doesn’t meet my needs and it never has. I don’t really want to carry on the way I am.

“The fact that I have to [go on hunger strike] just shows how difficult things are. I have to be prepared for the idea that I am going to die.”

He currently receives between 24 and 28 hours a week of support from Lambeth council, but believes he needs support throughout the day to ensure he can have a normal life.

He is also angry about the quality of the support he receives, and has lodged complaints about the care agency that currently provides that support.

He said: “The quality of life that you’re expected to have as a disabled person from a social services point of view is disgusting. You wouldn’t treat a dog like that.

“Even if I have another assessment, it’s not based on my needs, it’s based on what they are willing to give. It’s just care needs, and that’s it.

“Life is about a lot more than having a shower.”

He added: “We are the fifth richest country in the world. Nobody really understands what it is like to live as a disabled person in the trenches. It does your head in.

“Why can’t disabled people have complete control?”

He was given another assessment by the council after returning from hospital this week.

But he said: “They just want to fill out a form, tick a box and move on. It’s not acceptable.

“I honestly don’t think they care. I don’t think [social services] see disabled people as people.”

He had earlier warned the council not to be “under any illusion”.

He told the council: “I will go through this process 1,000 times if I have to as long as I have breath in my body I will fight Lambeth social services and their partners. Until I get what I need. Or die trying.”

He said he hoped that if he did die, it would show that “not everybody is willing to live under the oppression of the status quo”.

[Inclusion London](https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/), the pan-London disabled people’s organisation, said: “We stand in solidarity with Jimmy and salute his determination to fight for the rights of disabled people. We hope he recovers soon.

“Although local authorities are in a difficult position, they still make political choices about how to prioritise their resources.

“We urge Lambeth Council to see the devastating consequences of its decisions and actions and ensure its disabled residents, including Jimmy, get appropriate social care support to live a normal life.

“Many disabled people all over the country will relate to Jimmy’s situation. The current social care system is not helping us live a good quality life.

“It is oppressive and often humiliating with many disabled people’s lives reduced to just being clean and fed.

“With a decade of budget cuts and increased demand combined with the laws that place all power in the local authorities’ hands without real and effective means to challenge, it is shocking, but not surprising, that people have to use such extreme actions to fight for their basic human rights.

“This is why we are calling for a reform of social care support; it must be based on our right to independent living and it must give disabled people true power, control and resources to live a normal life.”

A Lambeth Council spokesperson said: “Lambeth Council has worked to support Mr Telesford over an extended period of time, and we are both alarmed and concerned at the current situation.

“We are listening, and given the breadth of his concerns have offered Mr Telesford an opportunity to discuss and urgently review his services.

“Lambeth Council is determined to provide excellent quality adult services to all that need them in the borough, and remain fully committed to that pledge.”

A spokesperson for NHS South East London Clinical Commissioning Group said: “The CCG is very sorry to hear of Mr Telesford’s situation.

“His appeal against the outcome of his NHS continuing healthcare (CHC) assessment, which was made earlier in the year, unfortunately was delayed in line with national guidance issued at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, when health and care resources were refocussed on combatting the threat to people’s health posed by the virus.

“Across the country, work is now getting underway to address those waiting for CHC assessments, including where appeals have been lodged against previous decisions.

“Locally here in south-east London, that work is now starting and Mr Telesford’s appeal will be reviewed as soon as is possible.

“We are aware that Lambeth Council’s adult social care team remains in contact with Mr Telesford and is offering him ongoing support.”

**15 October 2020**

**Labour waters down criticism of government by its own shadow disability minister**

Powerful criticism of the government’s performance on COVID-19 and disability employment by Labour’s shadow minister for disabled people was significantly watered down by her own party, Disability News Service (DNS) can reveal.

An email mistakenly sent to DNS yesterday (Wednesday) by a member of Vicky Foxcroft’s staff shows that her original draft comments attacking the government were weakened by someone within the party hierarchy.

The changes made by the party include the removal of a reference to the “vital” role played by trade unions in protecting disabled people from discrimination.

The party also removed any reference to disability discrimination from Foxcroft’s comments.

The comments had been requested by DNS in response to three stories: new research which casts doubt on the government’s much-vaunted progress in reducing the disability employment gap; further research which warns of the impact of the pandemic recession on disability employment; and concerns about the government’s new COVID-19 guidance for people placed in the “clinically extremely vulnerable” group (*see separate stories*).

In her draft comments, seen by DNS, Foxcroft said the party had “long wondered” whether the government’s figures on reducing the disability employment gap “stand up to scrutiny” and that the research “shows this may not be the case”.

She also said it was “absolutely vital” that the government recorded disability employment data in a “transparent” and “open fashion”, and that Labour was “extremely concerned” about the government’s failings on data about disabled people.

But the eventual “official” comment made no reference to the research’s suggestion that the government’s claims to have sharply reduced the disability employment gap were based simply on a statistical quirk.

Instead she said: “We remain concerned about the lack of internal data on disabled people in work and the frequency it is collected.

“If we are to close the disability employment gap we must make sure the data captured is accurate and transparent.”

On the pandemic recession, Foxcroft called in her draft statement for the government to ensure that disabled people and those clinically vulnerable to the virus were “protected in the workplace from discrimination”, and she added: “Trade unions are an obvious vital part of this, but so is having stringent regulations that support disabled people.”

But her official statement removed any reference to discrimination and trade unions.

Instead, she called on the government to “put safeguards in place to ensure that disabled and clinically vulnerable people are protected in the workplace from disproportionate job losses” and said ministers “must urgently act to ensure disabled workers do not bear the brunt of redundancies in this jobs crisis”.

Responding to the new pandemic guidance, Foxcroft’s draft comments warned that disabled people who might need to shield again needed to be “properly compensated and not left without enough money to survive”.

She added: “People are extremely worried and government guidance has done little to alleviate this.”

But her official statement said that disabled people were just “anxious” rather than “extremely worried”.

Her call for disabled people who might need to shield again needing to be “properly compensated and not left without enough money to survive” had vanished.

Instead, she asked simply: “What support will people who are expected to shield get?”

A spokesperson for [Manchester Disabled People Against Cuts](https://twitter.com/McrDPAC) said: “Given the government’s well documented grave and systemic catastrophic policies towards disabled people, we would hope opposition leadership does not soften its previous stronger condemnations and trusts the shadow minister for disabled people to speak with frankness.”

It is not clear whether Foxcroft’s staff member consulted with party headquarters before amending her comments.

But he said yesterday that the comments read by DNS “were drafts that I was free to amend” and the final version was “agreed with Vicky so those are the responses that should be used”.

**15 October 2020**

**The truth about the government’s disability jobs ‘miracle’**

The government’s repeated claims that its policies have transformed the employment prospects of disabled people over the last seven years have been challenged by academics who suggest their figures are simply the result of a statistical quirk.

Disabled activists have been left bemused for years as official figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) appear to have shown disabled people becoming increasingly likely to find work in comparison with non-disabled people.

The figures continued to come despite a decade of government austerity policies and allegations of a hostile environment [created by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/coronavirus-return-of-benefit-sanctions-in-middle-of-pandemic-is-barbaric/).

Justin Tomlinson, the minister for disabled people, has [repeatedly bragged](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-07-09/71805) that the figures show the government has slashed the disability employment gap (the difference in the proportion of disabled and non-disabled people of working-age in jobs).

In July, he said this had fallen by more than five percentage points in six years (from 33.8 percentage points to 28.6 per centage points).

But academics from Cardiff Business School – [part of the Disability@Work group of researchers](https://www.disabilityatwork.co.uk/about-us/) – have now shown that these figures appear to simply reflect an increase in the number of people reporting that they are disabled.

In a Disability@Work [briefing note](https://www.disabilityatwork.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Briefing-Note-disability-measurement-.pdf), Professor Victoria Wass and Professor Melanie Jones have shown that, between 2013 and 2020, an alternative indicator, the proportion of people prevented from working due to disability, has remained stable.

One potential explanation for the figures repeatedly quoted by ministers over the last few years is that there has been a sharp rise in the proportion of people describing themselves as having an impairment that limits their ability to carry out day-to-day activities.

This is the indicator used by the government to measure whether someone is disabled in its employment figures, which are collected by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Between 2013 and 2020, the percentage of working-age people describing themselves this way rose from 16.5 per cent to 19.7 per cent.

Wass and Jones believe this increase is because increased public awareness and acceptance have led more people to “recognise and acknowledge that they have a health condition and/or that it is limiting”.

They say this change in the “disability prevalence” rate is particularly relevant to those with mental health conditions.

Their research has been passed to DWP for “welcome discussion” on how to interpret these findings.

Their conclusions are given further weight by a 2015 RNIB study which showed that the proportion of people who were registered as blind and partially-sighted and had jobs fell by 21 per cent between 2005 and 2015, whereas, using the ONS definition, the employment rate for those with visual impairments rose by 23 per cent between 2005 and 2012.

Once the increase in the rate of people describing themselves as having an activity-limiting impairment is taken out of the ONS figures, they show that the prevalence-corrected disability employment gap actually rose slightly between 2013 and 2020, while it fell significantly under the last Labour government, between 1998 and 2009.

The authors conclude: “The prevalence-corrected measure suggests all the narrowing in the [disability employment gap] from 2010 is accounted for by the expansion in disability prevalence and not by any reduction in underlying disability employment disadvantage.”

They urge the government to enhance data collection on disability prevalence so that it can explore these findings.

They also point to [government research](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/875199/employment-of-disabled-people-2019.pdf) (*PDF, see pages 10-12*) which suggests that the increase in the number of disabled people in employment – which Tomlinson says reached 1.4 million between 2014 and 2020 – was due not simply to a narrowing of the disability employment gap, but also to a steady increase in the working-age population, an increase in disability prevalence, and a rise in the overall employment rate.

Vicky Foxcroft, Labour’s shadow minister for disabled people, said: “We remain concerned about the lack of internal data on disabled people in work and the frequency it is collected.

“If we are to close the disability employment gap we must make sure the data captured is accurate and transparent.”

A DWP spokesperson said: “Before this pandemic the number of disabled people in work had increased to over four million and as we begin to rebuild, our continued support for disabled people will not be diminished.

“Through our Plan for Jobs and tailored schemes like Access to Work we will continue to support disabled people to find, retain and remain in work to help unlock their full potential.”

**15 October 2020**

**Deaf campaigner sues government and Labour over lack of BSL at COVID briefings**

A Deaf campaigner is set to take legal action against both the government and the Labour party after they both failed to provide British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters at televised coronavirus briefings this week.

[Katie Rowley](https://twitter.com/KatieJRedstar), who is pregnant, said it was “terrifying” to be unable to follow the information provided at the coronavirus briefings, particularly those on health-related issues.

The Labour party member, from Leeds, is supporting an existing legal action being taken by Deaf campaigners against the government over its “callous and heartless” refusal to provide BSL interpreters at its coronavirus TV briefings.

That legal action is spearheaded by Lynn Stewart-Taylor, founder of the [#WhereIsTheInterpreter](https://www.facebook.com/WhereIsTheInterpreter/) campaign, who with fellow Deaf activist Mark Hodgson is set to reach Downing Street tomorrow (Friday) after walking from Gloucester to London in a bid to “shame” the government into providing interpreters alongside ministers and health experts at the briefings.

They are also [raising funds](https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/whereistheinterpreter) for a judicial review of the government’s refusal, which they say has breached the Equality Act, the Human Rights Act and the UN disability convention.

Now Rowley, while backing their legal action, is also taking two legal cases of her own.

One of those relates to the failure to provide a BSL interpreter at [two televised briefings](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGoKsrWw9i0) with health experts at 10 Downing Street, on Monday (12 October), which focused on how the NHS was preparing for the next phase of the pandemic, and on 21 September.

Monday’s briefing was attended by three health experts, including Professor Jonathan Van-Tam, the deputy chief medical officer, and Professor Stephen Powis, medical director of NHS England.

The government has previously defended itself by arguing that BSL-users can now follow its televised briefings by watching the interpreter provided by the BBC News digital channel, but Rowley says that service was not available for either of the briefings so there was no way she could understand the information provided.

Her second case is against her own party for failing to provide an interpreter for [a televised COVID-19 briefing](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2020/oct/13/uk-coronavirus-live-balance-justifies-ignoring-sage-covid-lockdown-boris-johnson) given by Labour leader Keir Starmer on Tuesday.

Leeds [is currently at the second highest local coronavirus alert level](https://www.yorkshireeveningpost.co.uk/health/coronavirus/leeds-could-be-put-tier-3-very-high-local-lockdown-covid-infection-rate-keeps-going-3001655), with fears that it could soon be placed into the highest level.

Rowley, who is also visually-impaired, and struggles to understand written English, told Disability News Service: “As a Deaf BSL-user I feel at disadvantage to what’s going on.

“I have health issues and am pregnant. I need access to an interpreter to be able to protect not only myself but my unborn baby.”

She said it was “terrifying for any mum” to be without access to the information she needs to “make the appropriate decisions”.

She added: “Without access to the information, how can I make decisions which not only affect me, but my unborn baby and those around me?”

Her solicitor, Chris Fry, [of Fry Law](https://www.frylaw.co.uk/), yesterday (Wednesday) sent a letter to Labour party headquarters, seeking compensation for disability discrimination under the Equality Act, as well as a written apology and a promise to provide an interpreter for future live briefings.

A similar letter will to be sent to the government relating to its failure to provide an interpreter at the briefings on 21 September and 12 October.

In the letter to the Labour party, Fry says that Rowley watched the Starmer briefing hoping to find out about his COVID-19 policies and hoping he would “demonstrate his commitment to the Deaf Community by leading by example, embarrassing the Government and ensuring that his Briefing was accessible” by providing a BSL interpreter.

The letter adds: “However, and much to Ms Rowley’s dismay, the Briefing had no BSL Interpreter.

“She could not follow any of the content. As a result of the inaccessibility of the briefing for our client, she was left feeling excluded from her own political party, she felt insignificant and irrelevant and isolated.”

[The party said more than a month ago](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/sep/08/keir-starmer-to-hold-regular-press-briefings-to-compete-with-no-10) that it planned to begin its own regular media briefings – which it wanted to be televised – but it has so far refused to apologise for the failure to provide an interpreter on Tuesday, arguing that the event was only set up at short notice.

A Labour spokesperson said: “Yesterday’s press conference was organised with only a few hours’ notice. We did try to get a BSL interpreter.

“However, unfortunately this was not possible at short notice. The Labour Party is committed to introducing a BSL interpreter at future news events and we have already spoken to Vicky Foxcroft [the shadow minister for disabled people] about taking this forward.”

The Cabinet Office refused to comment on the failure to provide a BSL interpreter for Monday’s televised NHS briefing, with a spokesperson [pointing instead to a comment made last week](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/deaf-activists-on-200-mile-trek-to-bring-wheres-the-interpreter-message-to-callous-pm/), which related to briefings where there was an interpreter provided by the BBC News channel.

He said: “At this stage we have nothing further to add.”

**15 October 2020**

**Disability hate crime prosecutions plummet, while Home Office stays silent**

The number of cases of disability hate crime prosecuted in court has plunged by nearly 40 per cent in just one year, [Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) figures](https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/proportion-hate-crime-cases-getting-increased-sentences-all-time-high) have revealed.

The fall appears to be the result of a steep fall in the number of cases referred to prosecutors by police forces, with one leading disabled campaigner saying the figures showed the police “failing disabled people yet again”.

It is the third year in a row that the number of disability hate crime prosecutions has fallen steeply and the figures have caused alarm among disabled campaigners.

The fall, from 579 prosecutions in 2018-19 to just 360 in 2019-20, comes as [new Home Office figures](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2019-to-2020) show that the number of disability hate crimes recorded by police forces in England and Wales has continued to climb.

It means that the number of prosecutions as a percentage of the number of recorded disability hate crime offences has fallen from 19 per cent in 2016-17 (1,009 prosecutions and 5,254 recorded offences) to just four per cent (360 prosecutions and 8,469 recorded offences) in just three years.

The CPS report also shows that there were just 292 convictions for disability hate crime in 2019-20.

CPS has passed figures to Disability News Service (DNS) showing that the number of disability hate crime cases referred to prosecutors by police forces for a decision on whether to charge the alleged offender has fallen every year for the last five years.

In 2014-15, there were 924 cases passed on by the police, but this had fallen to 367 by 2018-19 and fell again to 320 in 2019-20.

CPS is continuing to offer support to the National Police Chiefs Council in its efforts to “understand” the fall.

A CPS spokesperson said: “If a disability hate crime case meets our legal test we will always seek to prosecute, however, we are demand-led and can only prosecute cases referred to us by the police.”

He said the continuing falls in referrals since 2014-15 “has had an impact on our prosecution figures”.

He said: “Despite this, last year we secured 292 convictions out of 360 disability hate crime prosecutions.

“We would urge any victims of these sickening offences to come forward and report.

“CPS areas have been encouraged to offer support to local police forces to improve understanding of this fall in receipts.”

One positive figure in the CPS report was that its conviction rate for disability hate crime offences rose from 72.4 per cent in 2018-19 to 81.1 per cent last year.

Anne Novis, chair of [Inclusion London](https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/), a leading expert on disability hate crime and an adviser to the Metropolitan police and the CPS on hate crime, said the figures showed police services across England and Wales “failing disabled people yet again” and “allowing perpetrators to get away with harassment, abuse, hostility and worse”.

She said forces were failing to continue successful projects on disability hate crime that had been “initiated more often than not by disabled people”.

She added: “If we try to report, we have to deal with officers with little training and awareness of disability hate crime, often having to tell them what our rights are, what disability hate crime is.”

Novis also said that police officers were removing markers from reports which showed that offences should be treated as disability hate crimes.

She said this leads to poor investigations, offences being treated only as “anti-social behaviour” and then a lack of evidence that a hate crime has been committed when police reports are passed to CPS.

New figures from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) [were also released by the Home Office](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2019-to-2020) this week (*see appendix table seven*).

But although they suggested that actual disability hate crimes experienced by disabled people (rather than those reported to the police) had remained roughly stable when comparing the period 2015-16 to 2017-18 with the period 2017-18 to 2019-20, the Home Office made it clear that the two sets of data could not be compared because of a change in methodology.

David Wilkin, a coordinator of the [Disability Hate Crime Network](https://www.facebook.com/groups/disabilityhatecrimenetwork/) and [author of a book on disability hate crime on public transport](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/book-exposes-horrifying-levels-of-abuse-faced-by-disabled-people-on-public-transport/), said: “Whilst data from the victim and perceptions survey (the CSEW) do not offer clarity regarding disability hate crime it is again obvious from police recorded incidents that hate crime is on a continuously rising trend.

“As these are seemingly not being passed on to the CPS for threshold and public interest tests and ultimately prosecution, the police are therefore evidently sitting on these cases.”

Last year, a CPS spokesperson told DNS that there was a “concern over the growing gap between the number of hate crimes reported to the police and the number of cases being sent by forces to the CPS for a charging decision”.

The Home Office [refused last year](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/cps-concern-over-huge-drop-in-police-disability-hate-crime-cases/) to offer any explanation for the fall in cases passed to CPS by the police, or to say if this was due to a fall in police numbers, or if the Home Office was concerned by the drop.

This week, it again refused to offer any explanation for the fall, or to say if this was due to a fall in police numbers, or if the Home Office was concerned.

A statement by a Home Office spokesperson failed to mention disabled people or disability hate crime.

He said: “All forms of hate crime are completely unacceptable.

“The government takes this issue very seriously, which is why we published the [hate crime action plan](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/sharp-fall-in-disability-hate-crime-referrals-by-police/) which has helped improve the police response to, and public awareness of, all forms of hate crime.”

**15 October 2020**

**Coronavirus: Criticism over new ‘clinically extremely vulnerable’ guidance**

The government’s updated guidance for those who are “clinically extremely vulnerable” (CEV) to COVID-19 has been criticised for its lack of detail and clarity, and its failure to announce new support for those who are particularly at risk from the virus.

[The new guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19) for the 2.2 million CEV people in England was published by the UK government this week as the number of new infections continues to rise across large parts of the country.

It describes extra measures that CEV people should take, depending on which of the three coronavirus alert levels applies to their local area.

Health and social care secretary Matt Hancock said the announcement would mean “every person most at risk from serious outcomes from the virus will have specific advice targeted to local levels, which they can follow to keep themselves as safe as possible, while ensuring they can also keep as much normality in their lives as possible”.

But the guidance is “less restrictive than previous shielding advice” and it says the government will, in the future, “only reintroduce formal shielding advice in the very worst affected local areas and for a limited period of time”.

It does not suggest – yet – that anyone in the CEV group adopts “formal shielding” and there is not yet any extra support being offered with accessing food, arranging deliveries of medicines and providing additional care or support.

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) said it would write to CEV people in the future “if they are advised to adopt formal shielding again”.

The highest of the three levels – for those living in areas with “very high” local alert levels – advises those in the CEV group to work from home, to “stay at home as much as possible, and avoid all but essential travel” and “significantly reduce shopping trips” [*for detailed advice on all three levels,* [*visit the guidance page*](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19)].

But it adds: “People in these areas are encouraged to still go outside for exercise, and can still go to school and to work if they cannot work from home.”

DHSC and the NHS are writing to all those in the CEV group, and their doctors, describing the changes to the guidance. Anyone advised to shield in the future will be written to again.

But [Disability Rights UK](https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/) (DR UK) criticised the new guidance for offering “little in the way of support to those who previously shielded, such as food parcels or deliveries, or medicine deliveries”.

It was also critical of the failure to change the list of conditions which lead to people being placed in the CEV group, even though disability groups including DR UK advised the government in March that the list was “not comprehensive enough”.

Kamran Mallick, chief executive of DR UK, said: “It is incredible that given that two-thirds of deaths from the virus have been those with disabilities and long-term health conditions, that the government is not providing robust support and protections for those most at risk.

“Given the virus is at similar levels to March, and we are being told to expect it to rise over the winter, it is astonishing that shielders are now, effectively, being told to be more relaxed.”

He was also critical of the guidance for those in work, which says that even those in the highest-risk areas “can still go to work” if they have no alternative.

Mallick said: “The financial provisions for those who cannot work are punitive. Not all employers will make adequate provisions for their disabled workers.”

He also said the lack of ringfenced supermarket deliveries for those who need to shield “makes no practical sense” as “the impacts of coronavirus on individual lives have not changed since March”.

He added: “Individuals on the shielding list should be able to make their own choices in conjunction with their clinical professionals. But this guidance doesn’t leave much room for that.

“It’s keep calm and carry on, unless the government issues a top-down instruction to order people to stay at home. There is no personal agency in that.

“This is yet another example that the government has not yet grasped the basic concepts of the social model of disability – that people need the right support frameworks in place for them to be able to truly exercise their agency.”

Vicky Foxcroft, Labour’s shadow minister for disabled people, said the guidance was “too vague”.

She said: “Once again, the government isn’t providing the assurances the 2.2 million people who have shielded in the past need.”

She said that questions remained about the support that will be available to those who are expected to shield in the future and about the CEV list and who is on it.

She said: “People are anxious; government guidance has done little to alleviate this.

“Seven months after this pandemic started, we can’t continue with this confusion – people need clear guidance.”

There was also anger over the guidance from disability and health charities, including concerns that CEV people in the highest risk areas were still being advised to travel to work if they cannot work from home, and about the lack of detail.

The MS Society condemned “the lack of financial and practical support to help people follow the government’s new advice”, while Age UK and Scope [were both reportedly critical](https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/outrage-over-latest-covid-shielding-22840084?utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=sharebar&fbclid=IwAR2d0hgzVuF0nipIapaI-srm3s7p2fRu7EiCS_6Ja-K7nE36DM7bwq3lZIg) of the lack of clarity in the guidance.

\**For sources of information and support during the coronavirus crisis, visit the*[*DNS advice and information page*](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/advice-and-information/)

**15 October 2020**

**Funding provides opportunity to build evidence of national DPO crisis**

New research will seek crucial evidence of the “serious crisis” facing disabled people’s organisations (DPOs) across England.

[Inclusion London](https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/) has secured £80,000 from the National Lottery Community Fund to research the state of England’s “chronically under-resourced, fragmented and precarious” DPO sector.

It will produce proposals for long-term improvements to the regional and national DPO infrastructure and build a “clear picture” of the support the DPO sector needs.

The research will be used as the basis for future funding applications.

The new funding follows calls by DPOs during April’s national conference of the [Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance](https://www.rofa.org.uk/) – of which Inclusion London is a member – for more to be done to ensure the voices of disabled people and their user-led organisations are heard at both regional and national levels.

Inclusion London says that about a quarter of DPOs have closed since 2015, while many others are “hanging on by a thread”.

It says that life for disabled people “is getting worse not better”, with “exclusion and discrimination coupled with rising poverty and inequality as a result of austerity, welfare reform and cuts to public services”.

As well as an austerity-driven financial crisis, it says, there are also “considerable challenges” in “developing new leaders, having our voices heard, losing contracts to organisations and charities run by non-disabled people and a lack of diversity and representation reflective of the whole disability community”.

The lack of resources means DPOs cannot carry out vital projects, such as outreach work with disabled people in institutions, developing the skills of its members, and tackling the “systematic exclusion” disabled people face.

Inclusion London warns that it is still “culturally acceptable, indeed the norm, to have non-disabled people representing us with funding disproportionally going to the large disability charities that are not run or controlled by disabled people and do not represent or even amplify our voice”.

Tracey Lazard, Inclusion London’s chief executive, told April’s conference that there was a need to “call out the charities and tell them to move over and stop taking our space”, while Mike Steel, from [Bristol Reclaiming Independent Living](https://twitter.com/BrilLiving), said the influence of the charities meant that local grassroots and community groups were excluded from decision-making.

Lazard told Disability News Service this week: “The funding from NLCF to carry out grassroots research on the capacity building, policy and voice and movement building needs of DPOs across England is critical funding that will enable us to gain in-depth insight and evidence of the needs of our sector and movement.

“We will use this evidence to collectively develop strategic funding ‘asks’ to provide the strategic long-term investment we need for our sector and then work with funders on how best they can meet our asks.

“Tackling structural inequality must become a top priority of funders and to do that funders must re-set how they work with DPOs and start prioritizing long-term, core funding support to DPOs and other grassroots community user-led organisations from all communities blighted by structural inequality.

“All of this is only possible if DPOs take part in this research.”

As part of the research, Inclusion London is asking DPOs in England [to take part in a survey](https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/SG2BX8J).

Lazard said: “We know your time is precious but this is a rare opportunity to gather the evidence we need to secure long term strategic funding so please do take part in our survey and the range of on-line focus groups taking place up and down the country.”

The new research will be carried out by disabled consultants and DPOs in the six regions of England – the north-west, the north-east, the Midlands, the east, the south-east and London, and the south-west – and is expected to be completed within nine months.

Inclusion London is working on the research with seven regional DPOs: [Equality Together](http://equalitytogether.org.uk/) in Bradford; [Disability Sheffield](https://www.disabilitysheffield.org.uk/); [Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People](http://gmcdp.com/); [Disability Resource Centre](http://www.disability.co.uk/) in Birmingham; [Equal Lives](https://www.equallives.org.uk/) in East Anglia; [Spectrum Centre for Independent Living](https://spectrumcil.co.uk/) in the south-east; and [West of England Centre for Inclusive Living](https://wecil.co.uk/).

**15 October 2020**

**Tributes paid to ‘irreplaceable’ and ‘irrepressible’ Sian Vasey**

Disabled activists have paid tribute this week to Sian Vasey – a much-loved, “multi-layered activist” who played a “pivotal role” in the disabled people’s movement for more than 40 years – who died last week.

A stream of messages on social media mentioned her contributions as a disabled activist, a pioneering member of the disability arts movement, a BBC producer, a writer, a campaigner on issues such as accessible transport and independent living, and as a Labour party and union activist.

Many mentioned her wit, her contribution as a role model for other disabled people, and the part she had played in protests as an activist with the Disabled People’s Direct Action Network (DAN) and [Not Dead Yet UK (NDY UK)](http://notdeadyetuk.org/).

Several described her as a “warrior” as well as a friend and an inspiration to many other disabled activists.

Mandy Colleran described Vasey as “the warrior queen of the disability movement”, and “a role model, a thinker, a leader, an activist, a writer, and a great friend”, and said she was “irreplaceable”.

Another disabled campaigner who knew her well, Mary-Ellen, described her as “incredible, irrepressible”, with an “infectious smile and laugh”, and said she had “worked tirelessly for a better, more just and equal, inclusive world”.

Vasey’s activism with NDY UK often intertwined with her campaigning on independent living.

In November 2014, as NDY UK prepared for its latest protest outside the House of Lords to demonstrate opposition to a bill that sought to legalise assisted suicide, she said: “Many of us need support with our daily routine, washing, dressing, continence and going to the loo but this in no way affects our well-being, or diminishes our dignity.

“We get the help we need, but we have had to fight hard to get it.

“Those who develop terminal and disabling conditions later on in life often find it impossible to grapple with the social care system.

“It is a tragic fact that this is a primary cause of such people wanting to end their lives prematurely.”

Vasey was also a member of the pioneering Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) in the 1970s, and played a key role in setting up another pioneering disabled people’s organisation, London Disability Arts Forum.

[In the late 1980s](https://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/library/Vasey-Disability-Culture.pdf) (PDF), she wrote of the importance of disability culture and of making links with other oppressed groups.

She predicted the future importance of the disability arts movement, writing: “In time we will have our own body of artistic work about or informed by the experience of being disabled in the same way as there is already much work created from the point of view of women, people from ethnic cultures and from lesbians and gay men.”

Through the arts, she wrote, disabled people can “make discoveries about what we have in common and place the emphasis on those things rather than on our differences, thus countering the traditional charitable model of Disability that has historically kept us separate from each other”.

She was later director of [Ealing Centre for Independent Living](https://www.ecil.org/) (ECIL) and was awarded an OBE in 2009 for services to disabled people.

Broadcaster, campaigner and access consultant [Mik Scarlet](https://twitter.com/MikScarlet) first met Vasey at the BBC in the early 1990s, where they both worked at its Disability Programmes Unit (DPU), she as a producer and he as a presenter.

He said: “Sian was so important to my career, as she guided me through developing a more rounded approach to presenting.

“She was a stickler for language, and she spent many hours helping me develop my presentation and voice-over technique.

“As I voiced over most episodes of the later series of From The Edge and Sian was the voice-over producer, we spent many hours together and became firm friends.

“She helped me learn more about disability politics and the concept of disability pride.

“After the DPU was disbanded, we remained in touch and worked together on several equality campaigns.

“I also compered the ECIL Christmas parties on many occasions, where Sian always did a turn and was the life and soul of the party, with her dry sense of humour.”

He said: “The disability movement owes so much to Sian.

“Her ability to hold her ground with people from all walks of life, especially with those with the power to make real change, led her voice to be one listened to by all.

“She played pivotal roles in many of the advances in equality we disabled people have experienced, and was a hardened campaigner right up until the end.

“Most recently we worked together through NDY UK, making sure the voices of disabled people were heard in the campaign against assisted suicide.

“I’ll miss Sian the campaigner, Sian the creative, Sian the raconteur but most I’ll miss Sian’s cheeky smile and dry, wicked sense of humour.”

[Dennis Queen](https://twitter.com/missdennisqueen), another NDY UK activist, described Vasey as “an iconic disabled woman and a multi-layered activist” and said it was a time of “deep grief” for those who had known her.

She said: “From grassroots peer advocacy, to writing, protesting and sitting at the top table, Sian was at home in every environment and generated admiration in them all.

“I had the privilege of protesting with Sian on many occasions in Not Dead Yet UK and previously, the Disabled People’s Direct Action Network (DAN).

“Sian’s presence and media representation in our campaigns at NDY UK will be sorely missed.”

**15 October 2020**

**Pandemic recession likely to have ‘disproportionate’ impact on disabled people**

The recession associated with the pandemic is likely to be having a disproportionate impact on disabled employees, just as it did in the last recession, according to academics.

They have examined the impact on disabled people during the recession of 2007 to 2009, and believe it is set to be repeated during the coronavirus recession.

They believe that – just as with the last recession – disabled employees might experience a disproportionate impact through experiencing increased workloads, wage freezes, and restricted access to overtime and training.

The conclusions have come from academics from Cardiff, Warwick and Cass Business Schools – professors Nick Bacon, Kim Hoque, Victoria Wass and Melanie Jones – who [form the Disability@Work group of researchers](https://www.disabilityatwork.co.uk/).

It is too early to assess whether there has been a disproportionate negative impact on the employment of disabled people, they say, although early research by the charity Citizens Advice, based on inquiries it has received about redundancy, suggests this could already be happening.

Their research shows that, during the last recession, disabled employees were significantly more likely than non-disabled staff to report increased workloads (36 per cent of disabled employees compared to 28 per cent of non-disabled employees), a wage freeze or cut (37 per cent compared to 32 per cent), and restricted access to paid overtime (23 per cent compared to 18 per cent) and training (15 per cent compared to 12 per cent).

They believe this led to widened disability pay gaps, and wider job satisfaction gaps.

Even allowing for the concentration of disabled people in jobs more heavily affected by the recession, their findings still held up.

They conclude, [in a briefing note](https://www.disabilityatwork.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/disability%40work-COVID-19-recession-briefing.pdf) (PDF): “The results are therefore consistent with the argument that disabled people face unequal treatment from employers during recessions, and that organisational responses to downturns affecting employment terms and conditions form an important source of inequality at work.”

They call for both employers and the government to take action.

Among their recommendations, they say the government should monitor disability pay gaps and disability job satisfaction gaps, and that it should analyse the impact of policies such as the furlough scheme on disabled people.

And they call for the government to support self-employed disabled people, introduce mandatory reporting on disability employment for large firms, and increase funding and promotion of the Access to Work scheme.

Their research has been shared with the government’s Disability Unit, which is working on a new, much-delayed national disability strategy, which is due to be published next spring.

They also say that employers should measure how many of their staff are disabled – encouraging staff to disclose this information – and monitor the impact of changes they make to working practices as a result of the pandemic.

And they say employers should also ensure disabled staff working from home are adequately supported, and retain and support employees who are the most “clinically vulnerable” to COVID-19.

Victoria Wass and Melanie Jones, from Cardiff Business School, told Disability News Service: “Given the economic impact of COVID-19 is likely to be pronounced and more persistent than expected, it is even more critical that the government responds rapidly to our evidence.

“Otherwise there is a clear risk that disabled people, who are some of the most disadvantaged in society, will face increased absolute and relative economic disadvantage.”

Bacon and Hoque [have also called repeatedly](https://www.disabilityatwork.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Disability%40Work-Two-Ticks-Briefing-Paper-4.pdf) (PDF) for the government to scrap its much-criticised Disability Confident employment scheme and replace it with a new programme based on how employers actually perform on disability employment rather than the promises they make when they sign up to Disability Confident.

And they say that trade unions [must be supported to do more](https://www.disabilityatwork.co.uk/research-areas/organisational-barriers-and-supports/how-can-unions-support-disabled-employees/) to represent disabled workers and highlight their workplace support needs.

Fazilet Hadi, head of policy for [Disability Rights UK](https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/), said: “Disabled employees and those seeking work, are undoubtedly being hit hard by the recession caused by the coronavirus crisis.

“Yet we have seen two government employment programmes announced with no additional measures in place to support disabled job-seekers.

“The eligibility criteria for these schemes would stop some disabled people having access to them.

“There are no plans to ensure that new work coaches and careers advisers have disability expertise. The Access to Work scheme remains painfully slow.

“We support calls for mandatory monitoring of the numbers of disabled people in the workforce, their satisfaction levels, and the disability pay gap.

“We need to expose discrimination within the workforce and require employers to tackle it.”

Vicky Foxcroft, shadow minister for disabled people, said: “Throughout the pandemic, disabled people have felt like an afterthought.

“The government must put safeguards in place to ensure that disabled and clinically vulnerable people are protected in the workplace from disproportionate job losses.

“Ministers must urgently act to ensure disabled workers do not bear the brunt of redundancies in this jobs crisis.”

A DWP spokesperson said: “Before this pandemic the number of disabled people in work had increased to over four million and as we begin to rebuild, our continued support for disabled people will not be diminished.

“Through our Plan for Jobs and tailored schemes like Access to Work we will continue to support disabled people to find, retain and remain in work to help unlock their full potential.”

**15 October 2020**

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