**Philippa Day: Flawed PIP system led to young mum’s death, says coroner**

Flaws in the disability benefits system were “the predominant factor and the only acute factor” that led to a young disabled mother taking her own life, a coroner has concluded.

Gordon Clow, assistant coroner for Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, yesterday (Wednesday) highlighted 28 separate “problems” with the administration of the personal independence payment (PIP) system that helped cause the death of 27-year-old Philippa Day, from Nottingham.

It took more than two hours for the coroner to read out his conclusions and findings, after a nine-day inquest\* that uncovered multiple failings by both DWP and its private sector contractor Capita in the 11 months that led up to Philippa’s death in October 2019.

Clow ended by telling DWP and Capita that he had decided to issue them with prevention of future deaths (PFD) reports, which will force them to consider how to make changes to the PIP system to prevent further deaths of claimants.

DWP will now need to examine the mental health training given to its call handlers and its poor record-keeping, while Capita will have to examine the process for changing where and how assessments are carried out and ensure that letters issued about this process “are accurate and [do] not create unnecessary distress”.

He dismissed suggestions made by DWP and Capita during the inquest that only a few individual errors had been made in dealing with Philippa’s claim, and concluded instead that there were significant, systemic flaws.

The coroner said that Philippa had been eligible for PIP throughout the 11 months at the enhanced rates for both mobility and daily living, that DWP could have obtained all the information it needed to ensure she received those benefits, and that she should not have been told she would have to attend a face-to-face assessment.

Among the 28 “problems” he highlighted were the repeated failures to record on her file that she needed additional support with her claim; and the mistaken decision to remove her benefits after DWP concluded wrongly she had no “good cause” for failing to return a claim form.

He also pointed to the failure to respond to [the mental distress she displayed](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/philippa-day-dwp-phone-agent-ignored-sobbing-claimant-who-later-took-her-own-life/) in a call to a DWP telephone agent; the refusal to allow Philippa a home assessment; and the “institutional reluctance” to accept evidence from professionals such as her community psychiatric nurse (CPN) over the telephone.

The 28th, and final, problem was Capita’s failure to accept, despite a phone call from her CPN on the day before she was found unconscious – and repeated earlier warnings – that “requiring a face-to-face assessment at a clinic placed Philippa’s safety at risk”.

The coroner concluded that there were “deficiencies in the system’s ability to process PIP claims without causing unnecessary distress to claimants”, including problems with training for call handlers and Capita disability assessors, DWP’s record-keeping, guidance on additional support for claimants, and inaccurate DWP correspondence.

He also said there was an “institutional working assumption at the DWP that documents which are not on the claimant’s file are missing because the claimant failed to send them in”.

Clow also pointed to flaws in Capita’s initial review and change of assessment processes.

Philippa’s unconscious body had been found by her sister and father on 8 August 2019, just days after she had been told she would need to attend an assessment centre for a face-to-face appointment to decide her PIP claim.

They found her lying on her bed at her home in Nottingham. On the pillow next to her was the letter from Capita telling her she would have to attend the appointment at the assessment centre in Nottingham.

She was taken to hospital but later died after more than two months in a coma.

The coroner did not reach a verdict of suicide, concluding instead that he could “not be satisfied that it was more likely than not that Philippa intended her death”, even though she was responsible for taking her own life.

But he did say he was “satisfied on balance of probabilities that Philippa intended to harm herself and to put her life in danger” by her actions on 7 or 8 August 2019, which led to her death.

He concluded that there were many factors that led to her decision to put her life in danger.

But he said that “the combined impact of successive destabilising incidents caused by the problems in the handling of her benefits claim was… the predominant factor, and the only acute factor” which led to that decision.

Philippa had been diagnosed with type one diabetes when she was 18 months old, and was later diagnosed with emotionally unstable personality disorder, anxiety, depression and agoraphobia.

She lived a “chaotic” life characterised by repeated self-harm, suicidal ideation and drug and alcohol misuse, as well as repeated inpatient admissions to mental health units, but the inquest heard she received constant, dedicated and close support from her family and mental health professionals.

She had been claiming disability living allowance (DLA) for her diabetes since she was 16 but had started a new claim for PIP in November 2018, hoping to secure further support for needs related to her mental health.

Her PIP application form appears to have been lost by DWP, the inquest heard, after she posted it in January 2019, and her DLA was stopped that month because she had failed to return it.

Disability News Service (DNS) [reported last week](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/philippa-day-secret-dwp-report-reveals-errors-that-led-to-disabled-mums-death/) how a secret DWP investigation into her death found that, because of its errors, Philippa’s total benefits had fallen from £229 a week to just £73 per week for four-and-a-half months, while Social Fund loan repayments of £12.43 per week were deducted from the £73, leaving her with little over £60 a week to live on.

The inquest had heard how Philippa had experienced months of distress due to DWP’s decisions to remove her disability benefits when it lost her claim form, and then to confirm that decision, as well as the length of time it took to reinstate her benefits, and deal with a new claim.

DWP errors had caused her severe financial hardship, said the coroner, and resulted in her taking out payday loans she could not pay back.

Both DWP and Capita had been told of her history of significant mental distress and mental health inpatient admissions, that she was agoraphobic, and that she would be unable to cope with attending the assessment centre.

Philippa’s sister, Imogen, said last night that the family wanted “continued and systemic change”.

She said they believed that the treatment of her sister (known to her family as Pip) by DWP “had a direct impact on her mental state and in the end is the reason for her death.

“She was in despair because of the depths to which she had sunk, she could see no way out of the debt and the poverty in which she was living.

“Pip’s poor mental health meant she was not able to handle the battle with the DWP for the reinstatement of her benefits.

“The stress of the conflict with the DWP made her even more ill.

“Support from her community psychiatric nurse and from her family kept her going. But the constant cold and unsympathetic wall of resistance that she met at Capita and the DWP was more than she could endure.

“The refusal of a home assessment by Capita was just too much for Pip to cope with. We believe she just couldn’t take any more.”

She said she was “really happy” with the coroner’s conclusions, and she praised his “very full and thorough investigation”.

Merry Varney, a partner with solicitors [Leigh Day](https://www.leighday.co.uk/), who represented the family at the inquest, said the coroner’s decision to issue PFD reports was “hugely significant”, as DWP and Capita would be required to respond to them, while their responses would be published.

She told DNS that the example set by the coroner and his “willingness” to investigate the role of DWP “should be very powerful messages for other coroners”.

She added: “I hope that Pip’s family and everything they have done helps other families who may have been in that position feel that they can come forward and that there may be a way to help them and for them to achieve justice”.

In a statement, Capita apologised to Philippa’s family “for the mistakes made in processing her claim and the additional stress which was caused to Philippa”.

A spokesperson said: “We have strengthened our processes over the last 18 months and are committed to continuously working to deliver a high-quality, empathetic service for every claimant.

“In partnership with the DWP, we will act upon the coroner’s findings and make further improvements to our processes.”

DWP offered its “sincere condolences” to the family, and said it would “carefully consider the coroner’s findings”.

DNS asked if it would apologise to the family for its failings, but DWP had not responded by noon today.

*\*Disability News Service attended nearly every session of the online inquest*

**28 January 2021**

**Second secret DWP benefit death report could open door for bereaved families**

Ministers appear close to defeat in their six-year battle to prevent the release of secret reports into the suicides and other deaths of benefit claimants, after the release of findings from a second Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) investigation.

The family of Errol Graham, who starved to death in June 2018 after his employment and support allowance (ESA) and other benefits were wrongly removed, have been shown a summary of the DWP internal process review (IPR) that examined the circumstances surrounding his death.

The document was released to [Leigh Day](https://www.leighday.co.uk/), the solicitors representing his family, as part of their [high court judicial review claim](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/errol-graham-legal-challenge-exposes-years-of-dwp-dishonesty-and-broken-promises/) that the decision to halt Errol’s ESA in 2017, and DWP’s ESA safeguarding policy on terminating benefits, were both unlawful.

It follows the release of an IPR into the death of Philippa Day, which was obtained by solicitors for her family – also Leigh Day – and [later released to Disability News Service (DNS)](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/philippa-day-secret-dwp-report-reveals-errors-that-led-to-disabled-mums-death/) by the coroner holding her inquest (*see separate story*).

The two IPRs appear to be the first to be released to families since DWP admitted in autumn 2014 that such documents existed.

Alison Turner, the fiancée of Errol Graham’s son, said she hoped the release of the two documents would now mean that all families with a relative whose death has been investigated by DWP would be able to obtain a copy of that IPR.

She said: “I think they are going to struggle to refuse that now.

“The additional suffering families go through is because DWP is not treating those who have died as a person, they are treating them as if they are just a number.

“They don’t acknowledge that a family is hurting and needs answers in order to start moving on with their life and have the comfort that things have changed as a result.

“It is causing unnecessary hurt and stress.

“There is nothing worse for a family than to think their loved one is dead, and no-one is learning anything from it.”

She added: “It helps to know that Errol has not just died and DWP have just gone into work the next day like nothing’s happened, because that’s how it felt to me [before she saw the IPR].”

But she said she was also frustrated that DWP had only released a summary of the IPR, rather than the full document.

She said: “They are picking and choosing what they think we have a right to see.

“As far as I am concerned, that IPR belongs to my family [because it looks at] how they have learned from my family member’s death.

“We should not be entitled to part of it, we should be entitled to the whole of it.”

Turner also said the document showed that the review had downplayed the conclusions of the coroner who heard the inquest into his death.

She said the IPR failed to mention that Errol starved to death, even though the coroner found he died from “starvation” at his flat in Nottingham and that his benefits were removed eight months before his body was found by bailiffs who had come to evict him.

She said: “They are treating the death as it is just a mistake and it is not their policy that is at fault.”

Turner said the IPR also failed to mention the coroner’s conclusion that Errol had “needed the DWP to obtain more evidence at the time his ESA was stopped” and her conclusion that the “safety net that should surround vulnerable people like Errol in our society had holes within it”.

Although the IPR raises some concerns about safeguarding under the heading “minor findings”, under the heading “major findings” it states simply: “None.”

A DWP spokesperson had not commented on the new IPR by noon today (Thursday) but has previously said it would currently be inappropriate to comment on the judicial review case. Judgement on the case has been reserved until a future date.

**28 January 2021**

**Ministers sat on accessible housing research for up to four years**

Ministers delayed publishing a report that called for more research into the benefits of accessible housing for up to four years, Disability News Service can reveal.

[The report](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-on-part-m-access-to-and-use-of-buildings), by architectural firm PRP, was finally published last week by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), but none of the research and evidence referenced in the document is dated later than March 2016.

[Payments for the research](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/561897/TP_DCLG_April_2016_for_Publication.csv/preview) appear to have been made as long ago as April 2016, and PRP said this week that it was finalised in 2017.

The report examined evidence on the benefits of accessible housing, and the effectiveness of guidance relating to other buildings – under Part M of the building regulations – to see how well it was meeting the needs of disabled people.

The report found that the key benefits of accessible housing included reduced delayed hospital discharges, avoiding having to pay for temporary and permanent residential care, reduced costs to the NHS of trips and falls, reduced costs of aids and adaptations, and lower administrative costs of rehousing disabled people from inaccessible housing.

But the report concluded that there were gaps in the evidence on “the cost and frequency of these benefits that arise from building accessible homes”, and it added: “Further dedicated research to understand the benefits of more accessible housing is needed.”

The report also examined the effectiveness of guidance on “buildings other than dwellings”, which has not been updated since 2004.

It found that, although the guidance was “considered to be reasonable in meeting most needs of disabled people”, the lack of enforcement of that guidance was seen as “a critical issue”.

It also found that the needs of some disabled people may not currently be covered “adequately” by the guidance, including hearing- and visually-impaired people, people with restricted growth, people with complex and multiple impairments requiring personal assistants, and users of powered wheelchairs.

It also called for consideration of the needs of autistic people, those with mental health conditions, and people with dementia and other “cognitive health issues”.

Reviews of the experiences of disabled people and their families through social media and other online sources found concerns around issues such as the safety and visibility of accessible entrances; the location of accessible entrances “via non straightforward side or rear entrances”; and the location of accessible toilets.

This week, MHCLG refused to say when the research was completed, and why its publication had been delayed for so long.

But a spokesperson said in a statement: “We recognise the importance of improving accessible housing and since the report was completed we have used this research to inform policy.

“As the author recommends, we’re commissioning further research and will use that evidence to review and update statutory guidance.

“We are also reforming the entire building safety and standards system, including measures to improve compliance and enforcement.”

A PRP spokesperson said the company did not know why there had been such a long delay in publishing the report.

But she said the research was carried out from 2015 to 2016 and was finalised in 2017.

She said PRP had worked closely with MHCLG on various aspects of the building regulations and had “identified a gap in the provision of ergonomic standards for wheelchair users and to address this issue the MHCLG has now invited suppliers to tender for further research”.

She added: “We fully support the MHCLG’s initiative.”

The delay in publishing the report follows years of concerns about the government’s lack of action to deal with the accessible housing crisis.

A long-promised consultation paper – just 21 pages long – on whether it should introduce higher accessibility standards for new housing in England [was finally published last September](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/long-awaited-accessible-housing-consultation-gives-little-away/).

The previous month, the government was accused of “showing contempt” for disabled people after publishing [an “utterly shameful” 84-page white paper](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/governments-contempt-for-disabled-people-as-planning-white-paper-ignores-accessible-housing/) on the future of the planning system, without including a single mention of disabled people, disability or accessible housing.

[And in 2019](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/government-faces-legal-action-threat-over-accessible-housing-failure/), housing secretary Robert Jenrick was warned that he faced the threat of legal action over the government’s failure to take action to solve the crisis in accessible housing.

**28 January 2021**

**Tory backing for domestic abuse amendment on care, despite government opposition**

Two disabled peers have secured cross-party backing for their attempt to expand the protection offered to disabled people through the government’s domestic abuse bill.

Although the government is so far opposing the move by Baroness [Tanni] Grey-Thompson and Baroness [Jane] Campbell, [their proposed amendment](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-01-25/debates/218A33F6-D938-4EDB-A7AF-070FAE5D2330/DomesticAbuseBill#contribution-5D18CFE9-C210-450E-B91D-5977F8D325B1) to the bill during its Lords committee stage secured support this week from at least five Tory peers.

The bill includes measures to create a wide-ranging statutory definition of domestic abuse, to establish a new domestic abuse commissioner, and to place a duty on local authorities in England to provide support to survivors of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation.

The amendment by the two crossbench disabled peers would ensure that measures in the bill would cover not only those abused by family and partners, but also abuse by paid care workers and unpaid carers, such as friends or neighbours.

Baroness Campbell told fellow peers that the amendment followed “disabled people’s express plea that the bill should address the covert abuse that some individuals experience from a carer, whether paid or unpaid”.

She said: “While most who care for disabled people do so with great kindness, respect and the best intentions, there are a significant number who do not, and who go on to abuse those who rely on them.”

She said that care relationships were “sometimes exploited by the carer, leading to an abuse of power and pervasive means of coercive control” and that existing legal protections were “clearly not working”.

She said: “Many personal assistants [PAs] who are employed by disabled people – I have that ability through my own personal health budget – are not regulated.

“We do not come under safeguarding measures. We are alone, to manage and control our PAs ourselves; it is something that we choose to do.

“I would want to know that this legislation covered me if I ever found myself in a situation where my PA was abusing me.”

Lord Cormack, one of the Tory peers who supported Baroness Campbell’s amendment, said: “It is important that this landmark legislation is able to deal with abuse involving relationships between those who live in the same domestic setting or where there is a dependency within a domestic setting.”

He said that was why he supported Baroness Campbell, who he said had spoken “with great eloquence, force, lucidity and passion”.

He added: “What she said convinced me entirely.”

Two peers mentioned the work of disabled campaigner Ruth Bashall, chief executive of [Stay Safe East](http://staysafe-east.org.uk/) – which works with disabled survivors of domestic and sexual abuse, hate crime and other forms of abuse – who has been lobbying for improvements to the bill.

Last June, [she told Disability News Service (DNS)](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/four-key-changes-to-domestic-violence-bill-could-make-crucial-difference/) of four key amendments that would provide disabled people with crucial new protections, including the one put forward by Baroness Grey-Thompson and Baroness Campbell.

Despite the widespread support, the Tory whip, Lord [Stephen] Parkinson, said that their amendment – and other similar suggested improvements – would “broaden the definition of domestic abuse unhelpfully”.

He said: “This is a domestic abuse bill, not an abuse bill, which is why we do not believe that it would be appropriate for these sorts of relationships to be included within that definition.”

He said that suitable protection was already offered through other legislation, such as the Care Act, and organisations such as the Care Quality Commission and local safeguarding adult boards.

Baroness Campbell did not ask for a vote on the amendment, but she and Baroness Grey-Thompson told DNS that they would continue to push the government to change its position before the bill becomes law.

**28 January 2021**

**Report calls for ‘radical and ambitious’ disability strategy**

A new report, based on the views of hundreds of disabled people and organisations, has called on the government to produce a national disability strategy that is “radical and ambitious”.

[The report by Disability Rights UK (PDF)](https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/sites/default/files/DR%20UK%20We%20Belong%20Report_0.pdf) follows a three-month engagement campaign aimed at discovering how disabled people want society to change.

Now it wants the government to include recommendations from its We Belong report – across five key areas – in its national disability strategy, which will be published this spring.

Among the report’s recommendations are calls for the Equality Act to be extended and made easier for disabled people to enforce, and for the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to be incorporated into UK law.

Disability Rights UK (DR UK) also calls for the government to ensure that every area has a properly-funded disabled people’s organisations (DPO), alongside “meaningful” and “in-depth” co-production and engagement with DPOs at national and local levels.

Other recommendations include reform of both the benefits and social care systems, for action on accessible housing, and for national and local government and transport organisations to co-produce improvements to public transport with DPOs so that stations, platforms, trains and ticketing systems are made accessible “at a more rapid pace”.

On attitudes to disabled people, the report calls for a new public disability awareness campaign based on the social model of disability, and for disability equality and the social model of disability to be incorporated into the school curriculum.

DR UK also says there should be improved support for disabled people who experience domestic abuse, and stronger laws on disability hate crime.

Kamran Mallick, DR UK’s chief executive, said: “We will share the comments of all who contributed to this project with the government, so it hears the views expressed.

“We ask the government to take bold and radical action to tackle the systemic discrimination and inequality which persist, and to produce an ambitious ground-breaking strategy, which creates a society where we truly belong.”

He added: “It is not enough to tinker with current policies and services, we need radical and ambitious change.”

Last week, other DPOs spoke of their shock and dismay at the government’s failure to engage with them, as the minister for disabled people, Justin Tomlinson, announced [a new National Disability Survey](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/citizen-space-survey-national-strategy-for-disabled-people), but gave disabled people just four weeks to respond if they wanted their views to influence the strategy.

DR UK has joined those DPOs in criticising the deadline.

Fazilet Hadi, DR UK’s head of policy, said: “It is understandable that engagement has been made more difficult due to the coronavirus crisis, but giving disabled people one month to respond is not remotely acceptable.

“For many of us, information on the survey will take time to reach us, some of us will want to discuss our responses with others, and some of us will require assistance to respond.

“A month just isn’t sufficient to enable disabled people to genuinely influence ground-breaking changes in the way society treats us.”

**28 January 2021**

**Low-traffic schemes have ignored disabled residents, says new research**

Disabled people have been ignored by policy-makers in the post-COVID rush to introduce low-traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs), according to new research by a disabled people’s organisation.

Although disabled people have both positive and negative views about LTNs, local authorities and transport bodies have failed to consult with them on the potential impact of LTNs on their lives and travel, says the [Pave the Way report](https://www.transportforall.org.uk/campaigns-and-research/pave-the-way/).

It is the first detailed research into the impact of LTNs on disabled people.

The schemes aim to reduce traffic on roads and promote walking, wheeling and cycling – so-called “active travel” – by restricting access for vehicles to residential roads.

The report has been produced by Transport for All (TfA), which interviewed disabled people and carers from 19 London boroughs, as well as Newcastle, Manchester, Yorkshire, Surrey, Oxford and Edinburgh.

The use of LTNs increased rapidly in London from May last year, after changes to road traffic regulations – introduced because of the pandemic – allowed local authorities to introduce them without consulting residents beforehand.

The TfA research found many disabled people felt “a great sense of injustice and unfairness at LTN measures, because there is such a distinct lack of alternative options for transport”.

The report says: “In some of the areas where LTNs have been introduced, participants have told us that the streets are very unfriendly.

“They say uneven pavements, trees and tree roots, lack of dropped kerbs, street clutter and dockless bikes all contribute to it being very difficult and exhausting to get around by foot, wheelchair, or cycle.”

The schemes have proliferated at a time when many disabled people are not using public transport because of the pandemic.

One wheelchair-user, from north London, told researchers: “So how do I get to St Pancras?

“I can’t take the Tube as none of the Tube stations in Camden are accessible.

“Buses aren’t great for us who are ‘vulnerable’ at the moment, particularly as they’ve only got one space for wheelchairs.

“People are currently standing in these to be at a safe distance, so are less prepared to move, meaning driving was my only real option.

“That has been taken away from me, because of the difficulty of [the] extra time [driving now takes].”

The research found that 72 per cent of participants criticised how the introduction of an LTN in their local area had been communicated to them.

Another criticism raised by TfA’s research was that LTNs have led to longer journey times for residents, as well as their care workers, with travel becoming more exhausting, expensive, complicated or difficult.

One disabled participant in the research, from Lewisham, said: “Well, I did to go to the chemist at the end of last week, and where it normally would take me about five to seven minutes, it took me three quarters of an hour.”

Of the 78 disabled people and carers whose interview responses were analysed, three-quarters of them (77 per cent) said they had seen journey times increase after an LTN was introduced in their neighbourhood.

A third (33 per cent) reported an increase in traffic danger, while 18 per cent said this had decreased because of an LTN.

The report concludes: “It is clear from our findings that, although some disabled people are experiencing benefits as a result of LTNs, many disabled people are being disproportionally and negatively impacted, compounded by the many existing barriers that disabled people face in many aspects of their lives.”

Among the report’s recommendations is for “meaningful engagement” with disabled people; for communication about the schemes – and the way they are implemented – to be more accessible; and for “dispensation” for disabled residents, allowing them to access their homes by any vehicle they choose, including taxis.

Kirsty Hoyle, TfA’s chief executive, said: “This heated and divisive debate has seen disabled people being spoken for, not to.

“This has added to the growing frustration, compounded by the lack of engagement and consultation, that disabled people’s concerns are not heard.

“LTNs, in their current format, are too much ‘stick’ and not enough ‘carrot’: they bring negative impacts for those who continue to use cars, but few incentives or changes that increase disabled people’s opportunities to access active travel.”

Katie Pennick, TfA’s campaigns lead, added: “Ripping [LTNs] out and going back to normal isn’t the solution, when ‘normal’ wasn’t accessible to disabled people, either.

“We need immediate measures and long-term solutions to tackle these issues.”

**28 January 2021**

**Margaret Hickish: Tributes paid to ‘unstoppable roller-coaster for inclusion’**

Tributes have been paid to Margaret Hickish, an “unstoppable roller-coaster for inclusion” who played a significant role in “waking up the transport industry to the benefits of accessible transport and inclusive design”.

Although Hickish’s name was not widely-known among disabled people, she played a key and influential role in access and inclusion at the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and later at Network Rail.

Following news of her death this week, fellow disabled campaigners who knew and worked with her spoke of her strength of will, her kindness, and the legacy she will leave behind.

With a background in engineering, she began working as an access consultant with the consortiums that produced the London 2012 “masterplan” in early 2007 before later joining the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) as its accessibility manager.

She spent years consulting with disabled people, including local organisations in east London, to ensure that the London 2012 stadia, including the Olympic Park, were as accessible as they could be.

The ODA’s efforts were widely-praised by disabled people and their organisations for ensuring an accessible environment for both Paralympians and disabled spectators.

She later worked as a consultant for both ODA and LOCOG, the London 2012 organising committee, and was appointed as Paralympics adviser to London mayor Boris Johnson.

She also worked on projects outside the Olympic Park, taking responsibility for access improvements to the South Bank, and access arrangements at Heathrow and the capital’s London 2012 Live Sites.

But she quit her post with the mayor and LOCOG less than a year before the games, in part because of “misgivings” about pressures on its access budget, concerns that were borne out by the access problems experienced by some disabled visitors during London 2012.

In 2013, [she began to work with Network Rail](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/london-2012-access-bosss-enormous-task-at-network-rail/), and later became its permanent access and inclusion manager, giving her responsibility for access and inclusion issues across Network Rail’s huge estate of depots, offices and 17 of Britain’s largest stations, including Paddington, Liverpool Lime Street, Glasgow Central, Charing Cross and Waterloo.

It was, she admitted at the time, “an enormous task” but also a “wonderful challenge”.

Mik Scarlet, who worked with her at London 2012 and for her at Network Rail, said she had been “a powerhouse of knowledge and passion”.

He said: “So much of the forward motion the UK’s disabled community has seen on the rail network and wider built environment was due to the work and absolute commitment of Margaret Hickish.”

He said she had had a “dogged commitment to leaving a real legacy of change for disabled people”.

But he said she was also “the life of the party”.

He said: “She loved life and lived it well. She wanted others who didn’t have her strength of will to be able to live a similar life if they wished, which I think lay behind her passion.

“I have had a few hugely influential people in my life and Margaret was one of the most important.

“A friend, a colleague, an unstoppable roller-coaster for inclusion and a truly lovely person, Margaret will be sorely missed and living up to her memory will drive all of us she took under her wing to continue her work and build on her legacy.”

Scarlet added: “Many disabled people won’t have heard the name Margaret Hickish, but they see her work every day.”

This week, he took part in an online Network Rail meeting on improving access, and realised that “every person in the meeting was brought on board or trained by Margaret”.

Her legacy, he said, “will carry on”.

In 2014, Hickish received an honorary fellowship from the Royal College of Art for her contribution to inclusive design, and she received an MBE in the 2016 new year honours.

At Network Rail, she introduced its built environment accessibility panel (BEAP) to advise on access issues, with most of its members disabled people, a development she had also championed at ODA.

She said in 2016 that Network Rail soon began to reap the benefits of the panel, which proved that projects affecting disabled people work better if you involve them right from the start.

She told Disability News Service at the time: “We have changed a lot about the way Network Rail looks at inclusive design.

“More than anything else, what we are talking about is putting people at the heart of the design process.

“That is basically the human condition: throughout everyone’s life from birth through to death, and everything that might happen in between.”

Sue Groves, a BEAP member and a friend of Hickish, said she had been “one of a kind, a force to be reckoned with but also an extremely kind and caring woman”.

She said: “Her work in the access and inclusion field is a legacy that will benefit many for decades to come.

“She recruited me to the Network Rail BEAP when it was first set up and when I was worried about being able to hold my own against a raft of experts, she told me not to focus on the qualifications of others as I brought the common sense of lived experience.”

Hickish told Groves that her role on the panel “was to state the bleeding obvious to the experts who may well understand what the regulations required them to do, but had less understanding about how they worked for disabled people.

“I never forgot that valuable lesson.”

Another member of the BEAP, Tanvi Vyas, a disability equality consultant and trainer, said it had been “an absolute privilege” to work with her.

She said: “Margaret was instrumental in waking up the transport industry to the benefits of accessible transport and inclusive design.

“She had such an impact on me and many others as I saw her living life as a successful, professional, disabled woman.

“Margaret leaves a great legacy that goes so much further than many of us can appreciate.”

**28 January 2021**

**Football clubs can still do more on access, says Paralympian**

One of the country’s leading Paralympians has called on football clubs to do more to improve access for disabled supporters.

Six-time Paralympian [Stephen Miller](https://twitter.com/hailfabio), a founding member of Newcastle United Disabled Supporters Association (NUDSA), said there had been a “massive progression” on access since he started attending football matches.

He said his club’s ground was now one of the most accessible in the country, thanks in part to the influence of NUDSA.

But he said that many other grounds were “still not up to standard”, which was “not acceptable”.

Miller, who has six Paralympic medals in athletics, said: “Sport is well funded, especially elite sport, people make a lot of money and the facilities should reflect that.

“It’s about equality. We shouldn’t accept any more where grounds and facilities are not meeting the standards that they should be meeting.

“There need to be bigger incentives, bigger penalties for the clubs that are not making the effort to embrace disabled supporters.”

Even with his own club, he said, more could still be done, such as improving transport to and from the ground, while buying tickets was “still not the easiest thing in the world for disabled people”.

He added: “Looking at away games, that is a big area as well, how we can improve away facilities for disabled supporters and make disabled supporters feel more comfortable about going to away games.”

He was speaking at an online event organised by the disabled-led campaigning charity [Level Playing Field (LPF)](https://www.levelplayingfield.org.uk/), which represents disabled fans and is preparing for its 17th annual [Weeks of Action event](https://www.levelplayingfield.org.uk/campaigns-research/weeks-of-action/weeks-of-action-2021/).

Last year’s Weeks of Action campaign was “stopped in its tracks” when its final weekend coincided with the suspension of live sport because of the pandemic crisis.

This year’s event, which aims to highlight good access and inclusion at sports venues across England and Wales, will take place from 27 February to 14 March, and will focus on social media.

One in four Premier League football clubs have already signed up to Weeks of Action, as well as two-fifths of those in the Championship, the second tier of English football, with LPF working with others to join them.

Miller said Weeks of Action was about “raising awareness and the importance of everybody having the opportunity to watch live sport and have that experience.

“I know how much sport has given me in my life, not only competing and training but also going to watch sport and how that can help to build positive experiences.”

He said he was missing the “matchday experience” of live sport during the pandemic, such as “walking around the ground and being in the city centre, meeting friends, meeting family, having all those conversations, that’s what I miss the most.

“That’s why I go to football, for the experience. It’s a day out. It’s fun, it’s social, it’s interaction, that’s really what I miss the most. I think a lot of people are in the same boat.”

He said he was missing being able to “have a pint, talk about the game, put a bet on, have a bit of banter; it’s these little things you miss.

“It’s never the same watching it on the TV when you’re on your own in the house.”

Last June, LPF was the first sports charity to carry out a survey on the impact of COVID-19, surveying nearly 600 disabled sports fans, with 43 per cent of them saying that the suspension of live sport had had a significant impact on their mental health.

Tony Taylor, LPF’s chair, stressed that there had been “huge progress” on disability and access in football, while “huge improvements” were still being made.

He said: “We had a situation where many clubs said to us: ‘We can’t make all these adjustments… it’s not physically possible.’

“The actual reality was that it was possible, and things have changed.”

He told the online event that he had been “really, really pleased” that many clubs and individual players had contacted disabled supporters during the pandemic to check on their welfare.

He said the positive mental and physical health advantages of attending live spots events for disabled supporters was now “missing for so many people”, which was “a great tragedy”.

But he said that access and inclusion must be kept “right at the top of the agenda” and that he hoped the Weeks of Action would show how important the issue is to clubs.

Taylor said: “The impact of the Weeks of Action is to make sure we maintain the importance of accessibility and inclusion right at the top of the agenda.”

Owain Davies, LPF’s chief executive, said LPF had launched several programmes to tackle the impact of the pandemic on disabled supporters and to “keep people connected”.

He said this year’s Weeks of Action would focus on social media, with clubs planning to use the campaign as a platform to provide virtual wellbeing sessions for disabled fans, develop their services ready for the return of fans to live sport, carry out staff training, raise awareness of the campaign on matchdays, and showcase their accessible facilities and services.

**28 January 2021**

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