**Tory silence after four peers aim disablist ‘barrage of attack’ on disabled colleagues**

The Conservative party has refused to act after four of its peers delivered an “extremely alarming” and disablist “barrage of attack” on disabled members of the House of Lords.

The four Tory peers were all arguing that the Lords should quickly return to “normal” and end the adjustments that have allowed disabled members and those shielding from coronavirus to vote and take part in debates from their homes during the pandemic.

One of the Conservative peers argued that “personal infirmity should not provide grounds for exemption from normality” and that continuing the adjustments post-pandemic would be “extending the logic of equality beyond reason”.

Another suggested that those members who “cannot or will not” attend the House of Lords should retire as peers, while a third said that it was “inconceivable that those who aspire to take part in the governing of this nation should not make the effort to attend parliament, whatever the difficulties”.

Their comments came as the government prepares to publish its cross-government national disability strategy, which disability minister Justin Tomlinson [has claimed](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2020-11-10/HLWS556) will “remove barriers and make this country more inclusive for disabled people”.

The adjustments introduced by the authorities in the House of Lords have allowed disabled peers such as Baroness [Jane] Campbell and Baroness [Sal] Brinton – who have both had to shield from the virus – to continue to play an important part in parliamentary proceedings during the pandemic.

Many peers [told the debate](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-05-20/debates/1A303224-207C-4131-96B2-4A07DE9CF3D8/HouseOfLordsRemoteParticipationAndHybridSittings) on the use of remote participation and so-called hybrid sittings in the Lords that some of the measures introduced during the pandemic – which include online voting and allowing some peers to take part in debates virtually – should continue when the crisis ended.

Baroness Campbell, a crossbench peer, said that the “capacity to join in remotely has swept away many of the barriers that some of us encounter daily” and she called for the “best aspects” of the hybrid model to be retained post-pandemic.

She said it had been “a relief to watch debates at home on my night-time ventilator and to vote. It improved my focus, decision-making and health.

“As a result, I worked harder, longer and more effectively than ever I had done before the pandemic. Yes, I did my duty better.

“Surely remote working should at least be seen as a ‘reasonable adjustment’ under the Equality Act.”

The Liberal Democrat leader in the Lords, Lord Newby, said there was “a strong case for allowing those who have a disability that makes attending the House difficult to retain the option to participate virtually on a permanent basis”.

The crossbencher Baroness Finlay said the Lords “needs diversity and has shown inclusiveness this year” and “must work in a way that enables everyone to contribute their expertise”, which “means changing our approach, not putting the old barriers and hurdles back in place”.

But the four Tory peers each suggested that if their colleagues were not able to attend the House of Lords in person once the worst of the crisis was over, they should not be allowed to contribute at all.

Lord Farmer, a former treasurer of the Conservative party, said that extending hybrid arrangements post-pandemic would be “another example of extending the logic of equality beyond reason”.

He said that “for the sake of the public who are paying our way, personal infirmity should not provide grounds for exemption from normality” and that “parliamentary participation is for those able to bring vitality to proceedings”.

He said that “if infirmities of mind or body make that vital contribution impossible, any permanently lowered bar to participation serves peers’ interests, not those of the public.

“The previous norm should be reinstated: those of us who cannot come to the House cannot contribute.”

His colleague, Lord Howard of Rising, called for the Lords to “resume our usual proceedings at the earliest possible opportunity” and said it was “inconceivable that those who aspire to take part in the governing of this nation should not make the effort to attend parliament, whatever the difficulties”.

Baroness Noakes called for the Lords to “get back to normal as soon as possible”.

She told fellow peers that there were “no good reasons for hybridity in future” and that “those who are ill or otherwise unable to attend for periods of time can take leave of absence”, while those who “cannot or will not, for whatever reason” attend in person can retire instead.

A fourth Tory peer, Viscount Trenchard, made it clear that he did not believe that “those with disabilities, in poor health or pregnant should be allowed to continue to participate remotely”.

He said it was “an unfortunate fact that if a noble Lord’s condition or circumstances prevent his or her attendance and ability to participate fully, it is hard to argue that that member is fully capable of exercising his or her functions as a legislator”.

He added: “I welcome the fact that it has become easier for those with disabilities to participate fully, but exceptions to physical attendance requirements should be minimised.”

After the debate, Baroness Brinton, the Liberal Democrat health and social care spokesperson in the Lords, who has been working from home for the last 14 months to allow her to shield, described the comments of the Tory peers as “an extraordinary barrage of attack on disabled peers and those with underlying conditions that puts them on the clinically extremely vulnerable list”.

She told Disability News Service (DNS): “A number of Conservative peers were telling us to retire because they believed that our ‘infirmity’ or ‘unsound body or mind’ meant that we couldn’t attend the House of Lords, so we weren’t worthy of our place in it.

“Those same peers felt it was more important to put the clerks to the Lords back in their wigs, than make any reasonable adjustments for their disabled colleagues.”

She added: “Frankly, it is hard enough to work or visit parliament with a disability out of pandemic.

“But for many of us – not just peers – those barriers became much worse last week, when a number of noble Conservative Lords told us that there was no place at all for some disabled people in parliament.”

Baroness Campbell said the comments of the Tory peers had been “hard to hear”.

But she said she had been “heartened by others’ support for creating a more progressive and inclusive way of working, so I am trying to reflect on that, rather than narrow-minded comments which clearly demonstrate a dated understanding of what a modern parliamentarian can contribute brilliantly, via different means”.

She told DNS: “I believe their truth is haunted by their own fears of losing identity and influence.

“But there really is room for everyone to participate fully in different ways, making parliament stronger, more relevant and, most importantly, democratic.

“If we do not modernise in a fully inclusive way, the House of Lords will wither and die on the vine.”

Vicky Foxcroft, Labour’s shadow minister for disabled people, was also critical of the four Tory peers.

She said: “These comments are extremely alarming, especially given that disability hate crime is on the rise.

“If the Conservative party do not take action against these peers, it will only serve to reinforce the message that they think disabled people are an inconvenience.

“With so few disabled politicians in parliament, it is obvious that the way we do business needs to change, reform and become more inclusive.

“A more representative parliament would ensure disabled people’s voices were at the heart of decision-making, instead of them constantly feeling like an afterthought.

“MPs and peers should be raising the issues that disabled people face and seeking to build a more inclusive society.”

Neither the Conservative party nor Justin Tomlinson’s Disability Unit had answered questions about the comments made by the four Tory peers by noon today (Thursday).

**27 May 2021**

**New bid to legalise assisted suicide ‘threatens disabled people’s lives and independence’**

Disabled activists have warned that the latest bid to persuade parliament to legalise assisted suicide is a threat to their “lives, independence and peace of mind”.

The latest attempt to force a law change is being led by the crossbench peer and former social worker Baroness Meacher, the chair of the campaigning organisation Dignity in Dying, formerly known as the Voluntary Euthanasia Society.

Because she came seventh in the Lords ballot for private members’ bills for the 2021-22 session of parliament, Baroness Meacher’s bill will be among those receiving priority for the limited amount of debating time available.

Her bill [received its first reading](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-05-26/debates/94E8B4BA-4164-4FCD-BA24-C1DC98585840/AssistedDyingBill(HL)) in the House of Lords yesterday (Wednesday), and is likely to be debated later this year, the first time such legislation has been considered by parliament in six years.

She said her bill would “enable terminally ill, mentally competent people whose suffering is beyond the reach of palliative care to die well and on their own terms” and would “provide invaluable comfort and control to countless more who may never avail themselves of this option but would be comforted by the simple fact of its existence”.

But [Not Dead Yet UK (NDY UK)](http://notdeadyetuk.org/), which leads disabled people’s opposition to legalisation of assisted suicide in the UK, said that a change in the law would be “a threat to disabled people’s lives, independence and peace of mind”.

NDY UK said many disabled people had lost access to health and social care during the pandemic, making it even harder to secure the support they needed to live “active, independent lives” and bringing into “sharp focus” the value society places on them.

[In February](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/coronaviruscovid19relateddeathsbydisabilitystatusenglandandwales/24januaryto20november2020), the Office for National Statistics (ONS) suggested that many of the deaths of disabled people during the pandemic could be linked to discrimination within the healthcare system.

[The following month](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/regulators-face-call-to-act-over-figures-linking-covid-deaths-with-health-system/), ONS confirmed to Disability News Service that – after adjusting for health conditions and other factors – disabled women aged between 30 and 69 with higher support needs had been 60 per cent more likely to die from COVID-19 than non-disabled women in the same age group.

At the same time, [research by the care regulator](https://www.cqc.org.uk/news/releases/improved-oversight-reform-needed-pressures-pandemic-shine-light-inconsistent) uncovered more than 500 “do not attempt resuscitation” decisions put in place during the pandemic that “had not been agreed in discussion with the person, their relative or carer”.

Meanwhile, there are growing concerns from disabled activists at the increasing number of countries – including Spain, Ireland and New Zealand –that have voted or otherwise agreed to legalise assisted suicide, while others, such as Canada and the Netherlands, push to expand the boundaries of laws already in place.

In January, [three UN human rights experts expressed alarm](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26687&LangID=E) at a “growing trend to enact legislation enabling access to medically assisted dying based largely on having a disability or disabling conditions, including in old age”.

They said that, even when access to assisted suicide was restricted to those at the end of life or with a terminal illness – Baroness Meacher’s bill would restrict access to those who are terminally-ill – disabled people, older people, and particularly older disabled people, “may feel subtly pressured to end their lives prematurely due to attitudinal barriers as well as the lack of appropriate services and support”.

The three experts – the special rapporteur on the rights of disabled people, the special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, and the independent expert on older people’s human rights – said that disabled people “condemned to live in poverty due to the lack of adequate social protection can decide to end their lives as a gesture of despair”.

An NDY UK spokesperson said this week: “For essential support to become merely the alternative option to assisted suicide terrifies us.

“That is why no organisation of terminally ill or disabled people has sought a change in the law.

“We need help to live – not to die. That means investment in palliative care, pragmatic solutions to social care provision and continued financial support for our world-class NHS.

“These are the issues our parliamentarians should be concentrating on, rather than the Pandora’s Box of assisted suicide which might help the few, but at the expense of the many.”

**27 May 2021**

**Ministers pledge to publish their first ‘robust’ rail access strategy**

The government has promised to publish its first “robust” national strategy to improve the accessibility of the rail network.

The pledge came in its new white paper, which aims to “transform the railways in Great Britain”.

There was little or no publicity or further detail around the pledge, but the white paper – which the government is calling the [Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/great-british-railways-williams-shapps-plan-for-rail) – promises to make travelling by rail a “modern, convenient and accessible experience for passengers” with “more fully accessible trains and stations”.

At present, only about one in five stations have step-free access to all platforms, according to the white paper.

The plan promises that “realtime updates on station accessibility” will be rolled out at stations, on trains and directly to passengers through third-party providers, which will “help people know whether lifts are working, how busy a service may be and where the most accessible point of a platform is”.

Much of the government’s efforts to publicise the new rail white paper have focused on the plan to set up a new public body, Great British Railways (GBR), that will own the rail infrastructure, collect fare revenue, run and plan the network, and set most fares and timetables.

But the white paper also says that GBR will be given a statutory duty to improve the accessibility of the rail system.

There will be a “comprehensive audit” of the accessibility of the rail network, which the white paper says will provide “robust, consistent and detailed information” that will be made publicly available and will be regularly updated.

The white paper says the national accessibility strategy will provide “the first robust, joined up, system-wide approach to accessibility, including getting to, from and around stations and on and off trains”.

The need for this promise appears to be an admission of failure, three years after the publication of the government’s [Inclusive Transport Strategy](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/728547/inclusive-transport-strategy.pdf) (PDF), which itself pledged to “make our transport system more inclusive, and to make travel easier for disabled people”.

The white paper says that the different sources of funding for improving access will be pooled into a single accessibility fund, which will “serve a new long-term investment programme that will allow investment to be prioritised where it is most needed, using data from the accessibility audit to enable the national accessibility strategy’s goals to be delivered”.

The white paper was published as the Department for Transport (DfT) re-launched [It’s Everyone’s Journey](file:///C:\Users\John\Desktop\Documents\Disability%20News\2021\May%202021\everyonesjourney.campaign.gov.uk), a campaign which aims to raise awareness about the needs of disabled people when using public transport, and to persuade other passengers to “create a more supportive travelling environment”.

The campaign was first launched in February 2020 but had to be put on hold because of the pandemic.

Its initial launch [was met with a reminder](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/government-must-invest-in-infrastructure-after-launch-of-transport-access-campaigns/) that – although other passengers’ attitudes are important – the “fundamental barriers complained about by disabled people are inaccessible infrastructure (for example lack of level boarding), inadequate staffing and attitudinal issues by service providers”.

[Doug Paulley](https://twitter.com/Doug_Paulley), who has played a significant role in highlighting discrimination across the transport industry, repeated that warning this week, suggesting that the campaign “won’t make any difference on the ground and the DfT could do a lot more effective things if they wanted to”.

The campaign launch comes only two months after [Disability News Service reported](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/train-company-pays-17000-after-repeatedly-leaving-disabled-woman-stranded/) how a disabled woman who was left stranded on trains and station platforms more than 30 times by a rail company had been awarded £17,000 compensation.

[Katie Pennick](https://twitter.com/KatiePennick), campaigns lead at the user-led charity [Transport For All](https://www.transportforall.org.uk/), which campaigns for older and disabled people in London, said: “Transport for All welcomes any campaign that shines a spotlight on the many barriers disabled people face to accessing transport.

“In light of the devastating impact of COVID-19, we are pleased that there is additional focus on support for disabled people who have been disproportionately affected.”

But she said the government must continue its work on its Inclusive Transport Strategy “and the many vital infrastructure changes that are required”.

She said: “No amount of public goodwill and patience will increase access for disabled people for whom our network is physically inaccessible.”

Pennick added: “We recently worked with DfT to produce a series of [Guidance for Frontline Staffdocuments](https://www.transportforall.org.uk/guidance-for-frontline-staff/), which we hope will support transport staff to provide a more accessible service as disabled passengers return to networks.

“We are looking for tangible commitments, actions, and direct outcomes such as these, which will have a meaningful impact on the daily experience of disabled people on transport across the UK.”

Meanwhile, the rail industry has finally launched its much-delayed [Passenger Assistance](https://twitter.com/PassAssistance) mobile phone app, which it hopes will make it easier and quicker for disabled people to request assistance for their train journeys.

Although the app will offer passengers the choice to request assistance, update their own details and review their journeys, [it has been criticised](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/equality-act-threat-over-long-awaited-rail-access-app/) for failing to allow disabled passengers to book a ticket or a wheelchair space at the same time as they book assistance.

**27 May 2021**

**Minister’s Equality Act warning to rail industry**

The rail minister has delivered a blunt warning to the industry that it needs to start acting on its legal commitments to disabled passengers under the Equality Act.

Chris Heaton-Harris, who is also responsible for transport accessibility issues, said it was “bizarre” that there were still trains on the rail network that were not accessible to disabled people.

Speaking to a meeting of the all-party parliamentary group on disability on Tuesday, Heaton-Harris said: “Lots of the transport industry seems to think that disability acts or equality acts didn’t necessarily mean that they had to do anything, which is one of the bizarre reasons that we still have trains on our network that are unsuitable.”

He said that he had had to grant exemptions to transport providers to allow them to continue to use such trains on the network, but he warned that he would stop doing this “very, very soon”.

He added: “I am trying to give the message to all of those in transport that the law applies to them too and they really do need to be better.”

His comments appear to be a reference to temporary exemptions [he granted in late 2019](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/rail-industry-and-government-under-attack-over-outrageous-access-exemptions/) that allowed train operating companies to continue to use about 1,200 inaccessible rail carriages, roughly eight or nine per cent of the national fleet.

The rail industry had been set a legal deadline to provide accessible trains for every passenger and every journey by 31 December 2019.

But in [a letter to the industry in December 2019](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/heavy-rail-fleet-accessibility-compliance-time-limited-dispensations), Heaton-Harris said he had “reluctantly” agreed to issue the temporary exemptions because if “all non-compliant trains [were] removed from service there would be a disproportionately negative effect on the provision of services for passengers”.

The industry was put on notice as long ago as 1995 that it would need to ensure its services were accessible to disabled people, through the first Disability Discrimination Act.

Alan Benson, chair of [Transport for All](https://www.transportforall.org.uk/), the user-led charity which campaigns on accessible transport in London, said in January 2020 that the extensions were “outrageous and convey the message to disabled people that their rights to travel are not a priority”.

And accessible transport campaigner [Doug Paulley](https://twitter.com/kingqueen3065?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor) said then that the exemptions were “shocking” and that it was “a disgrace” and “an insult to disabled people” that the rail industry had missed the deadline.

He said the blame was shared between train operating companies, the government, Network Rail, train manufacturers and rolling-stock companies.

**27 May 2021**

**Ten years on from Winterbourne View scandal, activists ask: Why has so little changed?**

Disabled activists are asking why so little has been done to secure the rights of people with learning difficulties and autistic people in the 10 years since the Winterbourne View abuse scandal was exposed.

Monday (31 May) marks the 10th anniversary of the airing of the BBC Panorama documentary that uncovered serious allegations of abuse at the private hospital for people with learning difficulties and autistic people near Bristol.

Following the programme, it emerged that there had been repeated failures to act on concerns about the hospital by the [Care Quality Commission](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/care-watchdog-defends-failure-to-uncover-abuse-evidence/), as well as [the local council and police](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/police-and-council-investigated-scandal-hospital-concerns-six-times/).

In the years following Winterbourne View, the government made repeated pledges to drastically reduce the number of people facing seclusion and segregation in similar settings.

But those pledges were broken, and further abuse scandals were uncovered, including at [Whorlton Hall in County Durham](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/activists-call-for-closure-of-all-long-stay-hospitals-after-whorlton-hall-scandal/).

Now, more than 70 years after concerns were first raised by civil rights campaigners\*, disabled activists say that too little has been done in the decade since Winterbourne View.

Andrew Lee, director of [People First (Self Advocacy)](https://peoplefirstltd.com/), who was one of the disabled campaigners to speak out about Winterbourne View 10 years ago, said this week that he believed there had been “no change” in those 10 years.

He told Disability News Service (DNS) that people with learning difficulties had rights “on paper”, but regulators “have not got the courage to use the teeth that parliament gave them”.

He said: “What it looks like is that we are having to fight for ourselves.”

The grassroots disabled people’s organisation [Bristol Reclaiming Independent Living (BRIL)](https://twitter.com/BrilLiving), whose members live near Winterbourne View, said the 2011 documentary had been “one of the most harrowing Panorama episodes ever”.

One BRIL member said that it had “showed the most horrendous physical and emotional abuse of people, who were being assaulted by staff who were employed to care for them”.

A BRIL spokesperson said: “Since the Ely Hospital scandal over 50 years ago and the Longcare inquiry in 1998, governments have said ‘lessons have been learned’ and things would change for people with learning difficulties and autistic people.

“However, [as an NHS report show](https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/learning-disability-services-statistics/learning-disability-services-monthly-statistics-at-april-2021-mhsds-february-2021-final)s, over 2,000 people are still in these ‘hospitals’.

“Clinical commissioning groups are still spending vast amounts of money, on average £3,500 per week, on locking up disabled people in assessment and treatment units, rather than supporting them.

“This is [despite the evidence](https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng11/resources/costing-statement-pdf-70691581) that having support in the community saves money, and more importantly, it means people living a life with choices and rights.”

A second BRIL member said: “When a government that promises to keep people close to their families – without having to travel, in some cases, hundreds of miles to visit their loved ones – only provide [one sentence on social care in the 2021 Queen’s speech](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/watchdog-warns-social-care-is-at-crisis-point-and-calls-for-legal-right-to-independent-living/), what hope do disabled people have in improving our quality of life?”

The BRIL spokesperson added: “Until autistic people and people with learning difficulties are truly valued, until survivors are listened to, and until disabled people themselves are making the decisions, nothing will change.”

It also emerged this week that two of the business people who ran Castlebeck, the company that owned Winterbourne View, are now directors of Kedleston Group, which runs a series of independent special schools and care homes for disabled children.

Paul Brosnan resigned as chair of Castlebeck in July 2011, in the wake of the scandal, while his father Denis founded Lydian Capital, the private equity group which was the majority owner of Castlebeck.

The BBC [this week reported concerns](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-57156625?fbclid=IwAR3-tI30iFRnVmeUtfJwGVsri8Krq6fej2z9w05NoPyBzd7ieogfWMse83Y) from current and former staff and parents that one of Kedleston’s special schools, Leaways School in east London – which charges day pupils more than £50,000 a year to attend, and is [currently rated “good” by Ofsted](https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/27/137808) – was prioritising profits over the support needs of the disabled children who attended.

Lee said: “I am wondering how the hell it is that the people that allowed the abuse at Winterbourne View could be allowed to run a special educational needs school as a director.

“People with learning difficulties and autism should not be let down in this way.”

In [Transforming Care](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/213215/final-report.pdf) (PDF), the Department of Health’s response to Winterbourne View, published in December 2012, the government said that the “primary responsibility for the quality of care rests with the providers of that care”, including owners, directors and senior managers.

It added: “There can be no excuse for Directors or managers allowing bullying or the sort of abusive culture seen in Winterbourne View.

“Individuals should not profit from others’ misery.”

[An Ofsted inspection](https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50162468) on 18 March this year found that the school met all the standards that were checked.

Kedleston declined to answer questions about the Brosnans’ links with Castlebeck and Winterbourne View, or their suitability to be directors of a company that runs special schools and care homes for disabled children.

But a spokesperson said that “the vast majority of families are happy with our school and they see their children doing very well here” and that the “majority of the claims raised have been made by members of staff who have not worked within the school since 2019 and by a parent whose child also left in that year”.

She added: “Those claims are contradicted by the school’s Ofsted ratings which have seen Leaways judged to be consistently Good or Outstanding since opening almost 10 years ago.

“There are absolutely no safeguarding or welfare concerns which have been raised about the school and therefore it is not appropriate to draw direct comparisons between it and Winterbourne View in any way.”

An Ofsted spokesperson said: “The Department for Education (DfE) are the regulatory body for all independent schools in England.

“We carried out an emergency inspection of Leaways School, which is an independent school, on the 18 March as commissioned by the DfE.

“As part of the scope of the inspection, the department asked us to look specifically at the independent school standards relating to safeguarding, toilet facilities, health and safety, risk assessments, behaviour and supervision.

“We were also asked to check that the quality of leadership and management of the school met the standards.

“Ofsted’s role in regulating individual company directors is limited within legislation.

“We hope that [the Care Review](https://socialcareinspection.blog.gov.uk/2021/03/11/the-care-review-a-rare-not-to-be-missed-opportunity/) addresses the issue of financial and market oversight of the children’s care home sector as we have been raising this gap in regulatory scrutiny for a number of years.”

DfE declined to comment on the Brosnans’ links with Castlebeck and Winterbourne View.

*\*Calls to address the scandal of people with learning difficulties living inappropriately in long-stay institutions date back more than 70 years to when the National Council for Civil Liberties launched a campaign against eugenicist laws that led at their peak to the institutionalisation of more than 50,000 people in long-stay hospitals.*

*A series of scandals through the late 1960s and 1970s highlighted concerns similar to those uncovered by Panorama, with inquiries reporting cruel ill-treatment, inhumane and threatening behaviour towards patients (at Ely Hospital), the “harmful over-use of drugs” (Farleigh Hospital) and the use of tranquilisers and “side-rooms” – or solitary confinement facilities – at South Ockendon Hospital.*

*They were followed by* [*the Longcare abuse scandal*](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/longcare-survivors-the-biography-of-a-care-scandal/)*, exposed by journalists including DNS editor John Pring in 1994, and others such as allegations of neglect at Fieldhead Hospital in Wakefield in 2004, and of abuse at Cornwall Partnership NHS Trust in 2006,*[*the Solar Centre in Doncaster in 2010*](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/police-considering-new-probe-into-abuse-allegations/)*, Winterbourne View, the* [*National Autistic Society’s Mendip House*](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/charity-must-listen-to-autistic-people-in-wake-of-abuse-scandal/)*, and*[*Atlas Project Team in 2017*](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/care-regulator-faces-questions-over-inspection-failings-at-abuse-homes/)*.*

**27 May 2021**

**Pandemic failings left disabled women feeling ‘abandoned, unworthy and disposable’**

Disabled women were made to feel abandoned, unworthy and disposable by the government’s failure to take their lives into consideration when making decisions and drawing up national policies during the pandemic, according to a new report.

The report found that the lack of support provided to disabled women by the NHS and the social care and social security systems during the COVID-19 crisis exacerbated the impact of the cuts to services they had faced over the previous decade.

Disabled women’s cost of living rose during the pandemic, while their income fell, with many being forced to take unpaid leave or cut back on working hours, while others lost their jobs, said the report.

They were also forced to become more reliant on partners, family members and friends for financial support and care needs.

Because of their low income, some could not afford the internet access they needed to shop online, while others could not meet the high delivery costs and so had to rely on deliveries from friends, community volunteer schemes or food banks.

The report, [Disabled Women’s Perspectives on Independent Living During the Pandemic](https://www.sisofrida.org/report-disabled-womens-perspectives-on-independent-living-during-the-pandemic/), was published by the disabled women’s collective Sisters of Frida.

MSunnia, who wrote the report, told [an online launch event](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ijtuFCdR5dM): “The picture is bleak because there is an overall systemic breakdown across society on pretty much all aspects relating to supporting disabled women, from social care to pay in the workplace.

“This is a structural issue, and it is about policy, it is about local authorities, the NHS, education and other providers simply not delivering equitable services for disabled women.”

MSunnia said there had been a “stark lack of thought for disabled people”, who “simply don’t live in a culture where marginalised people are valued”, and that the pandemic had “exacerbated all the ways that intersectional ableism exists”.

Disabled activist [Dennis Queen](https://twitter.com/missdennisqueen) told the report’s launch event: “Seeing the report was very frustrating because it reflected the individual stories that we’ve been hearing and it’s really important that these are studied further.”

She spoke of the “avoidable carnage” caused by the pandemic, which had reinforced disabled people’s call for independent living, and she said that disabled activists would take to the streets with their “free our people” message when it was safe to do so.

And she called on the government to produce statistics to show how many disabled people from intersectional communities had died from COVID-19.

Tumu Johnson, a member of the Sisters of Frida steering group, said it had been painful to read how disabled women had been left feeling that “their lives are unworthy and disposable”, which she said had been a theme of the pandemic.

The report describes how one disabled woman who was shielding was forced to use all her disability benefits to pay for taxis to get to hospital, because her appointments were moved to locations more than 30 miles from her home, which left her with no money to pay for food.

The report says that many disabled women found that their personal assistance needs were not met, while the lack of flexibility from local authorities meant they were not allowed to change how they spent their direct payments, for example on accessible technology that might have helped them during the pandemic.

They also faced delayed medical appointments, cancelled treatment and misinformation about the provision of personal protective equipment and their right to social care.

One disabled woman was unable to access the healthcare treatments she needed to alleviate her ill-health, while her caring responsibilities increased.

She says in the report that being a disabled parent in the pandemic had “decreased our quality of life completely, for me quite a lot physically in terms of I’m in a lot more pain, a lot more fatigue therefore my inability to be able to interact with my children, I am basically keeping them alive and that is all I can do at moment”.

She adds: “I’ve had to go back on anti-depressants and I’ve been off them for four years.

“It just got to a point where I thought no, I can’t carry on any more.”

Another disabled woman describes in the report how her care package was stopped by her local council, which told her she was not as much of a priority as other disabled people.

She said the council “conveniently forgot about me on many occasions”.

The report says that disabled women’s mental health “deteriorated sharply” during the pandemic.

Some of those who took part in the research “felt like a burden to their families or partners, while others reported that they were made to feel like a burden by health and social care providers”, while those who were told to shield said the lack of public health guidance “influenced the deterioration of their mental health”.

The report adds: “More broadly, our participants felt that there was a stark lack of consideration for Disabled people’s lives in terms of national policy and decision making.

“This led to feelings of insecurity, fear, abandonment and Disabled women were made to feel that their lives were unworthy and disposable.”

The report says that single and queer disabled women felt particularly “abandoned” by the systems that were supposed to protect them, while those who were shielding felt “locked in, isolated and unsupported by healthcare professionals”.

Many also felt dismayed by the “violent disregard” for their accessibility needs, including those who use mobility scooters and were unable to use them because pavements and paths were blocked.

Among the report’s recommendations is a call for the government’s public health messaging to be “clear, consistent and widespread”, while the report says it is “imperative” that the government holds an inquiry into the deaths of disabled people during the pandemic.

The report also backs legal actions being taken by Deaf and disabled people around accessibility and independent living during the pandemic, such as those taken in response to [government failings on British Sign Language interpretation](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/legal-threat-to-pm-over-lack-of-bsl-interpreter-in-2-6-million-briefing-room/) at televised briefings, [and the failures of supermarkets](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/coronavirus-supermarkets-face-mass-legal-action-over-discrimination/) to make their services accessible.

**27 May 2021**

**Pandemic ‘has left disabled artists in shockingly fragile’ position**

The pandemic has left disabled people who work in the arts and culture sector in a “shockingly fragile” position, according to the campaign group behind a new survey.

The [results of the survey](https://www.weshallnotberemoved.com/2021survey/), carried out by the UK Disability Arts Alliance, suggest there are significant threats to the continued participation of Deaf and disabled people in the arts and culture sector as a result of the fallout from the COVID-19 crisis.

The survey was commissioned to mark the first anniversary of the alliance’s [#WeShallNotBeRemoved](https://www.weshallnotberemoved.com/) campaign, which has pushed for an inclusive recovery of the cultural sector, and to ensure that Deaf and disabled people do not face discrimination as the industry reopens.

The survey results suggest that the pandemic has delivered a “weighty” blow to disabled people in the arts sector, and left them in a “shockingly fragile environment”, said the alliance.

Three-fifths (59 per cent) of the more than 100 disabled creatives who took part said they were definitely or possibly worried that they would have to leave the industry because of a lack of work.

And nearly half said they had had less work (43 per cent) or no work at all (six per cent) since the pandemic began.

But the survey also showed the importance of financial support schemes during the pandemic, with 20 per cent of respondents receiving grants from the government’s self employment income support scheme (SEISS), with another 15 per cent on furlough and 20 per cent receiving emergency support grants from one of the UK’s national arts councils.

Those surveyed also expressed wider concerns about the impact of the pandemic as the country gradually emerges from lockdown, with more than eight in 10 mentioning continued access for disabled people as one of their top three concerns.

The report says this suggests that many disabled creatives have little trust in the wider cultural sector to prioritise access as the country comes out of lockdown.

The survey also received responses from 24 disability arts and cultural organisations, with half of them saying their future was at risk because of the pandemic.

Four-fifths said they had received emergency funding during the pandemic, from the UK arts councils, trusts or foundations, or the government.

And nearly three-fifths (58 per cent) had used some or all of their financial reserves during the pandemic.

[Andrew Miller](https://twitter.com/AndrewM_Arts), co-founder of the alliance and the campaign, who has just completed three years as the government’s disability champion for the arts and culture sector, said: “This survey is the first to reveal the full fragility of disabled people’s place in the cultural sector following the pandemic and highlights alarming intersectional inequalities.

“The impacts on disabled freelancers and disability arts organisations are significant, and will require additional targeted support from funders and a rebuilding of trust with the wider sector, to ensure the UK remains a global leader in fully inclusive culture.”

Jo Verrent, senior producer with [Unlimited](https://weareunlimited.org.uk/) – the disability arts commissioning programme that grew out of London 2012 – and convenor of the campaign, said: “We all knew the pandemic was impacting on disabled people in the arts sector heavily – now we can see just how weighty that blow has been.

“There is a brief window in which to act if we wish to stop the erasure of disabled people from the place it’s taken over 30 years for us to gain in the cultural sector.

“It is now for the right people to read, share and act on these findings and take immediate action.”

The report was funded by Unlimited and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

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