**Frustration and anger over social care white paper’s funding failure**

The government’s long-awaited adult social care white paper has appalled campaigners by failing to address the social care funding crisis.

The white paper, [People at the Heart of Care](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/people-at-the-heart-of-care-adult-social-care-reform-white-paper), is more than 100 pages long, but it says nothing new about how the government plans to ensure adult social care in England is properly funded over the next decade.

So far, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has been unable to explain why the much-anticipated white paper, published yesterday (Wednesday), ignores the key issue of funding.

Just two days before it was published, the [Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) warned](https://www.adass.org.uk/snap-survey-nov21-rapidly-deteriorating-social-services) that its members were “expressing unprecedented alarm” at a “rapidly deteriorating picture of hundreds of thousands of older and disabled people left waiting for help”.

ADASS said that nearly 400,000 people were now waiting for an assessment of their needs or for services.

Mark Harrison, a member of the steering group of the [Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance (ROFA)](https://www.rofa.org.uk/), said the white paper “offers no solutions to the funding crisis facing social care, it will not solve the extreme staffing shortages and for the tens of thousands stuck and dying on waiting lists for assessment or services – their wait will go on and get worse”.

He said the failure to address the funding crisis would mean councils continuing to push disabled people into poverty “by unfairly charging and taking money from benefits, forcing people to make a choice between eating, heating and social care”.

He said ROFA was calling again on the government to implement its [National Independent Living Support Service](https://www.rofa.org.uk/nilss_project/) proposals, which would provide a free, universal system of independent living, funded by progressive taxation.

ROFA is also calling on the government to introduce a legal right to independent living by bringing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into UK domestic law.

[Disability Rights UK (DR UK)](https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/) said the white paper had “failed to address the fundamental crisis in social care”, while the funding the government has already promised as part of its reforms was “tiny” in comparison with what was needed.

Fazilet Hadi, DR UK’s head of policy, said: “Whilst some of these measures are welcome, they are definitely icing on the cake, whilst attention to the actual cake itself is missing.

“The white paper does almost nothing to support disabled people in 2021-22 to receive acceptable and appropriate levels of care.

“The disparity between how social care and the NHS are treated remains markedly unfair.

“Where money to stem backlogs in elective surgery is found immediately, significant additional funding for social care isn’t even on the radar.”

[Bristol Reclaiming Independent Living (BRIL)](https://bril.uk/) said it was clear that social care in England was “in crisis”.

A BRIL spokesperson said: “This much-delayed white paper shows how little the government understand or value social care or the lives of disabled people, older people and family carers.

“£5.4 billion, spread across three years and 150 councils is nowhere near enough to ‘fix social care’.

“Most of this will be used for the government’s ‘care cap’, which punishes the poorest families.

“By co-opting disabled people’s principles of choice and control and independent living, to justify these ineffective plans, shows how indifferent the government are.”

Liz Kendall, Labour’s shadow social care minister, told the government in the House of Commons yesterday (Wednesday) that ministers had “utterly failed to deal with the immediate pressures facing social care”.

Former health and social care secretary Jeremy Hunt, the Conservative MP who now chairs the Commons health and social care committee, said the funding previously announced by the government “falls far short of the annual £7 billion sum that our evidence found would be necessary to fix social care”.

He said: “The white paper states that it provides an ‘ambitious ten-year vision’, but it doesn’t acknowledge the scale of extra resource needed to realise that vision, based on the crisis the sector faces right now.”

The failure to address the funding crisis comes less than two months after [government-funded research suggested](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/austerity-cuts-to-social-care-and-health-caused-57000-deaths-research-suggests/) that cuts to social care, health and public health caused 57,550 more deaths in England in the four years after 2010 than would have been expected if spending had continued on pre-2010 trends.

Although the failure to address the core funding issue in the new white paper has so far drawn almost universal criticism from disabled people’s organisations and the care sector, some of the government’s wider “vision” for adult social care has been welcomed.

The white paper says the government wants people to have “choice, control, and support to live independent lives”, to access “outstanding quality and tailored care and support”, and to find adult social care “fair and accessible”.

It says the “starting point” for its vision is “embedding personalised care”, while it also focuses on a move away from residential care, with more people living in their own home, with choice and control over their housing and support options.

The document does not appear to offer any new funding, but it does offer new detail on how the government plans to spend some of the £5.4 billion it announced in September for social care reform over the next three years, which will be raised through the new – [much-criticised](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/johnsons-social-care-fix-is-disappointing-regressive-and-insulting/) – health and social care levy.

This includes a new service that will carry out minor repairs and changes to help people remain independent and safe in their own homes, and an increase in the upper limit of the disabled facilities grant (DFG), which provides funding for adaptations such as stairlifts, ramps and wet-rooms.

Last year’s spending review had already announced that DFG spending would rise to £573 million in 2021-22, an increase of more than 13 per cent on 2020-21 and a huge increase from the £220 million provided in 2015-16.

There will also be at least £300 million over three years to integrate housing into local health and care strategies, and at least £150 million of extra funding to increase adoption of new technology across social care.

And at least £5 million over three years will fund local organisations to pilot new ways to provide personalised advice to help people “navigate local adult social care systems”.

But the white paper also makes it clear that the government has ruled out any possibility of a universal free social care system, stating: “We want to ensure the public understands the need to contribute to the costs of their care so that they can plan for it, but no one should be required to pay unpredictable and unlimited care costs.”

There appears to be no further pledge on charging for care, other than repeating previous proposals that will introduce a lifetime cap of £86,000 on how much anyone pays for personal care, allow slightly more generous means-tested support, and introduce a significant increase in the amount of relevant assets (from £23,250 to £100,000) below which people are eligible to receive some financial support from their local authority.

Sajid Javid, the health and social care secretary, said: “This ten-year vision clearly lays out how we will make the system fairer and better to serve everyone, from the millions of people receiving care to those who are providing it.”

Care minister Gillian Keegan added: “The lives of millions of people will be improved by our plans for social care supported by significant investment for system reform to deliver the person-centred care we need.

“We promised to come forward with proposals to improve social care and that is exactly what we are doing.”

**2 December 2021**

**DWP apologises to autistic man after work coach threatens to stick pins in his eyes**

An autistic man was left stunned after a jobcentre work coach threatened to stick pins in his eyes, or at least poke them with a Biro, and then said she had doled out similar treatment to autistic children.

The comments made to David Scott during an appointment in September have again highlighted concerns over the hostile and discriminatory environment frequently faced by disabled people who are forced to engage with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Disability News Service (DNS) has listened to a recording Scott secretly made of the appointment on 28 September, in which the work coach’s comments can be clearly heard.

During Scott’s conversation with the work coach, he explains that the past treatment he has received from DWP had left him suicidal.

Despite initial disagreements, the conversation appears to be approaching a successful conclusion as the work coach agrees that he will not need to carry out any work-related commitments, other than taking steps to prepare for the start of a PhD in neuroscience the following April.

But when he thanks her for her help, she tells him: “So I am here to support you whether you like it or you don’t, right?”

Scott replies that this would be his first experience of such support from DWP.

But the work coach says: “I’m not here to stick pins in your eyes, unless you want me to. And it will be a Biro, not pins, all right?”

Scott, who also has long-term health conditions, appears to laugh nervously, but he doesn’t otherwise respond to her comments.

The work coach then adds: “I taught autistic children for a long time, so yeah, it will be a sharp poke.”

Scott is taking legal action against DWP over the treatment he has received as a disabled claimant of universal credit.

In one of his legal letters, he tells DWP’s lawyers that he is “routinely treated badly” because he is autistic and because of his “atypical non-verbal communication”, and that the key reason he had decided to seek an autism diagnosis was to protect himself from DWP.

He says in the letter that he was left “stunned” and “did not know what to say” to the work coach.

He adds: “Her statement that she feels autistic children deserve being assaulted and thus me being an autistic adult also deserves such mistreatment is particularly disgusting.

“From her statements, I feel that she should not be let anywhere near any child or vulnerable adult.”

Scott believes the department and its contractors have repeatedly breached the Equality Act when trying to assess his fitness for work, including during assessments in 2018 and 2019 which led to significantly inaccurate reports.

He experienced significant mental distress because of the treatment he received in those assessments.

DNS has seen a letter to Scott from the Government Legal Department which denies any discrimination, but it says that DWP apologises for the work coach’s “inappropriate and misjudged comment”.

The letter says the work coach made the comments in “a joking manner”, although she now accepts that they were “misplaced and inappropriate”.

Asked if DWP still considered the comments to be “inappropriate and misjudged” or if it accepted that they were more serious than that, the department refused to comment this week.

It also refused to say if any disciplinary action had been taken against the work coach.

And it refused to comment on whether the case again illustrated the toxic, hostile and discriminatory environment frequently faced by disabled people who have to engage with the department.

But a DWP spokesperson said in a statement: “The DWP processes millions of benefit payments, providing a crucial safety net for those in need.

“We have robust procedures in place to investigate complaints by claimants.”

Meanwhile, the Public Law Project (PLP) [is keen to speak to claimants](https://publiclawproject.org.uk/latest/benefitsanctions/) who have been sanctioned by DWP, as part of a project examining the barriers they face when trying to challenge benefit sanctions.

The charity’s researchers are also keen to speak to those with experience of providing advice or support to sanctioned claimants.

The findings will be used to suggest ways to improve access to justice for claimants who have been unfairly or unlawfully sanctioned, and will be shared with DWP, politicians, policy-makers, welfare rights advisers and lawyers.

PLP said there was evidence to suggest that many claimants do not challenge sanction decisions, even if they have a good chance of success.

It added: “We are keen to understand the reasons for this further so we can develop a strategy for how we can support claimants to effectively challenge unfair or incorrect sanction decisions.”

**2 December 2021**

**DWP refuses to publish report that found disabled claimants had ‘unmet needs’**

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) ensured an independent report was watered down after it concluded that claimants of disability benefits had “unmet needs”, a whistleblower has revealed.

Disability News Service (DNS) has been told that DWP made it clear that it did not like the analysis and reporting of disabled people’s unmet needs and the implications for future spending on benefits.

DWP has refused to publish the watered-down report, despite promises made to more than 100 disabled benefit claimants who had agreed to be interviewed that it would be published.

The report, The Uses of Health and Disability Benefits, was commissioned to feed into DWP’s green paper on disability benefits, Shaping Future Support, which was published in July.

But the green paper made no mention of the report.

The report [was written for DWP by NatCen](https://natcen.ac.uk/taking-part/studies-in-field/understanding-your-health-and-disability-needs-and-how-your-benefits-support-you/) (The National Centre for Social Research), Britain’s largest independent social research agency.

After being shown the first draft of the report, DWP told NatCen to reduce the number of references to “unmet needs” and to delete some of its analysis.

The whistleblower, who is close to the team that prepared the report, said: “It was obvious to me that the findings about unmet needs and adequacy of benefits were not what the government wanted to hear.”

They said that the final version, which was submitted to DWP in September 2020, had far fewer references to unmet needs.

Despite managing to weaken the report, work and pensions secretary Therese Coffey continues to insist that it cannot be published.

That refusal appears to be a clear breach of the government’s own protocol, [Publishing Research and Analysis in Government](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/431367/GSR_publication_protocol_2015_FINAL.pdf) (PDF), which states: “There must be no opportunity – or perception of opportunity – for the release of research information (unfavourable or not) to be altered, withheld or delayed for political reasons.”

The whistleblower’s revelations will add to mounting evidence that ministers plan significant cuts to spending on disability benefits, and that they are desperate to avoid any evidence that disabled people currently have significant unmet needs.

The NatCen report was based on interviews with 120 benefit recipients about their experiences of receiving personal independence payment, employment and support allowance and universal credit, how they use their benefits, their unmet needs, and their quality of life.

The source said: “I have read the report and concluded that the government’s argument that it is not in the public interest to publish it is entirely spurious.

“The indication is clearly that some of the findings do not support government policy and so DWP have blatantly suppressed them, dishonestly hiding behind the Freedom of Information Act.

“Denying access to the report is unjustified, cowardly, and an insult to the 120 disabled people who took part in the research in good faith, trusting in the promise that they would be able to read the report.

“That faith and trust has been wholly betrayed by the government.”

They added: “I think there is a story here of extreme government arrogance that in my view shows an astonishing level of contempt for disabled people and for parliament.”

Carole Ford, from the [WOWcampaign](https://twitter.com/WOWpetition), said: “It is outrageous if not unexpected that the government should treat disabled people with disrespect.

“It is shameful that the government is prepared to break its own protocol and interfere with an independent report.

“We can only guess that the motive of the government in commissioning the report was to make it appear helpful and concerned about the unmet needs of disabled people – in other words a piece of propaganda.

“Hopefully the government will be questioned in parliament about this.”

WOW’s Michelle Maher added: “The suppression of a negative report on unmet needs mirrors every attack on disabled people over the last 11 years.

“They are refusing once again to make public the plight of disabled people.

“Hiding a report behind the Freedom of Information Act mirrors 11 years of Tory refusals to assess the impact of all cuts on disabled people as a duty of care.”

Both Stephen Timms, the Labour chair of the Commons work and pensions committee, and the Labour peer Baroness [Ruth] Lister, have publicly raised the failure to publish the report.

But Coffey has insisted[, in a letter to Timms](https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/7794/documents/82367/default/), that she has no intention of publishing the report, because “it is important to protect the private space within which Ministers and their policy advisers can develop policies”.

A NatCen spokesperson said: “The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) does not comment on the nature of individual survey commissions and contracts because we operate within a commercial environment.

“Timings for publication of our research findings are at the discretion of the commissioner of the research.”

A DWP spokesperson declined to comment on whether the whistleblower’s allegations were accurate.

But she said in a statement: “The government considers a broad range of analysis and evidence to support the formation of all its policy, including that which is both internally and externally commissioned.

“It is not necessary to publish all of this material, and the government does not have plans to publish the NatCen report at this time.”

**2 December 2021**

**Government’s reviewer tells MPs how DWP kept vital deaths evidence from him**

The expert commissioned by the government to review the work capability assessment (WCA) has told MPs that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) failed to hand him crucial evidence showing links between the test and the deaths of disabled claimants.

Dr Paul Litchfield [confirmed to the Commons work and pensions committee](https://www.parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/335a0886-efcc-4397-a9aa-4ed06794a412) yesterday (Wednesday) that he believed he had not been passed copies of secret DWP reviews into benefit-linked deaths, or two reports sent to DWP by coroners aimed at preventing future deaths of claimants of employment and support allowance (ESA).

And he suggested that the evidence that DWP prevented him considering could have led to him making further recommendations to improve the assessment.

This suggests that DWP’s decision to hide evidence from its independent reviewer may have prevented changes to the WCA that could have saved lives.

It again raises the question of whether former DWP ministers and senior civil servants should be investigated by police for potential misconduct in public office, and it adds weight to calls for an independent inquiry into the links between DWP and countless deaths of disabled claimants.

It was the first time Litchfield has spoken publicly about the claims made first by Disability News Service (DNS) and [confirmed two years ago](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/caxton-house-cover-up-dwp-hid-benefit-deaths-papers-from-wca-review-team/) after an intervention by the information commissioner.

Litchfield published his two reviews in [December 2013](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/work-capability-assessment-independent-review-year-4) and [November 2014](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/work-capability-assessment-independent-review-year-5#history), but neither of his reports mentioned the documents, many of which link the WCA with the deaths of claimants.

In response to a question from Labour’s Debbie Abrahams, who has led parliamentary efforts to expose the links between DWP and claimant deaths, Litchfield said: “As far as I recollect, I did not receive either and I am pretty certain about that.”

When Abrahams asked him how those documents would have influenced his recommendations, he said: “If I had had that evidence available to me, or indeed been told that it was there – you can only ask for stuff if you know that it exists… I would certainly have looked at it and taken it into consideration.”

He said one of his objectives in his two reviews had been to focus on mental health.

Abrahams told Litchfield about government-funded research [which concluded in 2015](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/damning-research-on-wca-deaths-is-timely-reminder-of-governments-shame/) that the programme to reassess people on incapacity benefit through the WCA was linked to 590 suicides in just three years.

Meanwhile, a disabled people’s organisation that has raised concerns about a “highly secretive” algorithm used by DWP’s computers to identify potential benefit fraudsters, and which appears to disproportionately target disabled people, [has launched a crowd-funder](https://www.crowdjustice.com/case/dwp-algorithm/) to cover its potential legal costs.

[Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People (GMCDP)](https://twitter.com/GMCDP), working with the campaigning organisation [Foxglove](https://twitter.com/Foxglovelegal), has already issued legal correspondence seeking more information about the algorithm from DWP.

If they find evidence that it is unlawful, they plan to challenge DWP in court.

GMCDP says on the crowd-funder page: “To date the government has failed to provide any details about the algorithm.

“We don’t know how it works, how and why people are flagged for investigation, what information or data about us is used in this decision making, how the government is ensuring the rights of disabled people are protected and what checks and balances are in place to ensure that this algorithm doesn’t destroy lives.”

GMCDP says the algorithm is causing “fear, confusion and endless cycles of bureaucracy”, with disabled people living “in fear of the brown envelope” or an out-of-the-blue phone call that fails to explain why they have been “flagged” by DWP.

It adds: “Once flagged by the algorithm, an automated system is kick-started that forces targeted people to repeatedly explain why they need payments in an aggressive and humiliating process that can last up to a year.”

A senior DWP civil servant, [giving evidence](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-bosses-quizzed-by-mps-over-secret-benefit-fraud-algorithm/) to the work and pensions committee last week, did not deny that DWP used an algorithm, but he insisted that any decision on action to be taken with a particular claimant “always comes down to an individual”.

**2 December 2021**

**StopSIM members speak of huge toll of campaign and lack of support from charities**

Five disabled activists who helped expose an “unlawful, unethical and unacceptable” mental health scheme have spoken of the huge personal toll their campaigning has taken on them, and the lack of support they received from the large mental health charities.

The campaigners, all mental health service-users, are just some of the members of the [StopSIM coalition](https://stopsim.co.uk/) which played a key role this year in raising awareness of the dangers posed by the multi-agency Serenity Integrated Mentoring (SIM) scheme.

Their campaigning revealed the flaws in the “sinister” and “disturbing” scheme and persuaded NHS England [to order local reviews](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/nhs-england-must-do-more-despite-ordering-reviews-of-unsafe-mental-distress-scheme/) of how it had been implemented by trusts across the country, seven years after it was first piloted on the Isle of Wight.

But they revealed this week that the intensive research, meetings and lobbying had impacted their own mental health and left them struggling close to burnout.

One of them said: “It’s still hard to know whether the cost has been worth it.”

Another of the campaign team said: “I am so pleased that we have done what we have done, and I’m pleased that we are all here now, and we’re safe, but in terms of the personal cost, I don’t know if that can be quantified.

“I don’t know a way to say if that’s been worth it.”

One of her colleagues said they had all had to take a break from campaigning because of the deterioration in their mental health caused by the intense work on highlighting the dangers of SIM.

But she said the large organisations, charities and professional bodies that had the resources to take on the SIM campaign had failed to do so.

She said: “Had we had those resources for six months or a year we could have achieved so much more, and that makes me really sad and angry.

“Why haven’t those organisations, charities, professional bodies, who have – some of them – millions of pounds in the bank, why haven’t they pushed this any further? And that upsets me too.”

The five – Luna Tic, Sunny, Hope, Bethan and Hattie – were taking part in [a podcast interview](https://anchor.fm/nsun) recorded by the user-led mental health network NSUN, which they praised for stepping in to ensure they received the peer support they urgently needed through the new user-led organisation [Peer Hub](https://www.peerhub.co.uk/).

The first half of the interview, carried out by NSUN member Erica, was released on Monday as part of NSUN’s [two-day annual general meeting](https://nsunagm2021.com/schedule-and-register/).

Hope said she had called publicly for national charities and other organisations with more resources and campaigning experience to continue the anti-SIM work but had been answered with “radio silence”.

She said: “That’s been really disappointing and disillusioning because these charities purport to be there for people who have experienced mental illness when we need them and they are not, so that has been really horrible to witness really.”

One of her colleagues added: “I still feel furious at the people whose job it is to protect people under SIM, to protect service-users, to do the job that we were doing through campaigning.”

SIM focused on users of mental health services – often those at high risk of suicide and self-harm – who had not committed a crime but were seen as “high intensity users” of emergency services.

It was first trialled in 2013 on the Isle of Wight, but by this year was believed to have been rolled out to nearly half the mental health trusts in England, and it had been backed by NHS England and recognised with national awards.

But an increasing number of disabled activists began to warn that it was based on coercion and denial of potentially life-saving support and was causing some service-users to live in fear of arrest or prosecution when they were in mental health crisis.

Hattie said the realisation that SIM had been allowed to continue for so long had been “terrifying”.

They said there had been “a lot of shock as we were processing that this was able to happen… there were a lot of safeguarding concerns that should have been picked up”.

Bethan said: “We should never have been placed in a position where a national rollout of a scheme went unchecked, undetected, and we were responsible for getting it stopped.

“It’s unfathomable that this could have happened, it really is.”

They had decided early on that they needed to focus their lobbying on senior figures in NHS England.

One of the StopSIM campaigners said: “We knew right from the off that we had to target the campaign towards the people who had the power and the influence to make decisions to change things… we knew that we had to target NHS England.”

Another of the team said there had been frustration that organisations and charities met regularly with NHS England (NHSE), and yet the coalition has met with just one NHSE representative and even that was not an official meeting, while there had been no proper dialogue with NHSE.

She said: “It just feels really unjust and unfair that we have done so much work in our own time unpaid and we don’t get to meet them about something so significant.”

The five campaigners and the other members of the coalition came together after increasing concerns were raised on Twitter about both SIM and the High Intensity Network (HIN), which supported NHS trusts and police forces that signed up to SIM and was set up by the scheme’s founder, former police officer Paul Jennings.

The work of the coalition and other activists led to [the closure of HIN](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/police-emails-show-dodgy-data-was-used-to-sell-unsafe-mental-distress-scheme-to-nhs/) and NHS England ordering reviews by local trusts of their use of SIM. The results of these reviews have yet to be published.

*\*The second half of the interview will be published on Monday (6 December).*

**2 December 2021**

**Government’s PIP reviewer disagrees with Coffey’s ‘no duty of care’ claim**

A former DWP civil servant commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to review disability benefit assessments has publicly disagreed with government claims that the department does not have a duty of care to benefit claimants.

Paul Gray, who carried out two independent reviews of the personal independence payment (PIP) assessment system, which reported in [2014](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/personal-independence-payment-pip-assessments-first-independent-review) and [2017](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/paul-gray-publishes-second-review-of-personal-independence-payment), was asked by Labour’s Debbie Abrahams whether he believed his former department had a duty of care to claimants.

She had earlier told him of the case of Philippa Day, a young disabled mum [whose death was linked by a coroner](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/philippa-day-flawed-pip-system-led-to-young-mums-death-says-coroner/) earlier this year to flaws in the PIP system.

Gray, who was [giving evidence yesterday](https://www.parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/335a0886-efcc-4397-a9aa-4ed06794a412) (Wednesday) to the Commons work and pensions committee, said: “Yes, of course there is a duty of care in any process of this sort to treat people fairly, appropriately and empathetically.”

He pointed to the DWP’s duty to ensure the logistics of arranging face-to-face assessments are convenient and appropriate, the way the department communicated with claimants about PIP, and enabling relatives and others to support claimants.

He said: “Those are all things that I think it is entirely appropriate for the department to undertake and my sense is the department is aware of that sense of duty.

“Have they always got it right in every case? In the same way, do any of us ever get all of these things right in every case? … it’s a learning process.”

Gray did not appear aware that work and pensions secretary Therese Coffey [has repeatedly claimed](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-lied-about-duty-to-keep-benefit-claimants-safe-document-suggests/) that DWP does not have a legal duty to “safeguard” its claimants, and has said that such tasks are instead the responsibility of local agencies such as social services departments and doctors’ surgeries.

Her denials follow a decade of cases linking DWP’s policies and practices to the deaths of disabled people, particularly those who were being assessed for [employment and support allowance (ESA)](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-the-case-for-the-prosecution/) and [personal independence payment](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/philippa-day-flawed-pip-system-led-to-young-mums-death-says-coroner/) and had experience of mental distress.

But DNS has reported how two DWP documents show civil servants discussing the department’s duty of care, both believed to have been written in 2014 or 2015.

One recommended that the department should carry out a review of its “ongoing Duty of Care”.

A second document was obtained by [Leigh Day](https://www.leighday.co.uk/), solicitors for the family of Errol Graham, [who starved to death in 2018](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/the-death-of-errol-graham-man-starved-to-death-after-dwp-wrongly-stopped-his-benefits/), months after DWP cut off his ESA when he failed to attend a work capability assessment.

This document is a copy of pre-2016 internal guidance for DWP staff, written to assist them in dealing with claimants who need support in using its services.

The guidance states: “Where the claimant has a known background of mental illness there are minimum requirements that Jobcentre Plus should be adopting to ensure that we are not found to be neglectful in our duty of care towards these claimants.”

Gray also told the committee yesterday that he believed there should be another independent review of the PIP assessment process.

**2 December 2021**

**WCA reviewer tells MPs that DWP is ‘odd’ and ‘characterised by inertia’**

The expert who was twice commissioned by the government to review the work capability assessment (WCA) has delivered a damning assessment of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), in an evidence session with MPs.

Dr Paul Litchfield, who led the final two independent reviews of the WCA in 2013 and 2014, [told members of the Commons work and pensions committee](https://www.parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/335a0886-efcc-4397-a9aa-4ed06794a412) that the “operational” side of DWP had constantly resisted his ideas for improvements to the assessment.

He said that DWP was characterised by “inertia”, and that it was “odd” and “different to other civil service departments I have had contact with”.

He said he had found the department to be “co-operative” and “enthusiastic” at a policy level.

But he added: “I constantly got the impression from the operational side that it was all a bit of a nuisance and that when I made recommendations about ways that the process might be improved, it was always pushed back really quite quickly, saying, ‘oh, it’s not cost effective’ or ‘it’s impractical’, or ‘we’ll accept it in principle, provided…’”

He said it appeared that, seven years on, “things just haven’t been taken forward”.

Litchfield said there had always been a “sucking of teeth” when recommendations reached the operational side of DWP.

He added: “I do wonder if they just wait out the things that they don’t really fancy doing, until a new lot come along.”

Litchfield said he had found in his first review that there was “systematic” bias in the way employment and support allowance (ESA) claims were handled by DWP, which led to “some odd decisions being made”, but that this had not been addressed.

He said that he believed there had not been “a lot of progress” in improving the WCA since he finished his final review in 2014, and that there had been no improvement that he could see in how fair people believed the assessment was, when comparing the situation before and after his reviews.

Litchfield also said he believed there needed to be another independent review of the WCA, seven years after the last one reported.

He said the assessment process was currently based on thinking that was developed “40 or 50 years ago”.

And he suggested that the government should develop a new assessment, which he said should be based on the – widely discredited – biopsychosocial (BPS) model of disability.

But academics and activists have argued that the WCA was already based on the BPS model and that this model was also used to justify the post-2010 decisions by the coalition and subsequent Tory government to cut spending on disability benefits.

[Three disabled researchers in 2016](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/biopsychosocial-basis-for-benefit-cuts-is-cavalier-unevidenced-and-misleading/) found that the biopsychosocial model did “not represent evidence-based policy” and was riddled with inconsistencies, misleading statements and “unevidenced” claims.

Key to the BPS model, the authors said in 2016, was the idea that “it is the negative attitudes of many ESA recipients that prevent them from working, rather than their impairment or health condition”, essentially branding many benefit claimants “scroungers”.

They said this allowed supporters of BPS – including a string of Tory and pre-2010 Labour government ministers – to draw a distinction “between ‘real’ incapacity benefit claimants, with long-term and incurable health conditions, and ‘fake’ benefit claimants, with short-term illness”, with the model responsible for a “barely concealed” element of “victim-blaming”.

**2 December 2021**

**Football review by Tory MP makes one mention of disabled people in 162 pages**

Disabled campaigners have said they are “extremely disappointed” at the failure of a review of football governance in England to include more than a passing mention of disabled fans.

The [Fan Led Review of Football Governance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fan-led-review-of-football-governance-securing-the-games-future), published last week, was commissioned by the government, and it was led by Tory MP and former sports minister Tracey Crouch.

But across the report’s 162 pages, there is just one mention of disabled people, despite the disabled-led campaigning charity Level Playing Field (LPF) submitting 14 pages of written evidence to the review team.

The only recommendation from the review that mentions disability – out of 47 – is a call for the current football leadership diversity code to expand beyond ethnicity and gender to include other under-represented groups, including disabled people.

Although there are several references to the mental health of current and former players, there is just one mention of accessibility, and that is only the claim that the “financialisation” of the game has allowed clubs to “invest in their stadiums to allow more fans to watch games in good, safe, and accessible facilities”.

In the evidence it submitted to the review, LPF, which represents disabled sports fans, said: “Effective (and representative) governance, along with a determined commitment to access and inclusion is essential to ensure that clubs do actually serve their disabled supporters (the largest minority group in their local community).”

LPF said this week that Crouch’s review was a “significant piece of work” but that it was “extremely disappointed, but sadly not surprised, at the lack of reference to disabled fans and the importance of disabled supporters’ voices in the governance of our national sport”.

It said it would have liked to see, “at the very least”, minimum and measurable accessibility standards across football clubs, board representation for disabled people, and “regular and meaningful structured dialogue” with disabled fans.

[Only three months ago](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/disabled-fans-continue-to-face-barriers-to-watching-live-sport-survey-shows/), an LPF survey highlighted the continuing barriers disabled supporters face in accessing sports venues, and found that almost a third (30 per cent) of disabled fans who took part said there were some sports venues they felt unable to visit because of access failings.

Tony Taylor, LPF’s chair, said: “We engaged with the fan led review panel with a short 30-minute discussion and submitted 14 pages of written evidence.

“We warmly welcome the recommendations outlined in the report; however, we are disappointed that reference to disability inclusion and disabled fans is very thin.

“Once again, we want to emphasise the need for disability representation in footballing governance, to shape and deliver appropriate inclusion.

“The review was signposted as a once in a generation opportunity and we trust that this will not go on to emphasise that the only voice that matters is one without a disability.”

In his response to the review, [sports minister Nigel Huddleston said](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-11-25/debates/E02AFDC3-CFBF-40B1-B9FC-A214394C2F4B/IndependentFan-LedReviewOfFootballGovernance) the government would respond to the review in the new year.

But he said the government already endorsed the review’s “primary recommendation”, that English football should have a strong, independent regulator.

Crouch had not commented by noon today (Thursday) on why the views and concerns of disabled fans appear to have been almost completely ignored by her review.

**2 December 2021**

**Paralympians tell MPs of concerns over access to grassroots facilities**

Two gold medal-winning Paralympians have told MPs of the need to improve access to grassroots sports facilities for disabled people.

Lauren Rowles, a double Paralympic gold medallist in rowing, and Ellie Robinson, a Paralympic gold medallist in swimming, were giving evidence on Tuesday to members of the Commons digital, culture, media and sport committee.

[The committee was hearing evidence](https://www.parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/33ae2c44-eae2-4ad2-be6e-2a081774205d) as part of its inquiry into the future of the National Lottery, and it also heard in the same session from triple Olympic swimming gold medallist Adam Peaty.

Rowles told the MPs that access to most rowing clubs was “horrendous”.

She said: “How are we going to excel if we can’t even get into the building?

“Even for our biggest race, the Boat Race, Oxford-Cambridge… they get their wellies on and they walk out into the water.

“You wouldn’t see myself doing that as a wheelchair-user.”

Rowles added: “I wouldn’t be able to turn up at most clubs in London, and I’m at the top of my sport.

“One, they don’t have the access, and two, they don’t have the equipment that I would require.”

She said that disabled people were “shoved right to the back of the list” and the only way accessibility at grassroots level would improve would be through her and her team-mates “shouting about it”.

She said: “There are not enough disabled people in the sport at the moment, we have not got the next generation below us, so we are worried about funding for our team.

“It’s because most people can’t get access to a rowing club, so we have got to shout about it as athletes and go around talking about it to get anything done.”

Rowles said she was working with her sport’s national governing body to improve the accessibility of rowing clubs, and to encourage more disabled people into the sport.

Robinson, who [retired from competitive swimming](https://www.swimming.org/sport/ellie-robinson-retires/) after this summer’s Tokyo Paralympics, agreed with the concerns about accessibility.

She told the committee: “We really need to make the grassroots more accessible.”

And she stressed that there was a need to make sport accessible for people of all incomes.

But she also called for funding for elite swimmers to be focused more on those who had realistic medal potential.

She said: “I think we need to focus on having a bigger pool of swimmers to choose from, choosing only the ones that have the potential to do it, and then investing your money in them because they are going to get results.

“I think we need to focus more on competence rather than just, ‘let’s get as many disabled people [as we can] into elite sport.’”

She said Paralympic sport had changed and was now “elite sport”, adding: “This is no longer medals for participation.”

Peaty called for more government investment in swimming.

He said: “I know if you’ve got a healthier nation, a fitter nation, a happier nation, and a valued nation, saying we are giving you the facilities, and we’re going to cut the cost for you to access these facilities, that return on investment is going to be great.

“You can look at many case studies around the world where the government takes care of their citizens through leisure centres, through access to facilities, accessibility to facilities as well, and I think you can find the money.”

Rowles also told the committee that, in seven years of being in Britain’s elite Paralympic rowing team, she had had just one sponsor.

She said: “Even if you are the best [as a disabled athlete], you don’t get the sponsors.

“I sit here [having done] everything you could have done in my sport, in terms of world champion, European champion and double Paralympic champion and I have only ever had one sponsor in my seven years of being on the team.

“Nobody is interested in Paralympic sport and corporations are not willing to have us involved.”

**2 December 2021**

**Other disability-related stories covered by mainstream media this week**

The UK has announced it is to accelerate its booster programme in order to increase protection against Covid amid concern over the Omicron variant… But some vulnerable housebound British residents say they are struggling to get a booster jab at home: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/nov/30/weve-been-failed-five-vulnerable-people-on-their-booster-jab-wait-covid>

The everyday assault of disabled women: ‘It’s inappropriate sexual touching at least once a month’.They are almost twice as likely to be sexually assaulted as non-disabled women. Why is so little being done to address this harrowing, pervasive problem?<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/25/the-everyday-assault-of-disabled-women-its-inappropriate-sexual-touching-at-least-once-a-month>

A daughter who sued her mum’s GP for millions for allowing her to be born has won her landmark legal case. Evie Toombes, 20, was born with spina bifida and has won her case against a doctor who advised her mum she would not need to take a supplement that could have prevented the condition: <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/daughter-20-who-sued-mums-25590450>

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