**Osborne’s pandemic denial over austerity damage to social care**

One of the architects of the Conservative austerity years has denied to the Covid public inquiry that the spending cuts left a “depleted” health and social care system and rising inequality by the time the pandemic hit in 2020.

When asked by Kate Blackwell, a counsel to the inquiry, whether that was the case, [George Osborne said](https://covid19.public-inquiry.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/20184557/C-19-Inquiry-20-June-23-Module-1-Day-6.pdf) (PDF): “Most certainly not. I completely reject that.”

Osborne, who was chancellor from 2010 to 2016, was giving evidence to the inquiry – which has now entered its second week of public hearings – as part of its investigation into the UK’s preparedness and resilience for a pandemic.

He was later asked if government policy had damaged the social care and health systems to such an extent that “those in the worst situations of society were disproportionately affected when Covid hit”, and if that situation had been “identifiable” and “predictable” and “should have been part of the government planning”.

But Osborne told the inquiry on Tuesday: “I just completely reject that.”

He said Britain had been coping with the after-effects of a “huge economic crash” and “of course that had an impact on poverty in the country”.

He claimed this poverty “would have been worse” if the government had not “tried to address the risk to the public finances, because that would have led to a fiscal crisis, like you saw across much of Europe, that would have meant even less funding for these public services”.

But when asked if the state of the social care system worsened during his time in office, he said he was “not sure” and claimed that the social care and health systems were experiencing “exactly the same kinds of pressures as the pressures being experienced in most western democracies”.

He added: “And if we had not had a clear plan to put the public finances on a sustainable path, then Britain might have… experienced a fiscal crisis, [and] would not have had the fiscal space to deal with the coronavirus pandemic when it hit seven years later.”

He later admitted that there had been significant cuts to local government budgets in the years he had been chancellor in successive Conservative-led governments.

Osborne was shown an Office for Budget Responsibility fiscal risk report from July 2017, a year after he left office, which showed that spending in real terms on adult social care in England had fallen by 9.1 per cent between 2010-11 and 2015-16.

He admitted that “there were reductions in local government budgets” which was “because the country had had an enormous financial crash” and “was poorer than it had been before”.

He said the debate about the “social care problem” was still “unsolved” because “the solutions are currently unpalatable to the political system, which I would suggest is a reflection of being unpalatable to the broader taxpayer and society”.

Blackwell asked him if he believed that, although “in certain aspects” the effects of Covid were “felt more keenly by those most disadvantaged in society”, that had had “no connection whatsoever to the effects of austerity that were brought in in 2010”.

He replied: “That’s absolutely my contention.”

During his evidence, the former chancellor also questioned whether it was right that schools were closed during the pandemic to save the lives of people who were particularly vulnerable to the virus.

He told the inquiry: “You know, I don’t want to jump ahead for this inquiry, but should the schools have been locked down in the way they were?”

He said these were “absolutely critical questions about balancing, you know, the life expectancy of an 80-year-old versus the educational opportunities of an eight-year-old, incredibly hard questions”.

He added: “I had school-age children at the time of the pandemic… Some people will say the education of the child is more important than, you know, protecting older patients in, you know, our care homes.”

He said that “if you can give some kind of guidance to answering that question, it is the single most useful thing this inquiry can do for any future government”.

**22 June 2023**

**Years of government policies ‘have had little or no impact on job discrimination’**

Mounting evidence suggests that years of government employment policies have had little or no impact on reducing the discrimination disabled people face in the jobs market.

Government figures and new analysis show instead that disability equality for disabled people has remained almost static when it comes to finding and keeping jobs.

Ministers [have repeatedly boasted](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2022-12-15/hcws454) that the number of disabled people in employment has increased substantially over the last decade, including by two million between the third quarter of 2013 and the third quarter of 2022.

They often suggest that that increase is a result of interventions such as the Work and Health Programme, [the discredited Disability Confident scheme](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/disability-confident-firm-replaces-disabled-staff-with-non-disabled-agency-workers/), the Access to Work programme and “work to further join up employment and health systems”.

But disabled people have repeatedly accused ministers of failing to take meaningful action to address the employment barriers they face, such as the lack of [enforcement of disabled workers’ rights](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/tuc-research-on-disabled-workers-does-not-paint-a-happy-picture/) to reasonable adjustments or the flaws in [the Access to Work system](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/disabled-barrister-says-flaws-in-archaic-access-to-work-scheme-could-risk-vital-court-work/).

Tom Pursglove, the minister for disabled people, [admitted earlier this month](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-06-02/187380) – in response to a question from disabled Labour MP Marsha de Cordova – that the increase in disability employment was “driven primarily by rising disability prevalence and a strengthening of the overall labour market”.

Government figures [released in January](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2022/employment-of-disabled-people-2022) found that 60 per cent of the increase in disabled people in employment was simply due to a sharp rise in the number of people identifying as disabled.

Those government figures estimated that only 15 per cent of the increase in disabled people in work was due to a narrowing in the disability employment gap – the difference in the proportion of disabled and non-disabled people in jobs.

But the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has now admitted to Disability News Service (DNS) that it cannot prove that even this small proportion of the increase was due to government policies.

Pursglove [had previously argued](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-11-24/95981) that the impact of factors including government policies to tackle the disability employment gap accounted for about 25 per cent of the increase in the number of disabled people in work.

But when DNS asked in a freedom of information request for any evidence to show that government policies directed towards reducing the gap had managed to do so, DWP replied: “We confirm that we do not hold the information requested regarding the effect of government policies on reducing the disability employment gap.”

It argued that “isolating the direct effect of a single policy on the disability employment gap is complex” and it partly blamed the impact of “external factors” and the interaction of different policies with each other.

The January figures also showed that the disability employment gap was now at its widest point since 2018, at about 30 per cent, just four percentage points lower than in 2013.

Now analysis by the [Disability@Work group of academics](https://www.disabilityatwork.co.uk/) suggests that even the 15 per cent of the rise in disability employment caused by a narrowing of the disability employment gap may not be due to a fall in discrimination.

Professor Victoria Wass, of Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, pointed out that the National Audit Office (NAO) had previously found that the increase in people identifying as disabled “was a particular feature of those in employment”, [with the NAO saying](https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/7005/documents/72950/default/) (PDF, paragraph 19) it was “only people who are in employment where the trend has happened”.

She said: “In these circumstances, a falling disability employment gap does not support a claim that equality for disabled people has improved in the area of employment.”

Earlier analysis by Disability@Work has previously reached the same conclusion.

That analysis [showed last year](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/governments-milestone-disability-jobs-stats-are-meaningless-when-it-comes-to-equality/) that an increase of 1.3 million in the number of disabled people in work between 2017 and 2022 was “meaningless” when it came to the inequality disabled people faced in the jobs market.

Wass also pointed to government figures from January’s report which found that, between 2014 and 2021, disabled workers moved out of work at nearly twice the rate (8.9 per cent) of non-disabled workers (5.1 per cent).

The report also found that workless disabled people moved into work at nearly one-third of the rate (9.7 per cent) of workless non-disabled people (26.8 per cent).

Wass said: “These differences indicate that disabled people are more likely to leave employment and very much less likely to enter employment than non-disabled people.”

De Cordova told Disability News Service: “The Tories in government have completely failed disabled people by creating a hostile environment over the past 13 years.

“As the minister’s response to my question shows, the increase in disabled people’s participation in the market was ‘driven primarily by rising disability prevalence and a strengthening of the overall labour market’ rather than the government’s non-existent policies to remove employment barriers that disabled people face.

“It’s time for the government to get real and meaningfully act to remove employment barriers faced by disabled people.”

A DWP spokesperson said: “The government is committed to supporting disabled people and people with health conditions stay and succeed in work, and a range of initiatives have contributed to the disability employment gap closing by 4.8 per cent and the disability employment rate rising by 9.5 per cent since 2014.

“Our £58 million Individual Placement and Support in Primary Care scheme not only helps disabled people and people with health conditions move into a job that suits their needs, but also provides them and their employers with wraparound support during their work to help them sustain employment in the long term.”

**22 June 2023**

**‘Deep concern’ over decision to allow Treasury to hide budget equality impact**

Campaigners have told the information commissioner of their “deep concern” over his decision to allow the Treasury to hide information that would show how last year’s budget was set to impact disabled people and other equality groups.

[Women’s Budget Group](https://wbg.org.uk/), [Runnymede Trust](https://www.runnymedetrust.org/)\* and [Disability Rights UK](https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/) have today (Thursday) sent [a joint letter](https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/22.06.23-EIA-joint-letter-to-the-Information-Commissioner_Final.pdf) (PDF) about this decision to both the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) and the Treasury.

The letter expresses their “disappointment and profound concern” at [the ICO ruling in March](https://ico.org.uk/media/action-weve-taken/decision-notices/2023/4024744/ic-181445-y2s0.pdf) (PDF) which concluded that the government did not need to publish an equality impact assessment (EIA) of last year’s spring budget.

Disability News Service (DNS) had asked the Treasury last year to release the EIA through a freedom of information request.

But this week’s letter says the ICO ruling has prevented an “effective evaluation” of whether the Treasury fulfilled its obligation under the public sector equality duty to have “due regard” to equality.

And they say the ruling means the information commissioner is failing in his responsibility “to promote transparency in matters of public interest”.

They say that both recent and historical changes to taxes and social security have “disproportionately” affected the “most discriminated against communities in the UK”.

They say that disabled single parents, most of whom are women, were the group worst hit by austerity measures between 2010 and 2021, losing 21 per cent of their income through changes to taxes and benefits, and rising to 32 per cent if they had a disabled child.

Black and minority ethnic women have experienced a £1,040 decrease in benefits over the past decade, they say, while some groups of women, particularly lower income, Black and minority ethnic, and disabled women, “face multiple disadvantages”.

The letter adds: “…transparency and access to government information during and after the policy-making process are vital to ensure that we are able to support the government in formulating policies that benefit society as a whole and align with the Equality Act 2010.”

It calls on the Treasury to carry out and publish a “meaningful cumulative impact assessment” of every budget and spending review.

The trio of equality groups say it is “disappointing to see the Information Commissioner's Office make a decision that contradicts the principles of upholding information rights and promoting openness for the public interest, thus hindering civil society’s ability to support and hold the government accountable”, and they call on ICO to reconsider its decision.

DNS [has been trying for more than a year](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/watchdog-gives-treasury-go-ahead-to-keep-budget-equality-impact-secret/) to persuade the Treasury to release the assessment it made of the equality impact of the measures in last year’s much-criticised spring statement.

But the Treasury has [refused to release the information](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/treasury-wont-reveal-equality-impact-because-it-could-be-too-complex-for-the-public/), telling DNS it would not be in the public interest to release analysis that “could be misleading for a general audience”.

It also claimed that releasing the analysis would have a “chilling effect” on how it prepared evidence to support ministers as they draw up policies, which would “lead to poorer decision making”.

DNS lodged a complaint about the Treasury’s decision with the Information Commissioner’s Office.

But information commissioner John Edwards ruled that the Treasury was not acting unlawfully and is entitled to keep its analysis secret.

He said the Treasury was allowed to rely on section 35 of the Freedom of Information Act, an exemption clause that lets public bodies refuse to release information if it is linked to forming or developing government policy.

Kamran Mallick, chief executive of Disability Rights UK, said: “All the evidence points to disabled people being disproportionately affected by poverty and inequality.

“Half the people in poverty are either disabled people or people who have a disabled person in their household.

“Disabled people are hit hard by cuts to public services, low benefit rates and the rising costs of food, energy and housing.

“It is absolutely vital that the Treasury understands the impact of its actions and is open and transparent about how their policies affect disabled people.”

Dr Mary-Ann Stephenson, director of Women’s Budget Group, said: “Transparency is crucial in formulating policies that benefit society as a whole and comply with the Equality Act 2010.

“It is essential that the Treasury provides stakeholders with insight into the analysis of policy issues, for us to engage effectively with the government.

“The information commissioner’s reasons just don’t stack up.

“How can the Treasury be held to account for complying with equalities law if they won’t show their workings?”

Disabled people [reacted with disbelief](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/disbelief-at-chancellors-appalling-refusal-to-target-support-on-disabled-people/) in March 2022 to the “cruel” decision of the then chancellor Rishi Sunak to all-but-ignore those who rely on benefits in the spring statement, even as the [Office for Budget Responsibility](https://obr.uk/overview-of-the-march-2022-economic-and-fiscal-outlook/) was warning that the real value of benefits was set to fall by five per cent in 2022-23.

There was no mention in his speech of disabled people and how many of them were struggling to survive, and no attempt to increase benefits to match the sharply rising rate of inflation.

It was not until late May 2022 that Sunak [was forced to announce](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/governments-cost-of-living-sticking-plaster-is-no-long-term-fix/) a “sticking plaster” injection of £15 billion in grants and other funding in an attempt to ease the cost-of-living crisis.

The Treasury had not commented on the letter by noon today (Thursday).

An ICO spokesperson said: “The decision notice in this case, published on our website, sets out our position.

“If a requestor disagrees with a decision we have reached in their FOI case, the appropriate way to challenge it is by appeal to the Information Rights Tribunal.”

*\*Women’s Budget Group is a feminist think tank and Runnymede Trust is an independent race equality think tank*

**22 June 2023**

**Judge’s care charges ruling criticises council’s ‘extraordinary’ approach on costs**

A high court judge has criticised a council for taking an “extraordinary” approach to calculating an autistic man’s care charges, which placed too much emphasis on costs and not enough on his right to live independently.

The judge [has ruled](https://www.matrixlaw.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/RW-v-RBWM-Approved-Judgment.pdf) (PDF) that Windsor and Maidenhead council behaved unlawfully by refusing to view activities the man attended as part of a social and life skills group as “disability-related” spending.

The council will now have to reconsider its calculations.

The claimant, who is 25 and was referred to in the case as RW, is autistic and receives direct payments from Windsor and Maidenhead council to fund his care and support package, but he contributes to the cost of that support through weekly care charges.

As part of that package, he attends a social and life skills group, Step Together (ST), three times a week and has one-to-one support from ST staff at his home twice a week.

RW has difficulties communicating and can struggle to make himself understood, which causes him significant anxiety, and he is unable to understand non-verbal communication.

But attending the social and life skills group has made him happier and more confident, his family say, and without those sessions he can become withdrawn, isolated and depressed.

On top of the cost of attending the group, he pays for the activities he attends, which are not covered by his support package.

He argued that the cost of attending these activities should be seen as “disability-related expenditure”, disability-related costs that should be taken into consideration when assessing how much he can afford to pay every week in care charges.

The council disagreed, and claimed RW had “chosen” the activities, and so they were not disability-related, and that his need was for support from staff and not for the activities, while there were cheaper ways for him to have social interaction, and that such spending was part of his “care and support”.

As a result, RW’s care charges reached about £320 a month, which he could not afford to pay and often had to ask his mother to cover, leaving him “stressed and demoralised”.

But the judge found the council was “wrong” to conclude that the activities he attended at the social and life skills group were not disability-related.

He concluded that in “an important and material respect”, the council had failed to meet RW’s eligible care and support needs by refusing to recognise the activity costs as disability-related expenditure.

Deputy high court judge Dexter Dias said the council was also wrong to fail to take enough account of “adverse emotional impact, social anxiety, the claimant’s wishes and feelings, autonomy and choice” and that it had given “disproportionate, excessive and unreasonable weight to financial considerations”.

The judge concluded that the council had not “carefully weighed” the impact on RW if he could not attend the group sessions.

And he suggested that the council had failed to take account of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by placing “undue emphasis” on the question of cost without properly considering the impact on RW, who needs support to live “independently and autonomously”.

RW had said in his care plan that the other attendees at the social and life skills group were “the only group of friends that I have”.

He had said in a statement that the other attendees of the ST group were his “circle and support system”, adding: “I otherwise have difficulty making and maintaining friendships and without social contact I can get very low.”

The judge described the council’s approach as “extraordinary” because it had “discounted” spending that allowed RW “to develop his social skills and confidence through the arranged groups activities in the context of an environment he feels secure in”.

He also suggested that the council had failed to take account of disabled people’s rights under the UN convention to be put at the heart of decision-making.

He concluded that the council had behaved unlawfully.

RW said after the judgment: “I am very glad to have won this case and it will help me to continue attending my group without all the financial worry.”

[Inclusion London](https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/) and [Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People (GMCDP)](https://gmcdp.com/) both praised RW for taking the case.

Svetlana Kotova, director of campaigns and justice for Inclusion London, which is campaigning for the government and local authorities [to scrap all care charges](https://actionnetwork.org/letters/scrap-care-charging), said the judgment “exposes how cruel, intimidating and often oppressive the system of claiming DRE is\*”.

She said: “Windsor is not an exception. We see many cases where local authorities come up with all kinds of reasons not to allow DRE.

“People who already struggle financially and require support are made to evidence every penny, argue and complain for months and often years just to keep a bit more of their benefits money and spend it on extra costs that they need.

“It is a scandal that the judge has to remind local authorities that cheapest is not the best and that they need to consider things on an individual basis, taking into account wider context.”

Helen Rowlands, a GMCDP executive council member, said that navigating DRE was often a “bureaucratic nightmare for disabled people with statutory non-residential care needs who are charged by their local authority for the support they need”.

She said: “Financial assessment officers’ understanding of the statutory guidance on DRE can be patchy, and in the worst cases, unlawful misinterpretations are guiding councils’ DRE refusals.”

Rowlands said the ruling had now provided councils with “crystal clear legal guidance”.

She said: “The Care Act requires them to fairly consider any claim for DRE on a case-by-case basis, in a sensitive examination of the disabled person’s needs, with reference to their care plan and the statutory guidance.

“That guidance is informed by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and this case gives additional weight to the vital importance of the parties at Westminster committing to adoption of UNCRPD into domestic law within the first 100 days of the next government.”

RW was represented in his legal case by law firm Leigh Day and barrister Emma Foubister, from Matrix Chambers.

Lucy Cadd, a solicitor at Leigh Day, said: “This is a very sensible and robust judgment that will have important implications for the way claims for disability-related expenditure should be considered by local authorities.

“Going forward, local authorities will need to consider any claim for disability-related expenditure on a case-by-case basis, fairly and sensitively examining the claimant’s needs by reference to their care plan and flexibly interpreting the regulations and guidance which have been informed by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.”

Windsor and Maidenhead council initially refused to even acknowledge a request to comment from Disability News Service, before eventually refusing to comment.

*\*Inclusion London has launched* [*a DREy tool*](https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/chat-bot/)*, which helps disabled people document their disability-related expenditure,* [*alongside a guide*](https://www.scrapcarecharges.com/dreguide) *on how to use the tool and template letters to send to their local authority if they do not respond positively*

**22 June 2023**

**Report set to amplify experiences of Black disabled people in music industry**

A new report has provided the first step towards amplifying the experiences of “unseen” and “unheard” Black disabled people who experience widespread discrimination in the UK music industry.

It highlights the intersectional\* barriers that Black disabled music creators and professionals face every day.

[The report](https://blim.org.uk/report-unseen-unheard/) says that 80 per cent of Black disabled music creators and 89 per cent of Black disabled music professionals who took part in a survey believed they had faced some sort of discrimination in the music industry.

And 74 per cent of Black disabled music creators felt there were specific barriers to success in the industry because of their race or ethnicity, compared to 58 per cent of Black non-disabled creators.

The report\*\* is the first product of a new partnership between two campaigning organisations, [Black Lives In Music (BLIM)](http://www.blim.org.uk) and [Attitude is Everything](http://www.attitudeiseverything.org.uk), which aims to amplify the experiences of Black disabled people in the music industry and break down the barriers they face.

It combines responses from nearly 150 Black disabled people who responded to a groundbreaking BLIM survey in 2021 and new interviews carried out by BLIM.

One of the Black disabled women who were interviewed for the report explained why she does not reveal her impairment until she secures a job.

She says in the report: “I’m a Black woman. Being a Black woman. Being a plus-sized Black woman. Being a Black woman with a child. Being a Black woman with a child with ‘special needs’. Then you’re going to add a disability to that?

“That’s why I don’t tell them. I don’t want to say. If I get the job, you’ll find out.”

Among the report’s recommendations is for industry events to consider disabled people and their access requirements “from planning through to delivery”, and for the music industry to ensure that Black disabled people are involved in marketing campaigns “in meaningful and non-tokenistic ways”.

It also calls for employers to consult Black disabled employees on their mentoring needs and support them to access career development opportunities.

Esta Rae, senior events manager at the Association of Independent Music, who writes in the foreword of her own experience as a “Black female creative working in the industry and being neurodivergent”, says the report provides “a small snippet of the voices of the Black creatives that are unseen in this industry, giving space for some to be heard”.

She says the report shows how “many feel they cannot progress and that they are not recognised as talented artists or industry professionals with vast potential to contribute to this industry we all love”.

Suzanne Bull, founder of Attitude is Everything, said: “The Unseen Unheard report and podcast series marks the first major intervention generated by our partnership with Black Lives In Music.

“It’s a rallying cry to the industry to listen to Black disabled artists and professionals and to respond to their experiences of race and disability-related barriers.”

Charisse Beaumont, chief executive of Black Lives In Music, said: “Together with Attitude is Everything, Black Lives In Music are on a mission for Black disabled music creators and professionals to no longer be unseen and unheard but instead celebrated, uplifted and granted the same opportunities as others.

“Eradicating discrimination and creating platforms and pathways to showcase their talent and skills so they can thrive and have the careers they truly deserve.”

Yesterday (Wednesday), the two organisations also launched an Unseen Unheard podcast series, which will interview Black disabled creators and industry professionals about their experiences within the industry, and will be hosted on the [Black Lives In Music YouTube channel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5aVhoqd4aEP_ShkpDjv4dA) and on podcast platforms.

*\*“Intersectional” describes how different types of discrimination combine to create oppression, so that, for example, the experience of a Black disabled woman will be different to that of a white disabled woman or a gay disabled man*

*\*\*Unseen. Unheard. Race and Disability – Black disabled experience in the UK’s music industry*

**22 June 2023**

**PIP phone waiting-times even higher than previously thought, DWP admits**

Waiting-times faced by disabled people trying to use a benefit enquiry line are even higher than previously thought, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has admitted.

Disability News Service (DNS) [revealed last week](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/pip-telephone-waiting-times-continue-to-rise-dwp-figures-show/) that the “average speed of answer” for the personal independence payment (PIP) telephone enquiry line reached 38 minutes and 50 seconds in April.

It had risen from 23 minutes in January, to 31 minutes in February, and 37 minutes in March.

The figures were provided in response to a DNS freedom of information request.

But when Tom Pursglove, the minister for disabled people, was asked for these figures by Labour’s Jon Trickett, [the figures he provided](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-06-08/188483) on 16 June were even higher.

They show that the waiting-times rose from 25 minutes in January, to nearly 35 minutes in February, 40 minutes in March, and as high as 44 minutes in April, before falling in May to nearly 41 minutes.

These are just average waiting-times, with many disabled people reporting far higher waits before they can speak to someone, while the Benefits and Work website [has revealed that](https://www.benefitsandwork.co.uk/news/almost-half-a-million-pip-helpline-calls-deliberately-disconnected-in-april) nearly half a million callers to the PIP helpline in April were deliberately disconnected by DWP before they could even join the queue to speak to an adviser.

The number of disconnections rose from 34,860 in February, to 306,865 in March and 494,044 in April.

Benefits and Work reported that the number of blocked calls in April was even greater than the number allowed to join the queue (388,265).

DWP told DNS this week that the waiting-times provided to Trickett were higher than those given to DNS because they did not include figures for the PIP mandatory reconsideration enquiry line.

Pursglove told Trickett that PIP had “experienced unprecedented levels of new claims from customers in recent months and, as a result, we have seen increased call traffic”.

He said: “We are currently in the process of recruiting additional resource into telephony, so that we can increase the number of calls answered and reduce current wait times.”

DWP’s figures show the rise in new PIP claims – under the normal rules procedure – in February, March and April 2023, compared with the same months in 2022, was just 8.4 per cent.

**22 June 2023**

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

Three-quarters of magistrates courts in England and Wales are inadequately accessible for disabled people, with a lack of ramps, inaccessible toilets and non-functioning hearing loops all featuring as failings. An on-the-ground survey carried out by the Magistrates Association assessed the accessibility of 57 buildings – more than a third of magistrates courts – and found a plethora of problems. Only one building was found to be “good” across all areas assessed, which included magistrate entrances, car parks and public areas: <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2023/jun/19/most-magistrates-courts-england-wales-accessibility-failings>

The number of disabled pupils in England issued with a support plan has more than doubled in the last eight years to 180 a day, driving up deficits in local authority budgets to “unmanageable levels”, according to analysis by the County Councils Network. A record half a million pupils now have an education, health and care plan: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/jun/21/england-pupils-special-needs-support-plan-local-authority-deficits>

Proposals to increase social care charges in Telford and Wrekin are going out to public consultation. About half of those receiving help are likely to see their charges go up, the council said: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-shropshire-65951363>

A town council on the Isle of Wight will have to pay out more than £5,000 after a judge found it breached the Equality Act — due to the closing mechanism installed on an accessible toilet. Joe Nash said he was prevented from using the wheelchair-accessible toilet at The Cut, Cowes High Street, by Cowes Town Council after it refused a request to remove a “very powerful” hydraulic door closure: <https://www.countypress.co.uk/news/23602495.isle-wight-town-council-disabled-toilets-breaches-equality-act/>

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