**Disabled activists vow fightback as nearly 1,000 rail ticket offices set to close**

Disabled activists have vowed to fight back against government-backed plans for sweeping closures of ticket offices across England – including at some major city stations – with legal action now almost certain.

Even ticket offices at major stations such as Euston in London, Manchester Piccadilly, Birmingham New Street and Glasgow Central will eventually be closed, with nearly 1,000 ticket offices in all set to go.

It is the first suggestion that any Scottish ticket offices will also be affected by the closure plans.

Leaked documents have also revealed the first admissions by train companies that the plans to close ticket offices and move staff “out of ticket offices and on station platforms, concourses and ticket halls” will also lead to staff cuts.

The rail industry says the plans – pushed by the government – will modernise “station retailing” and see ticket office staff moving to “flexible roving roles”, where they “would be better able to give advice about the best and cheapest fares, advise on journey planning and support customers with accessibility needs”.

At least 13 train companies are believed to have launched three-week consultations on their own closure plans yesterday (Wednesday).

Train company Avanti West Coast says its plans will eventually lead to the closure of ticket offices at four major stations.

It says that ticket offices at Euston, Manchester Piccadilly, Birmingham New Street and Glasgow Central will only “remain for a short period” while customers “transition from traditional over the counter purchasing to a self-serve proposition”.

Avanti said the stations would stay open “short-term while the industry works together to digitalise the full range of tickets available at all stations”, which will “allow a period of time to support customers during the transition from traditional over the counter purchasing to a self-serve proposition”.

An Avanti spokesperson said: “The proposed changes will bring our staff closer to our customers and better trained to assist customers purchasing tickets, planning their journeys, and to provide extra support for those with accessibility needs.

“This should offer a better service to customers at our stations.”

But disabled activists have described the closures as “catastrophic”, “disgraceful” and “horrendous” and say they will have a huge impact on disabled passengers and their right to use the railway.

A document seen by Disability News Service (DNS), sent to staff by Northern, says it plans to close 131 of its 149 station ticket offices over 18 months from early 2024, leaving just 18 open.

And it warns that stations that are staffed will in future have staff on hand “on average for fewer hours per week”, while the “overall headcount” at stations “will reduce” once the new roles are introduced.

Sam Jennings, a leading accessible transport campaigner, told DNS that disabled people would fight back against the proposed closures, including possible legal action.

She said: “It’s a smack in the face and I felt it coming. It’s just disgusting.

“They know this is going to be catastrophic for disabled people and they are not mitigating it in any way.

“They are going to leave tens of thousands more people disabled by the railway. They are disabling us. It’s public transport. We are all tax-payers.”

Jennings, who was awarded compensation of £17,000 by Southern in 2021 after being left stranded on trains and station platforms more than 30 times, said: “After the last five years [of asserting my rights](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/train-company-pays-17000-after-repeatedly-leaving-disabled-woman-stranded/) and being given platitudes, it’s all been bollocks, because they’ve been planning this the whole time.

“I feel really mugged off as a member of the public who has had to fight so hard for access to public transport that should be accessible.

“The Disability Discrimination Act is nearly 30 years old… I shouldn’t be fighting like it’s my full-time job to be able to get on a train.”

Another disabled activist, Doug Paulley, [who has previously warned](https://twitter.com/Doug_Paulley/status/1674446026848055298) transport secretary Mark Harper that he will take him to court if he goes ahead with ticket office closures, said legal action was now very likely.

He said he was “grimly sad” and “unsurprised” by yesterday’s announcements.

Paulley said: “It’s going to knock passengers’ sense of ease and confidence in travelling, particularly disabled people.

“It just shows that they don’t care about the travelling public and groups made vulnerable by them. It’s disgraceful.”

He said the government and the rail industry were being “knowingly disingenuous” when they talked about the closures, as they were just a cover for staff cuts.

Another disabled activist, Sarah Leadbetter, national campaigns officer for [The National Federation of the Blind of the UK (NFB UK)](https://www.nfbuk.org/), said: “We are definitely fighting. We will fight to make sure this doesn’t happen.

“We have got to stop this because it’s horrendous and it’s disgusting.

“I am so angry. They are just excluding disabled people and elderly people again and again and again.

“I will not be able to travel. It will be excluding and isolating. That’s my independence gone.”

She said she believed NFB UK would support legal action against the planned closures.

One of the key concerns is that station ticket machines are often not accessible to many disabled people, while many disabled passengers – including blind and partially-sighted travellers – may not be able to track down a “roving” member of staff if they need assistance.

And campaigning organisations like the Association of British Commuters (ABC) are convinced the closures will lead to staff cuts.

Leadbetter, a guide dog-user, said the consultation process at her local station in Narborough, Leicestershire, appears to have involved simply putting a piece of paper on the wall of the station.

She also criticised the transport secretary, Mark Harper, as a former minister for disabled people.

She said: “I hope he lives to regret it, because [the closure plans are] excluding people.”

To respond to the consultations launched by individual train companies, passengers should contact the independent transport user watchdog [Transport Focus](https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/train-station-ticket-office-consultation/), or [London TravelWatch](https://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/ticket-offices-have-your-say/) in London. The consultation period lasts just 21 days (until 26 July).

Rail Delivery Group, which represents the companies that run Britain’s railways, [said in its briefing](https://media.raildeliverygroup.com/news/proposals-to-update-the-railway-for-how-passengers-use-it-today): “An estimated 99 per cent of all transactions made at ticket offices last year can be made at ticket vending machines (TVMs) or online and where needed, TVMs across the network will be improved and upgraded.

“Ticket office facilities will remain open at the busiest stations and interchanges, selling the full range of tickets while the transition takes place.

“Following these changes, if a customer is unable to buy a specific ticket before boarding the train because it was unavailable at the station, they would be able to buy one during their journey, at a ticket office en-route, or at their destination.”

But Caroline Eglinton, a disabled accessibility expert who has worked in the rail industry for 17 years and is the government’s disability and access ambassador for rail travel, told DNS: “I believe that it’s much more difficult to deliver an accessible service without ticket offices – so many rely on them to make their journeys possible, be that buying and paying for the correct ticket with cash or for seeking reassurance about their journey.

“Whilst it is useful to have staff ‘in front of the glass’, I don’t think that should be achieved by wholesale closure of ticket offices and could be delivered whilst maintaining the familiar and essential purpose that ticket offices serve for millions of people, particularly older and disabled people.”

The rail regulator, the Office of Rail and Road, provided some hope to disabled passengers yesterday by [writing to train companies](https://www.orr.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-07/2023-07-05-letter-to-operators-about-station-ticket-office-proposals-and-atps.pdf) (PDF) to demand that they provide an assessment of how the closures will impact on their accessible travel policies (ATPs) and show what changes they plan to make at stations to ensure they comply with ATP guidance.

This includes the impact on providing a “turn up and go” service to disabled passengers, and on booked assistance, buying tickets, and providing information.

An ORR spokesperson said in a statement: “In light of proposals to change staffing arrangements, ORR has written to all train operators to ask them how they propose to remain compliant with Accessible Travel Policy guidance.

“The guidance addresses a wide range of issues, including ticketing and provision of assistance.

“Operators will need to submit any material changes to their Accessible Travel Policies to ORR for approval.”

ABC had led on drafting a letter from disabled campaigners and allies to ORR and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (*see separate story*) which called on Tuesday for the two regulators to make an “urgent intervention” to prevent the closures.

[In the open letter](https://abcommuters.com/2023/07/04/experts-call-for-orr-and-ehrc-to-intervene-in-ticket-office-closures/), they said the plans were likely to “undo decades of progress made towards rail accessibility” and warned that the real purpose of the closure programme was to make cuts to staff by “stealth”, and that it could create 500 more unstaffed stations across England.

They also warned that access problems with ticket machines meant the planned closures would “guarantee a discriminatory impact on disabled people”.

**6 July 2023**

**Government criticised again over lack of proper engagement with disabled people**

The minister for disabled people has been criticised by one of his own MPs for failing to consult properly with disabled people’s organisations over his forthcoming disability action plan.

The criticism of Tom Pursglove [comes only days](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/disability-strategy-court-case-will-force-government-to-act-on-consultations/) after government lawyers were in the Court of Appeal trying to persuade judges that ministers did not carry out an unlawful consultation on their National Disability Strategy in early 2021.

Pursglove plans to publish his new disability action plan this summer, and [he told the Commons women and equalities committee](https://www.parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/67c685ba-d0b7-496e-bbe3-06f5d7e6f433) that it was “in addition to” the “long-term” National Disability Strategy.

He said the action plan would focus on “short-term changes that we can make, short-term improvements”.

Pursglove said he was “very disappointed and frustrated” that both the principle and the delivery of the strategy had had to be paused while the case was dealt with by the courts.

But Jackie Doyle-Price, a Conservative MP and former mental health minister, told Pursglove that she had been told by disabled people’s organisations that ministers had failed to include their input in his action plan.

She said that Fazilet Hadi, head of policy for [Disability Rights UK](https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/), had told her: “The trouble is that this is not coming from disabled people… It’s not our list of actions.”

Doyle-Price said: “The message we are getting is that disability organisations do not feel that they own this agenda, they don’t feel that they’ve had the strategic input.”

Pursglove said this was “slightly premature” because the action plan had not yet been released for consultation.

But Doyle-Price said: “These organisations do need to feel that there’s ownership and that there is genuine collaboration or else we are not going to get anywhere.

“This is a set of people who are used to being patted on the head and if you’re really going to deliver a marked improvement and a cultural change as to how we empower people with disabilities that’s not going to be a very helpful starting place.”

Pursglove said he had been “very committed to engaging regularly” but Doyle-Price said it was “a cultural thing and it’s reflecting [a history of dialogue](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/tomlinson-held-just-a-handful-of-external-meetings-every-month-early-in-pandemic/)”.

She said there had been [similar feedback](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/government-ignored-dpos-in-drawing-up-social-care-white-paper/) about the social care white paper, which was published in December 2021.

She said: “The needs of working-age adults have been lost because of the focus in terms of the politics on elderly social care.

“It feels like we really haven’t moved on in about five years in talking about this.”

Doyle-Price was also critical of ministers’ failure to make progress on reducing the number of people with learning difficulties and autistic people detained in inpatient mental health settings.

The current minister for mental health, Maria Caulfield, told the committee the government’s 2019 target was to cut the numbers by 50 per cent by March 2024, but she said they had managed just 30 per cent.

Caulfield said the Department of Health and Social Care was going through the records of each integrated care board (ICB) in England to check its progress and “finding out what it is that’s stopping them from being discharged”, and she was finding that it was “often about housing”.

Doyle-Price replied: “It’s all been about housing, and we’ve known it’s been about housing for years.”

She asked what conversations Caulfield was having with NHS England to manage this issue.

The minister said she was meeting with individual ICBs to “go through their patient lists and find out what the plan is for each individual patient”.

She said: “I’m not happy with it being at 30 per cent, I want it to get to 50 per cent.

“I want to be sure there is a plan in place for every single one. Because progress has been too slow, and we are working through the data, ICB by ICB, to find out what the challenges are.”

But Doyle-Price said this was “all talk and no delivery”, and she added: “This is why disability organisations have no confidence in this.

“We are not going to tackle what are systemic issues just by setting up more talking shops.”

Caulfield replied: “It’s not a talking-shop. If I’m meeting with the ICBs to go through their lists of patients who are not yet discharged, and finding out what those challenges are, that’s not a talking-shop, that’s practically looking at what the solutions are that we can deliver for each of those individual people.”

Doyle-Price also asked Caulfield why the government had yet to develop an initiative on public understanding of autism, which it had promised to introduce by the autumn of 2021.

But the minister replied: “I don’t have that particular information; I am happy to write to the committee about that.”

Caulfield [wrote last month](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-06-15/189781) in a parliamentary response to the committee’s chair, Caroline Nokes, that the initiative “has not yet been implemented”.

When Caulfield was unable to explain to the committee why the initiative had not been delivered, Doyle-Price told her: “You don’t know then. That’s the answer.”

Caulfield said: “We haven’t got a date.”

But her party colleague replied: “The question is: why have we not got it yet? The answer to that question is not that we haven’t got a date, it is why.

“You don’t know why, so let’s move on.”

**6 July 2023**

**Call for ‘urgent intervention’ from regulators to stop rail ticket office closures**

Disabled campaigners and allies have called for an “urgent intervention” from regulators to prevent the closure of nearly 1,000 rail ticket offices across England.

[In an open letter](https://abcommuters.com/2023/07/04/experts-call-for-orr-and-ehrc-to-intervene-in-ticket-office-closures/) to the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), they say government-backed plans for a national closure programme are likely to “undo decades of progress made towards rail accessibility”.

The letter was sent the day before rail companies launched consultations on proposals to close most ticket offices in England (*see separate story*).

The letter says the two regulators need to act urgently to ensure the closure programme takes full account of the possible impact on accessibility.

And they warn that the real purpose of the closure programme is to make cuts to staff by “stealth”, and that the closure programme could create 500 more unstaffed stations across England.

They also warn that access problems with ticket machines mean the planned closures will “guarantee a discriminatory impact on disabled people” if the government is allowed to press ahead with its plans, which will be implemented by train companies.

Among those who have signed the letter are Ann Bates, former chair and vice-chair of the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC); Matthew Smith, who [resigned from DPTAC last year](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/government-accessible-transport-adviser-quits-over-rail-staffing-discrimination/), after accusing ministers of backing policies on de-staffing the rail network that discriminate against disabled rail passengers; and Caroline Eglinton, the government’s own disability and access ambassador for the rail industry.

The letter says: “If passengers cannot purchase the ticket they need from a ticket vending machine (TVM), they will have to travel to one of the few remaining ticket offices, probably at bigger stations.

“This will cause extra costs and inconvenience to all passengers seeking better ticket options, advice, refunds; and directly excludes anyone who finds TVMs or e-ticketing inaccessible.

“It is sure to have a disproportionate effect on disabled people and put them at ‘substantial disadvantage’.”

Emily Yates, co-founder of the Association of British Commuters, led on drafting the letter, which is also signed by leading disabled access campaigners including Doug Paulley, Tony Jennings, Christiane Link, Sam Jennings, Andrew Hodgson and Sarah Leadbetter.

It calls on ORR and EHRC to make a public statement on whether they are satisfied that steps have been taken to ensure accessibility is not affected by the closures.

It says: “If they do not believe this to be the case, they should call for an immediate pause to proceedings and prepare to make use of their full regulatory powers to intervene.”

They say in the letter that they fear the Department for Transport has not been meeting its public sector equality duty over the plans.

The letter adds: “It is hard to understand how there can possibly be an economic justification for these plans, which are likely to prevent the growth of ridership for all passenger groups; prevent access to employment, leisure, and health facilities; and undo decades of progress made towards rail accessibility – also undermining the value of current investments.”

An ORR spokesperson said on Tuesday: “ORR has today received the letter and will respond in due course.”

But ORR did [write to train companies](https://www.orr.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-07/2023-07-05-letter-to-operators-about-station-ticket-office-proposals-and-atps.pdf) (PDF) the following day to demand that they provide an assessment of how the closures will impact on their accessible travel policies (ATPs) and show what changes they plan to make at stations to ensure they comply with ATP guidance.

This includes the impact of the closures on providing a “turn up and go” service to disabled passengers, as well as on booked assistance, ticket purchase, and the provision of information.

An ORR spokesperson said in a statement: “In light of proposals to change staffing arrangements, ORR has written to all train operators to ask them how they propose to remain compliant with accessible travel policy guidance.

“The guidance addresses a wide range of issues, including ticketing and provision of assistance.

“Operators will need to submit any material changes to their accessible travel policies to ORR for approval.”

An EHRC spokesperson said: “We have received the letter from the Association of British Commuters and will carefully consider the points raised before responding in due course.

“We are working with transport regulators, such as the Office of Rail and Road, to ensure disabled people receive fair and equal access to travel.

“We have also met with the Department for Transport regarding staffing on the rail network.

“Disabled people are protected under the 2010 Equality Act, which the EHRC is responsible for enforcing.

“Public bodies and private companies alike must anticipate the adjustments that people with disabilities will need, so they are not disadvantaged when using a service.

“Failure to do so may be unlawful discrimination, even if it is not intentional.”

**6 July 2023**

**Royal households refuse to release data on disabled staff**

The four most senior members of the royal family are refusing to release details of how many disabled people they employ across their two households.

Both Buckingham Palace, headed by the king and queen, and Kensington Palace, headed by the prince and princess of Wales, are refusing to release the figures, even though they both publish data showing the proportion of their staff from a minority ethnic background.

Both palaces claim to promote diversity, but they both refused this week to explain why they do not publish the figures, and both refused to even confirm whether they do collect data on disabled staff.

They also do not release figures showing what proportion of their staff identify as LGBT+ or any targets they might have for increasing the proportion of their staff identifying as LGBT+, or any targets for increasing the proportion of disabled staff.

A Buckingham Palace spokesperson said in a statement: “The royal household does not currently release this detail about its staff.

“The king and queen and the wider royal family have always promoted and embraced the diversity of our nation and we recognise that our own workforce needs to reflect the communities we serve.

“We’ve worked hard to ensure recruitment practices are fair and transparent, and that our employer brand is open and engaging and promotes career opportunities that are attractive to a wide pool of talent.”

The latest [sovereign grant annual report](https://www.royal.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2023-06/The%20Sovereign%20Grant%20and%20Sovereign%20Grant%20Reserve%20Annual%20Report%20and%20Accounts%202022-23%20v1.pdf) (PDF), published last week, shows there are 595 full-time equivalent staff employed at Buckingham Palace, of whom 9.7 per cent are minority ethnic employees.

The report says – in an almost exact replica of last year’s report: “Inclusion and Diversity are valued, all appointments and promotions are on merit, with active consideration given to applicants with disabilities and support to employees who become disabled to ensure their development and career progression continues.”

Kensington Palace said that 16.3 per cent of its 50 staff are from a minority ethnic background, an increase from 13.6 per cent last year, while 64 per cent of its staff are women.

It claims that diversity is extremely important to the palace and that it is always striving to become more diverse and inclusive.

Last year, Buckingham Palace said that data on the number of disabled staff was collected, reviewed and discussed at senior levels.

But both Buckingham Palace and Kensington Palace have refused to say whether they set any targets for disabled and LGBT+ staff, and why these figures are not released.

A spokesperson for the Equality and Human Rights Commission said: “A diverse workforce benefits employers.

“More diversity means a wider range of views and experiences can be shared and built upon, leading to better, more informed decision making.

“Although organisations are not generally required to publish diversity data, a first step towards achieving a more inclusive workforce is for any employer to collect and analyse data on the diversity of their employees – for example on disability, race, age and sex.

“This would identify where there may be issues and help employers to act and tackle the barriers some groups face within the workplace.

“Transparency is encouraged when publishing data, however this may not be appropriate in certain situations.

“For example, publishing the data of a small workforce could lead to the identification of staff.

“Taking specific steps to improve equality in the workplace, such as positive action measures, eliminating bias in recruitment and offering flexible working at all levels, can also be used to lessen disadvantage and increase participation.”

**6 July 2023**

**Rare DWP success sees long waits for new PIP claimants plummet**

The number of disabled people waiting longer than six months to be told whether they have been successful in their claim for a key disability benefit has plummeted over the last year, new figures have shown.

Figures obtained by Disability News Service (DNS) show that the number of people with a new claim for personal independence payment (PIP) who were waiting longer than six months for a decision has fallen from more than 20,000 to 300 in just 12 months.

The figures, provided by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), show that the number of disabled people having to undergo the longest waits for a new PIP claim has fallen every month since May 2022, when there were 20,100 new claimants who had been waiting six months or more for a decision by the end of the month.

In June 2022 that fell to 17,500, and then to 16,800 in July 2022, before continuing to drop to 15,800, 15,500 in September 2022, and then 13,400, 10,900 and 9,500 by the end of December.

The number of long waits has continued to fall this year, with 6,500 new PIP claimants waiting longer than six months by the end of January, then 5,300, 3,200 in March and finally just 300 by the end of April.

The unpublished figures apply only to England and Wales, and they exclude claims for those who were terminally-ill.

In its response to the figures, DWP told DNS: “We are committed to ensuring that people can access financial support through personal independence payment (PIP) in a timely manner.

“We always aim to make an award decision as quickly as possible, taking into account the need to review all available evidence.”

Despite the huge falls in those waiting longer than six months for a PIP decision, DWP declined to welcome the figures, commenting instead on average clearance times.

A DWP spokesperson said: “Since August 2021 we’ve halved the time it takes for PIP payments to be approved and processed – making sure people can access the support they are entitled to quickly.”

It said the current average “end-to-end” clearance time for new PIP claims was 13 weeks – about three months – including the period allowed for claimants to complete and return their questionnaire.

One of the measures it has taken, it says, is to prioritise new PIP claims, while ensuring that payments continue until an award review can be completed for claimants who are awaiting reviews of existing PIP claims and have returned the necessary information.

The release of the figures comes as the Conservative party [appears to be considering](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/focus-group-questions-suggest-means-testing-pip-is-back-on-the-tory-agenda/) plans to means-test PIP as a way of cutting spending.

The government may be keen to cut waiting-times for PIP because its plans to scrap the work capability assessment will place pressure on DWP to ensure PIP waiting-times are kept to acceptable levels.

Under those plans, which will only go ahead if the Conservatives win the next election, eligibility for out-of-work disability benefits – through a new universal credit “health element” – will be decided by the PIP assessment process.

Meanwhile, the latest figures have shown that it is still taking [an average of more than 40 minutes](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/pip-phone-waiting-times-even-higher-than-previously-thought-dwp-admits/) for a call to the PIP enquiry telephone line to get through to an adviser, while hundreds of thousands of callers a month [are being deliberately disconnected](https://www.benefitsandwork.co.uk/news/almost-half-a-million-pip-helpline-calls-deliberately-disconnected-in-april) by DWP before they can even join the queue to speak to a PIP adviser.

And [the latest figures](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/tribunal-statistics-quarterly-january-to-march-2023) from the tribunal service show that, between January and March 2023, 68 per cent of PIP appeals found in favour of the claimant.

**6 July 2023**

**Government scraps plans to improve accessible housing scheme**

The government has abandoned its pledge to consult on three improvements to the scheme that funds disabled people to make access improvements to their homes, Disability News Service can reveal.

Ministers promised in their [People at the Heart of Care white paper](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/people-at-the-heart-of-care-adult-social-care-reform-white-paper) in December 2021 to consult on the three changes to the disabled facilities grant (DFG) scheme “in 2022”.

But the Department of Health and Social Care has now admitted – in a response to a freedom of information request – that it has abandoned those promises.

It has also apparently abandoned plans to set up a new service to make minor repairs and changes in disabled people’s homes.

One consultation was to examine proposals to increase the upper limit for a DFG for an individual adaptation, currently set at £30,000 in England – although councils can increase this on a case-by-case basis – which would mean “that more people who need the grant across the country will be able to access it”.

An [independent review of DFGs](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disabled-facilities-grant-and-other-adaptations-external-review), commissioned by the government, recommended an increase to the upper limit in December 2018.

Another pledge was to simplify the means test underpinning the DFG system, which the government said was “complex and can be difficult to navigate”.

And the third was to examine how DFG funding was allocated to local authorities to “help ensure better alignment with local demand so that more adaptations reach those who need them most”.

But all three consultations have been scrapped.

The white paper also included plans to fund a new service to make minor repairs and changes in disabled people’s homes to “help them stay safe and independent and reduce demand for more substantial adaptations through the DFG”.

The four proposals were described in the white paper as “the next important steps towards our 10 year vision for transforming the role that housing plays in adult social care”.

The government has increased funding for DFGs from £220 million in 2015-16 to £505 million in 2019-20 and £573 million in 2022-23, although the 2018 review pointed to concerns that local authority contributions towards DFGs had fallen and so the number of homes adapted had not significantly increased.

[In April this year](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adult-social-care-system-reform-next-steps-to-put-people-at-the-heart-of-care/next-steps-to-put-people-at-the-heart-of-care), the government announced another £102 million in funding over two years.

In its response to the Disability News Service freedom of information request, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) said the three consultations “are not currently being taken forward”.

It pointed to a parliamentary response from care minister Helen Whately, [who said last month](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-06-06/187986) – in response to questions about the consultations from Labour’s Seema Malhotra – that the extra DFG funding would “enable local areas to fund supplementary services that are agile and help people stay independent, support hospital discharge, and make minor adaptations”.

Whately added: “Local areas already have discretion on how they manage the grant, for example, they can increase the cap on a case-by-case basis or in line with a locally published housing assistance policy.

“They can also choose to waive the means test for grants costing under a certain amount.

“As with all aspects of the Disabled Facilities Grants, Government will continue to keep these reforms under review.”

The freedom of information response said that the government’s Next Steps to Put People at the Heart of Care policy paper, [published in April](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adult-social-care-system-reform-next-steps-to-put-people-at-the-heart-of-care/next-steps-to-put-people-at-the-heart-of-care#supporting-people-to-remain-independent-at-home), “provides more detail on the way in which the Government intends to deliver the services (for minor repairs and changes in people’s home) to which you refer”.

But there appears to be nothing in that document that relates to setting up a new minor repairs service, another promise which appears to have been abandoned.

DHSC had failed to explain by noon today (Thursday) why the three consultations were scrapped or to confirm that the new minor repairs service had also been scrapped.

**6 July 2023**

**Legalising assisted suicide ‘would mean state endorsing NHS-funded deaths’**

Legalising assisted suicide would mean the state “endorsing” NHS-funded deaths, at a time when just one-third of palliative care is government-funded, MPs have been warned.

Dr Matthew Doré, honorary secretary of the Association for Palliative Medicine of Great Britain and Ireland, said legalised assisted suicide would be state-funded while two-thirds of palliative care was still funded by charities.

He told the Commons health and social care committee: “That is the state essentially endorsing death while not funding and paying for palliative care.”

Dr Doré said legalisation was a “public safety” issue, because taking that step would “risk the wider majority of the population”.

He [was giving evidence to the committee](https://www.parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/78b597cb-b29c-4471-a104-c498e5cada25) as part of its inquiry into assisted suicide.

He compared the proposed legalisation of assisted suicide to capital punishment, where people who were executed by the state were subsequently found to be innocent, despite a “full judicial process” that found them guilty “beyond reasonable doubt” following “months of deliberation” by the legal system.

Dr Doré pointed to diagnoses of motor neurone disease that had later proved to be wrong, and he said that research had suggested that [one in five older people had been abused](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/nov/29/one-in-five-older-people-in-the-uk-have-been-abused-poll-finds).

He told the committee: “There are going to be incorrect deaths. So… how many incorrect deaths justify… the right to pre-emptively kill yourself early?”

He also warned that legalisation would mean palliative care would become “subservient” to assisted suicide in hospices, as he said had happened in Canada with its [Medical Assistance in Dying programme](https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/maid-poverty-disability-1.6687453).

And he said that non-assisted suicides had risen sharply in the US state of Oregon after it legalised assisted suicide and “imbued in the culture” that “there are circumstances in which it’s not worth living”.

He added: “Laws are more than just rules. They send cultural messages.”

The committee also heard on Tuesday from Helen Whately, the minister for care, who repeated the government’s long-established position that any change in the law was “something for parliament to decide”.

She said: “It’s an issue of conscience for individual members of parliament.

“If the will of parliament is that the law on assisted dying should change, then government would not stand in its way.”

She said she was not aware of any government discussions about the potential implications of another part of the UK legalising assisted suicide, with Scotland, Jersey and the Isle of Man all apparently moving in that direction.

**6 July 2023**

**Watchdog agrees to review guidance after by-election hustings access concerns**

The elections watchdog has agreed to review its guidance, after criticism over its failure to advise organisers of election hustings that they should do everything they can to make them accessible for disabled people.

Disabled campaigners spoke out after it emerged that there were no plans to live-stream two of the hustings events being organised ahead of the by-election to replace Boris Johnson in the Uxbridge and South Ruislip constituency.

[Disability Politics UK](https://www.disabilitypolitics.org.uk/) called on the Electoral Commission this week to issue new guidance that would encourage organisers of hustings to make them accessible.

It pointed to the two events being held on the Brunel University London campus in Uxbridge.

Despite the university running online events for students during the pandemic, neither of the hustings was planned to be live-streamed until complaints from Disability Politics and others forced organisers to hurriedly arrange an online option on the day of the first event.

[The first hustings](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/uxbridge-south-ruislip-hustings-tickets-667414122607) was held on Tuesday this week and was hosted by Hillingdon Chamber of Commerce.

[The second hustings event](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/hillingdon-herald-hustings-for-the-uxbridge-and-south-ruislip-by-election-tickets-669279361587?aff=erelexpmlt), on 13 July, will be hosted by the Hillingdon Herald, the university’s own student-run newspaper.

Deborah King, co-founder of Disability Politics UK, was critical of the commission’s lack of guidance.

She said: “One of the few positive outcomes of Covid was the increase in availability of online access to events.

“We would expect all people organising hustings to try and ensure they are held at venues which can facilitate online access, so that disabled people can access them online.

“Disabled people’s voices are overlooked by political parties of all hues. We want better access to politics.”

An Electoral Commission spokesperson said its hustings guidance was “primarily focused on compliance with electoral law and sets out how spending on hustings may be regulated” and was “non-exhaustive, voluntary guidance, rather than statutory guidance”.

But she added: “However, it is important that elections are accessible for all those involved and that includes events such as hustings.

“We plan to review our guidance in the coming months to ensure it reflects the needs of voters, parties and campaigners, and will consider any guidance we can include on accessibility.”

A Brunel University London spokesperson told Disability News Service late in the afternoon on the day of the first hustings that both events would be live-streamed.

He refused to respond when asked to confirm that live-streaming had only been arranged that day, following complaints about the accessibility of the events.

He also refused to comment on whether Electoral Commission guidance on accessibility would be useful.

Hillingdon Chamber of Commerce had failed to comment by noon today (Thursday).

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

Disabled comedian Rosie Jones has faced a backlash from campaigners following the announcement of a Channel 4 project that aims to educate viewers on the abuse disabled people face. There has been so much concern about its title – Rosie Jones: Am I a R\*tard– that three disabled contributors who were set to feature in the programme have withdrawn from the project: <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/rosie-jones-disability-documentary-title-backlash-b2368940.html> *\*Channel 4 does not use an asterisk in its marketing of the programme*

A government document that guides doctors on how to assess benefit claims has been withdrawn after it was found to include a racist slur, The Independent can reveal. The Department for Work and Pensions guidance, first issued in 2010 to help assess disability benefit claims but still in use until just days ago, referred to Black people as being of the “N\*\*\*\*\*d race”. The document, referring specifically to assessments for osteoporosis, has now been scrapped after The Independent highlighted that it was still in circulation: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/dwp-guidance-document-scrapped-slur-b2368917.html>

The Creative Diversity Network’s sixth annual report on inclusivity in the UK TV industry reveals a generally sorry state of affairs with some sparks of progress. Disabled individuals and individuals from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds also continue to be underrepresented in senior positions, while craft roles remain largely segregated: <https://variety.com/2023/tv/global/women-disabled-minorities-underrepresented-uk-tv-1235662447/>

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