

Sarah Baker
Deputy Director
Disability Unit
The Disability Unit (Equalities Hub)
10 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0NB



Patron: Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson

16 December 2020

Dear Sarah,

Re: National Disability Strategy

We are a disability rights charity based in the north east. As you will see from [our website](#), we campaign for equality for disabled people and an end to disability discrimination.

We did not feel it appropriate to join the regional stakeholder network for a number of reasons, but we trust that the Disability Unit will still be interested in our views, and those of our members, to feed into the development of the national Disability Strategy. We have also contributed to Disability Rights UK's consultation, and have met with Lord Shinkwin and the Disability Committee to share some of our thinking.

Below, we set out a number of priorities which we believe need to be addressed by the forthcoming strategy. These have been informed by our ['Manifesto for a Better Normal'](#) campaign, a collaboration with a number of regional disability charities, and feedback from our members at recent online events.

Health and Social Care

- › A long-term solution to the funding crisis in social care must be found. This should be based on the need for high quality, person centred support. Competition in the sector should be based on quality not cost.
- › We are extremely concerned about the ongoing human rights abuses taking place across the country, in institutions where people with learning disabilities and autistic people are being isolated and mistreated away from their families, friends and communities. Report after report has called for more appropriate

community-based support to be provided and it is time for action. This video by local self-advocates explains more: <https://youtu.be/h05c27NfitE>

- › Local Authorities should be provided with adequate funding for commissioning user-led community organisations to manage Personal Health Budgets, giving greater control to individuals.

Employment

- › The Government should invest in more support to assist disabled people to find and maintain employment. We fear that, without more investment, the steady reductions we have seen in the disability employment gap will be lost.
- › The current 'Access to Work' service has deteriorated over many years. The quality of service is variable at best. It is highly inefficient and we recommend an overhaul, involving disabled people's organisations in its redesign.
- › More control should be put in the hands of disabled people in order to ensure they can get the workplace adjustments they need.
- › More bespoke incentives should be offered to employers to encourage them to employ more people through supported employment schemes, such as '...Project Choice'
- › Employment schemes such as the new 'Kickstart' programme need to include earmarked funding to help disabled jobseekers. Generic schemes are unlikely to offer the tailored support needed and therefore risk disabling people further.

Access and Inclusion

- › Our members are very concerned about the ongoing problems they have accessing buildings and facilities enjoyed by everyone else. Despite 25 years of disability discrimination law in this country, disabled people are often excluded in a way which would be viewed as unacceptable if it happened to any other protected group.
- › We believe that the law offers little protection because it is too difficult to enforce, relying to much on individuals to complain.
- › We recommend a new approach with local or regional enforcement carried out by statutory agencies or commissioned VCSE organisations. They should

have powers to investigate complaints, carry out spot checks and apply enforcement orders.

- › Feedback from members also points to a lack of consideration by Government during the COVID crisis, in terms of disabled people's needs. This has been evident in many Government communications, which have not addressed the needs of different disabilities, either in content or in presentation. We believe central Government should set the standard for accessible communication, leading by example.

Public Attitudes and Awareness

- › Feedback from our members also suggests that levels of public understanding of disability remain low. Discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping are still sadly commonplace.
- › Government should look to user-led community groups to assist in changing attitudes, as well as building more effective education programmes.
- › Better local enforcement (see above) and a commitment to reduce disability hate crime are also needed in order to protect people from unacceptable treatment.

We hope this input is helpful, and we look forward to an early opportunity to comment on the draft strategy in 2021.

Yours sincerely

Richard Boggie
Development Manager
Difference North East