

Climate Statement

March 2025



Summary

This statement says that we take climate change very seriously. It also says that disabled people are more at risk than others of experiencing the harmful effects of climate change. Also, disabled people often find it hard to join in what other people are doing to help stop climate change because of certain things that stop us from getting involved. These barriers can be removed, and that is what we try to do. So, we work with others to remove these barriers and try to dismantle them together.

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Introduction

[Note: read in conjunction with our Carbon Neutral Policy & Statement].

At Difference, we recognise we are in a climate emergency, and everyone must take action now to prevent a global disaster. Since 2019, the momentum of the climate emergency has grown, with Local Authorities, businesses and educational establishments all declaring emergencies. But emissions globally continue to rise, moving us towards more than a 2°C uplift. In the UK, this will bring hotter, drier summers and milder, wetter winters with an increase in the frequency of extreme weather. Sea levels are rising, biodiversity impacts are being impacted, and loss of agricultural productivity is also expected ⁽¹⁾.

At Difference, we recognise that disabled people are disproportionately affected by the effects of climate change and have needs that sometimes conflict with climate choices.

We are committed to fighting climate change in a way that continues to meet the needs of disabled people and does not sacrifice them. There can be no climate justice without disability justice.

Context

Difference has started work on the impacts of climate change in the North East, engaging with disabled people around their hopes and fears. This is the summary of the things we found and our 2024/25 consultations:

Fuel Poverty

Disabled Households have higher costs. Scope estimates these extra costs could cost the disabled household over £1000pcm ⁽²⁾. Many are related to energy costs to run equipment and provide essential warmth and sanitation. These needs mean that many of the 'personal measures' climate activists push on the individual are

detrimental to the health of disabled people. Furthermore, the extra costs faced by disabled people means they have less choice in terms of energy providers, as they must choose the cheapest or most accessible providers over those that have the highest renewable credentials.

Installation of Household Renewables

2.3 million social rented households (56%) contain a disabled person, and 1.3 million private rented households (28%) contain a disabled person⁽³⁾. This means that over 3.5 million disabled households rely on their landlords to offer green initiatives to them. These households will not necessarily benefit from the reduced energy costs of home solar panels.

Food Insecurity

In 2024, 69% of foodbank users were disabled people, highlighting the many difficulties disabled people have accessing healthy and low-cost foods. Disabled people are more likely to rely on food delivery services ('Meals on Wheels', Deliveroo, Uber eats, etc.). The travel impacts of these services are high. Disabled people are also more likely to need to purchase prepackaged food and preprepared meals from supermarkets. The plastic and packaging impacts of these needs are also outside the individual disabled person's control.

Single-Use Plastics

Disabled people cannot reduce, reuse, or recycle some of their essential medical equipment; a lot of this is plastic and single-use for infection control—items like plastic pinnies, gloves, syringes, catheters, tubing, and straws. The scope for changing or creating new materials is beyond the reach of the disabled person, and they rely on the government, NHS and researchers focussing on looking for sustainable alternatives. The reduction in single-use plastics in public spaces (i.e. plastic straws) has had a real and detrimental effect on disabled people's access to a free and complete civil life.

Active Travel & Public Transport

Difference has long campaigned on inaccessible transport ⁽⁴⁾. Until the significant flaws that exist in public transit in the North East are addressed, disproportionate numbers of disabled people are going to rely on private transportation methods.

Evacuation & Emergency Responses

As the expected extreme weather events increase, disabled people are more likely to be disproportionately affected by flooding, heatwaves and fires. The Grenfell Tragedy and resultant cladding scandal highlight the dangers posed to disabled people when their evacuation is not deemed necessary nor accounted for in planning. Disabled people have very little choice in the places they live and little say in their responses to extreme weather event planning.

Difference's Role in the Climate Crisis

Collective Advocacy

Difference has a dual role in its responsibility in the Climate Crisis. Its first role must be advocating for the needs of Disabled People in the North East in climate disaster planning at all levels—personal, community, and local, regional, and national government. Difference also has a role to play in educating the North East about the lives of disabled people and the nuances within the climate conversation. Difference should maintain that there is no climate justice without disability justice.

Our Actions for Climate & Disability Justice

In relation to keeping our own house in order, we will complete the following actions:

1. The Director and an identified trustee collectively takes responsibility for Climate Justice within the organisation.

2. Achieve Net Zero by 2028 or sooner by implementing the following:
 - a. Implement our Net Zero Policy.
 - b. Agree on information that needs to be collected; collect that information annually.
 - c. Calculate the total carbon footprint in January each year, the first arriving in January 2026.
 - d. Offset carbon footprint with an investment in tree planting with the UK Woodland Carbon Code, 2026.
 - e. Costs are to be calculated, added to full cost recovery calculations, and embedded within core cost calculations.
3. Difference staff to advocate for climate-friendly disability justice at local, regional and national levels, thinking about the distribution of resources, reducing waste, and how society adjusts to the impacts of climate change in a disability justice way.
4. Collaborate with other DPOs in the North East to advocate for plans that are inclusive of disabled people and relevant to the geographical context.
5. Educate others on disability justice in the context of climate change
6. Prioritise investment in sustainable practices and the purchase of sustainable equipment
7. Progress will be monitored and discussed at board meetings.

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