

# Access to the Everyday

*Disabled people's experiences of daily life in North East England*



**Difference  
North East**

**2026**



# ABOUT DIFFERENCE NORTH EAST

Difference is a campaigning and policy organisation representing disabled people across the North East.

We are a Deaf and Disabled People's Organisation (DDPO), led by and for the people we represent. Our mission is to reduce discrimination, increase access and inclusion, and build a fairer region where disabled people can take part fully in everyday life.

We campaign, lobby, research, and train to influence the policies and systems that affect disabled people. Our growing network of members and allies helps to shape our work and strengthen our collective voice.

Join us as a member or ally for free at [www.differencenortheast.org.uk](http://www.differencenortheast.org.uk).

Registered charity number: 1170789  
Patron: Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson

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# Foreword



**Dr Christopher Hartworth**

Director

Difference North East

This report sits on top of a great deal of work and preparation which, as a reader, you will not see. The work for this report started in January 2025, when we reached out and engaged with disabled people and their organisations across the North East, explaining that we wanted to hear from disabled people about what made their lives difficult and easy.

This resulted in a series of in-depth focused sessions led by disabled people from Teesside to Northumberland. There were also other events held by organisations that supported disabled people who fed into our research. These engagement events allowed us to really dig deep and examine those issues in great detail.

From the transcripts and their analysis came a clear set of themes, which we explored further with our membership over the summer and autumn. This produced deeper insights and intelligence. From detailed social research analysis to further investigative surveys and fact-checking, in this report we bring you what we think is a reflection of disabled realities in the North East of England.

The picture we set out here is shaped by the broader national context in which disabled lives are unfolding.

Disabled households now need an additional £1,095 each month to reach the same standard of living as non-disabled households (Scope, 2025), and nearly a third of disabled people in the North East live in poverty (JRF, 2025).

At the same time, national policy remains unsettled. The Universal Credit Act (2025) brings major changes to the benefits system, the Timms Review of Personal Independence Payment is due to recommend further reforms by autumn 2026, and changes to Access to Work mean many people are receiving less support than before. With the Casey Review of Social Care not expected until 2028, long waits and unmet need continue.

These pressures are felt especially sharply in our region. Around 21% of people in the North East are disabled, the highest proportion in England (ONS, 2021). Only 47% of disabled people are in work, compared with around 80% of non-disabled people (ONS, 2021; NECA, 2025). This is why national decisions on welfare, employment and access matter so deeply here, and why disabled people's voices must be central to every conversation about change.

**Against this backdrop, the insights in this report point clearly to the priorities disabled people told us matter most: Getting from A to B, Being Respected, and Getting Better Information.**



## Introduction

**Our research finds that disabled people in the North East are being failed on the basics. From access to attitudes, the everyday is often inaccessible.**

This report brings together what disabled people across the North East told us, through conversations, focus groups, and a regional survey. The early focus groups shaped the survey questions, and together they reveal consistent themes about daily life in our region.

Everything in this report is rooted in what disabled people told us directly. The experiences shared with us build a clear picture of the barriers people face every day, and the impact of feeling disrespected, judged, or dismissed.

It is a reminder of how far we still have to go to make everyday life accessible to everyone, and that progress starts with listening to disabled people.

Throughout this report, you'll see a mix of composite case studies, verbatim quotes from disabled people, and insights from our survey. More detail on who took part and how we carried out the research can be found in the Appendix.

**“Respect starts with believing people when they say what they need.” Alice, 50, Middlesbrough**

# Case Study

We start with Helen's story as it reflects barriers many disabled people described: everyday places that aren't designed with disabled people in mind, and the impact this has on getting around.

## Helen, 53, Darlington

Helen says the challenges she faces start the moment she reaches the high street. Most days she feels like the environment is working against her. **"All them shops on the high street, they're not accessible at all. Most of them, they are all steps up into the shops."**

Even when she gets inside a building, the basics still let her down. She's lost count of how many places aren't set up for disabled people in any practical way. **"You go somewhere and the disabled toilet's being used as a storage cupboard."**

Attitudes make a difference too. Helen often feels judged for simply being out in public. **"People think if you're disabled you shouldn't be out on your own."**

Being out can also be exhausting. The effort it takes to navigate places adds up over the day. **"It takes a lot of energy out you being out."**

Unpredictable and broken pavement make being out feel risky. She plans her routes carefully now, avoiding certain areas entirely. **"The pavements are shocking, uneven, broken, you're scared you're going to go flying."**

For Helen, these aren't minor inconveniences. They shape where she can go, how long she can stay out, and what she can access in her everyday life.

# Disabled People's Voices

These quotes come from the focus groups we ran across the North East. They offer a snapshot of the everyday experiences disabled people shared with us.

## The extra cost of disability

"Because you have got a condition, a long-term condition, you're penalised straight away, you have to pay more. Food, washing, everything for a disabled person is a hell of a lot more expensive." [Megan, 47, Hartlepool](#)

## Feeling worn down by systems

"Every conversation you have, they make your life so unnecessarily hard, and then they berate you for being angry about it. Of course, I'm bloody angry about it." [Rachel, 50, Darlington](#)

## Wanting a future where disabled children are understood

"So I just want him to grow up in a world that is sort of more understanding and accepting of our difference and that difference is really important." [Ciara, 33, Amble](#)

## Trying to access taxis

"What I need is for taxis to treat people in wheelchairs the same as everybody else but they don't do that. You can't pre-book a taxi but people can pre-book a taxi but you can't do it for wheelchair taxis. I've experienced that, I know what it's like, you just get bounced..."

[George, 54, Hartlepool](#)

## Being included

"A lot of decisions are made about us without us being asked anything. They don't include disabled people at all." [Patricia, 62, Darlington](#)

# Headlines

# 88%

of disabled people said they had been disrespected, judged, or dismissed in the last year.

# 64%

of public transport users faced regular and persistent access barriers.

# 68%

struggled to get the support or information they needed from public services.

# 0%

felt supported or listened to after dealing with services.

From our research, three clear priorities emerged for disabled people in the North East:

**Getting from A to B: transport and access**

**Being Respected: attitudes, rights, and dignity**

**Getting Better Information: communication and services**

The sections that follow take each of these priorities in turn, starting with transport and access.



# Getting From A to B

**Disabled people told us transport and access remain among the biggest barriers to daily life.**

Transport is one of the clearest examples of how disabled people are cut off from everyday life, but it's not the only one. From digital booking systems to public toilets and new developments, access barriers still shape how, where, and whether people can travel.

Our research echoes this picture, with clear evidence from disabled people in the North East about the barriers they face.

# Getting from A to B

## Disabled People's Voices

### Bus drivers refusing ramps

"Sometimes they're not putting the ramp down because people with the rollers, they're like 'Well, you can just step up'. Well, no, we can't we need the ramp. And they've been refusing people with rollers. But really you do need the ramp, because it's quite hard to balance..."

Mo, 33, Darlington

### Unstaffed train stations

"My nearest station is unstaffed so if you have any access issues you can't raise it."

Shaima, 41, Stockton-on-Tees

### Cobblestones making mobility painful and inaccessible

"I don't know if anyone else walks with kind of mobility aid, but I hate going to Durham, and I will leave my roller at home and take my stick, even though I need it. Because trying to push a roller over cobbles my wrists are in agony afterwards. They end up vibrating for hours and I can't control it."

Amber, 40, Stockton-on-Tees

### Public spaces without places to pause

"There's no benches anywhere. If you struggle walking you've nowhere to sit down. And the paths are all uneven, it's dead dangerous. You trip all the time. It's like they don't expect people to actually walk around here."

Shelia, 62, Hartlepool

# Getting from A to B

## Case Study

Lee, 61, Hartlepool

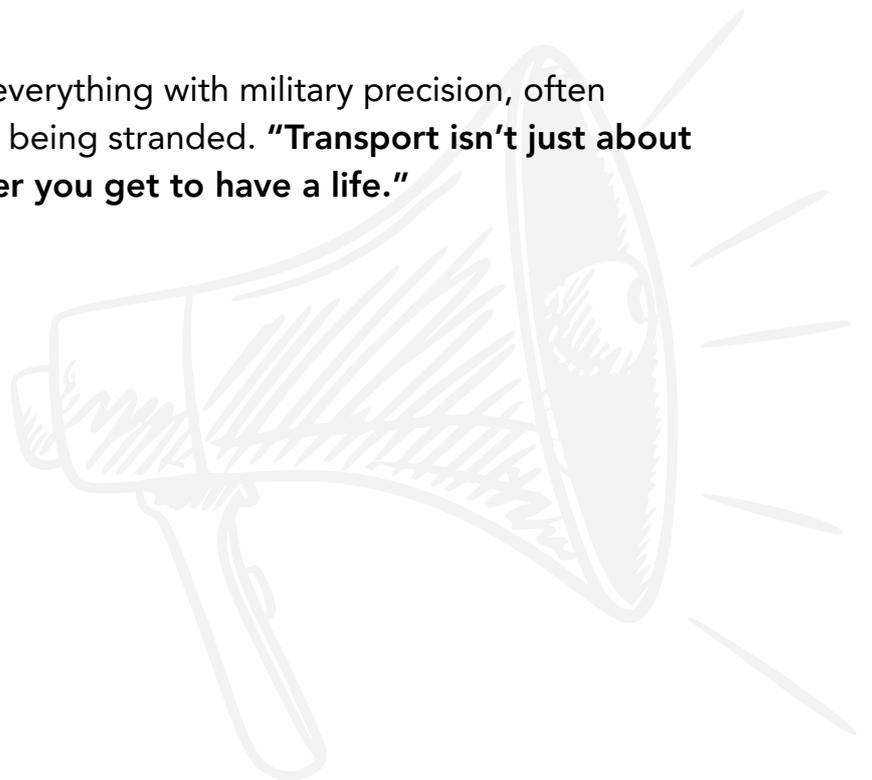
Lee worked for years in retail before a spinal injury forced early retirement. He enjoys socialising but says public transport has made that increasingly difficult.

**“The buses stop after seven. If you miss one, that’s you stuck,”** he says. Wheelchair taxis are nearly impossible to book, **“They say, ‘we don’t do those runs anymore,’ or they just don’t turn up.”**

Even the new flexible minibus service doesn’t reach his estate. **“It’s like we don’t exist,”** he says. **“They’ll drive through tiny villages but skip the places where people actually live.”**

Hospital trips are another ordeal. **“I can get hospital transport to Newcastle but not Middlesbrough, because it’s classed as too close. It’s ridiculous.”**

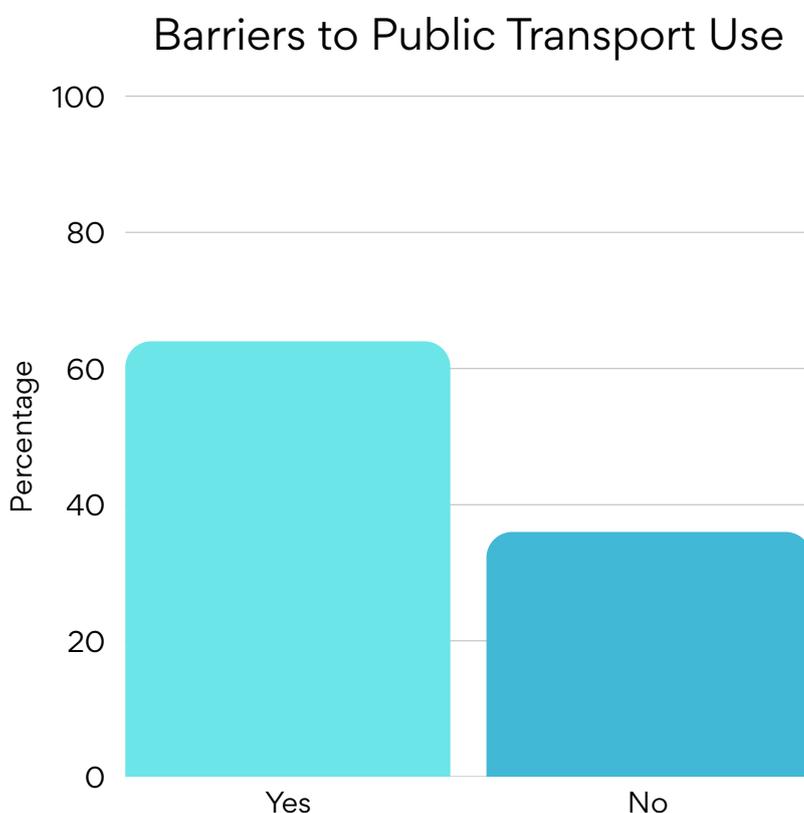
Lee has learned to plan everything with military precision, often cancelling plans to avoid being stranded. **“Transport isn’t just about buses, it’s about whether you get to have a life.”**



# Getting from A to B

## Barriers to Public Transport

64% of disabled people who use public transport said they faced barriers in the last year.

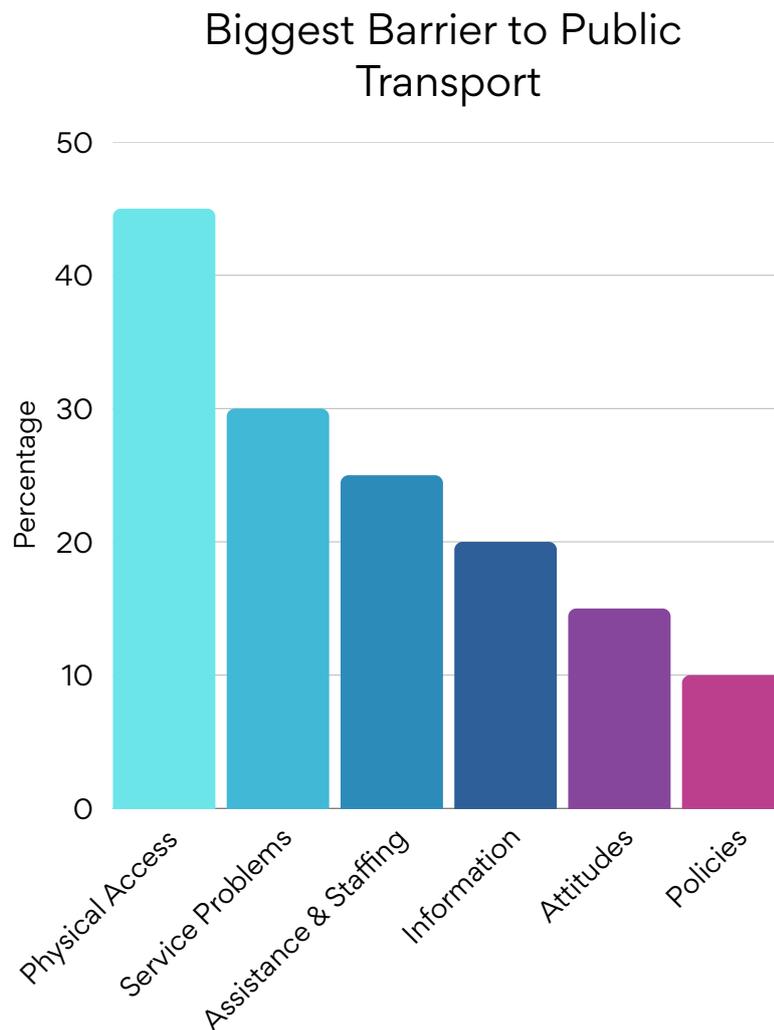


“I can’t just turn up and use a train unless I book passenger assistance and half the time it doesn’t turn up.” Shaima, 41, Stockton-on-Tees

# Getting from A to B

## Biggest Barriers to Public Transport

The most common barriers people reported were physical access (45%), service problems (30%), and lack of staffing (25%).

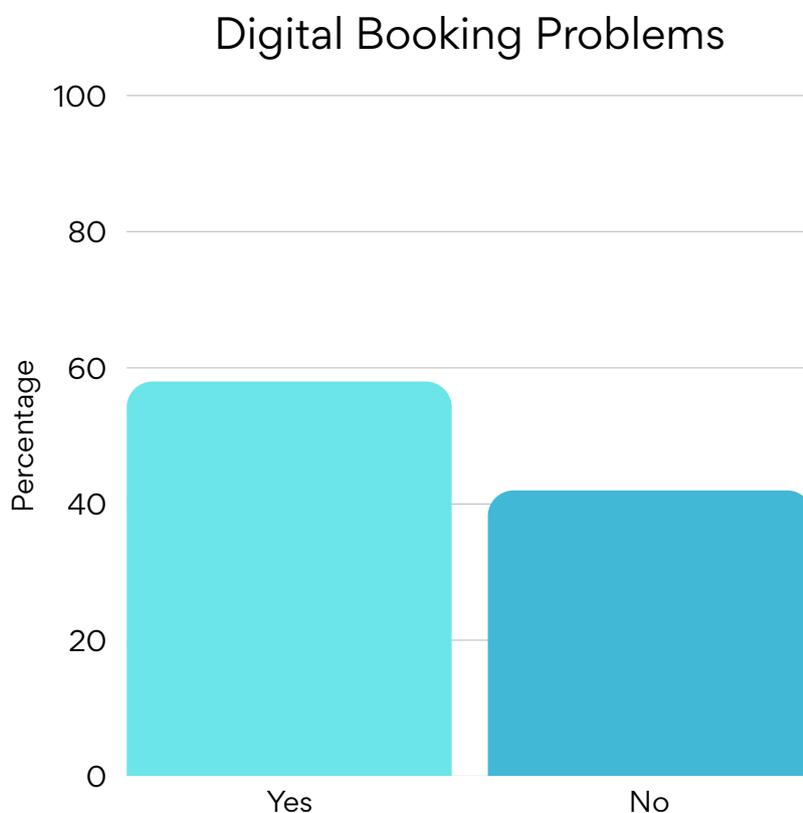


“I have a disabled bus pass, but I can’t use it for free before 9.30am. They assume disabled people don’t have jobs or kids to get to school.” Grace, 40, Stockton-on-Tees

# Getting from A to B

## Digital Booking Problems

Over half (58%) of those who book travel digitally reported problems with websites or apps.

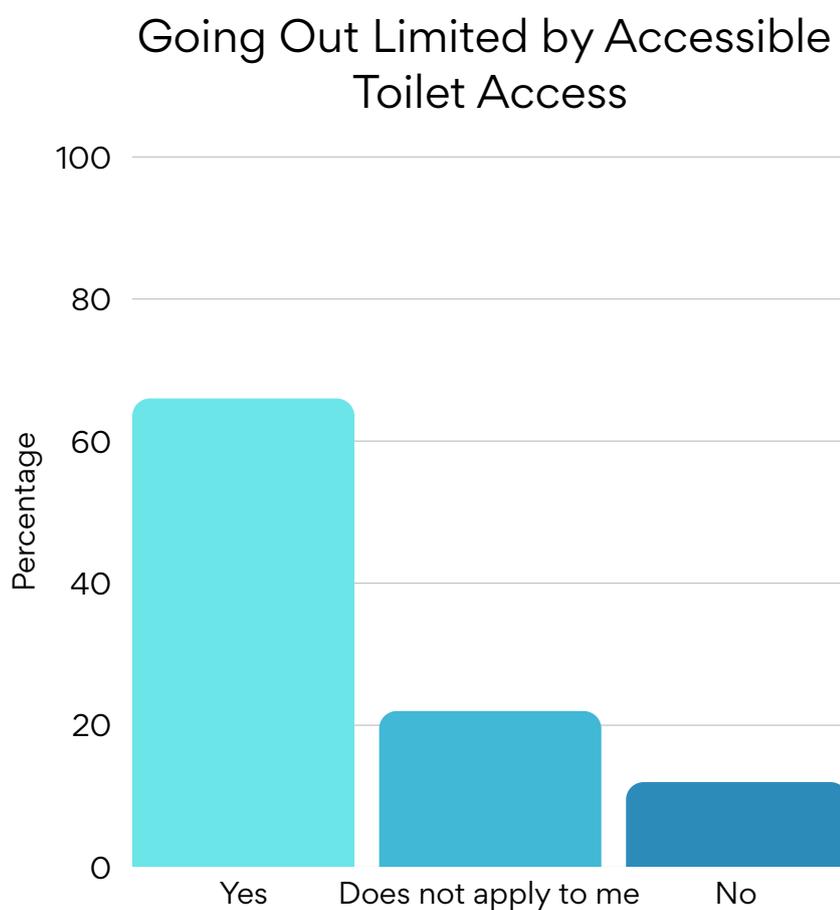


“Difficult to book for Passenger Assist online, had to revert to phoning and they changed what was already done, and took a long time. Nobody had told our local station.” Margaret, 68, Stockton-on-Tees

# Getting from A to B

## Accessible Toilets

Two-thirds (66%) of respondents said they had been unable to go out because there was no accessible toilet available.

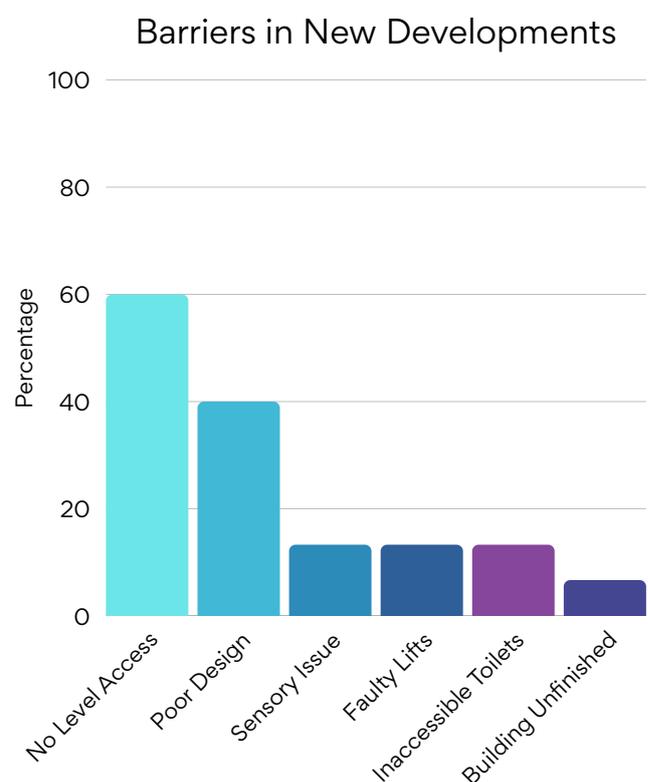
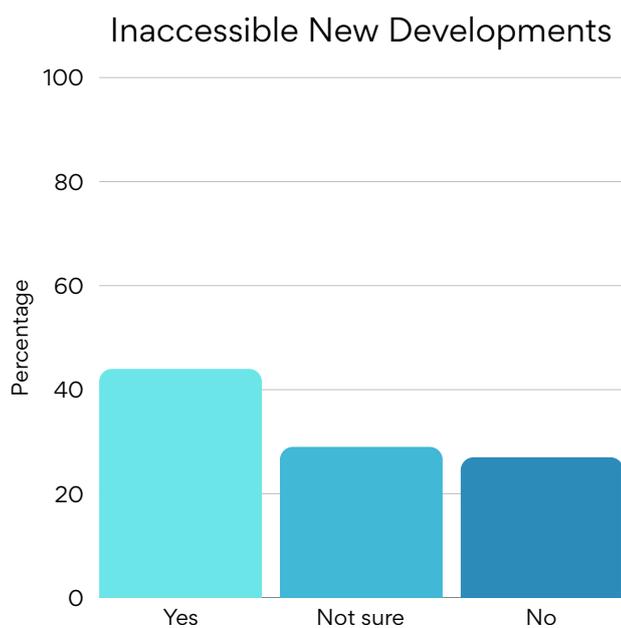


“I’ve had to cancel trips because there was no toilet I could use. It makes you feel trapped.”  
Craig, 44, Middlesbrough

# Getting from A to B

## New Buildings and Developments

More than four in ten people (44%) noticed new buildings or developments in their area that were still not accessible. When asked what made them hard to access, the most common issues were: no level access (60%), poor design (40%), and faulty lifts, inaccessible toilets, or sensory issues (13% each).

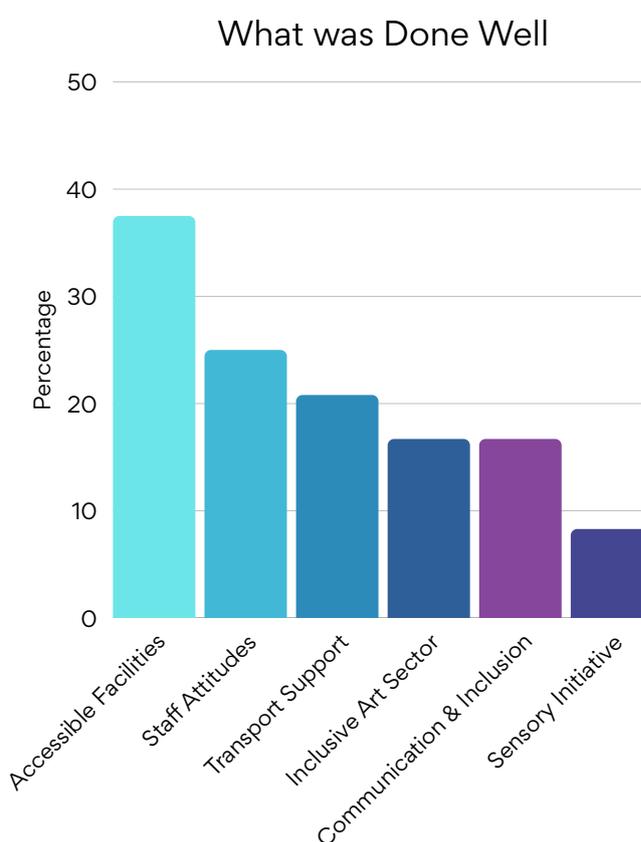
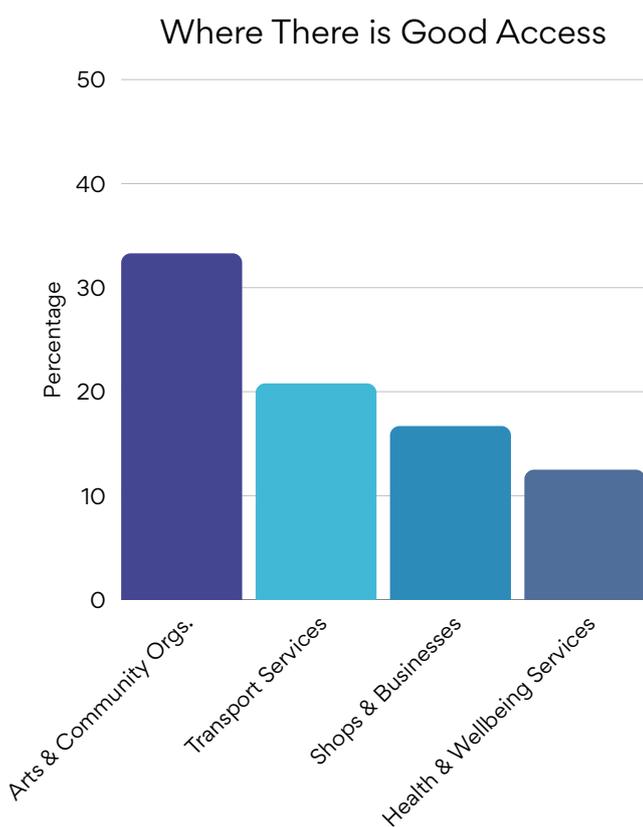


“They weren’t designed by disabled people, gradients on ramps are bare minimum rather than actually being easy to use.” Jonathan, 52, Gateshead

# Getting from A to B

## When Access Works

Arts and community organisations were most frequently mentioned as positive examples (33%). Respondents highlighted that when access works it is often because of good facilities and positive staff attitudes. Examples named included: ARC Stockton, Little Cog Theatre Company, Dry Water Arts, Navigator North and The National Glass Centre.



“ARC have disability equality training for all staff as standard. Inclusive performances. Accessible spaces, Changing Places toilets. It is one of the only places you can go as a disabled person for a night out in Stockton and know that it will be entirely accessible...” Sarah, 39, Stockton-on-Tees

# Getting from A to B

## What Needs to Change

The challenges disabled people face in the North East reflect national concerns. In 2025, the Commons Transport Committee described disabled people's access to transport as a "national embarrassment." National organisations, Transport for All (2023) and the National Autistic Society (2025) have highlighted the same barriers, from poor information to sensory overload.

From national to regional evidence, the findings show that transport and access remain among the biggest barriers to daily life. Based on what disabled people told us, here's what needs to change.

### PHYSICAL ACCESS & STAFFING

Steps, narrow doors, broken lifts and a lack of staff leave many excluded from buses, trains and stations. Passenger assistance can work well but remains inconsistent and unreliable. **Physical access needs to be prioritised, and staff should be available and fully trained.**

### SERVICE RELIABILITY & COVERAGE

Lateness, cancellations and lack of routes cut people off from daily life. Rural communities are especially affected, with some areas having no realistic bus or train connections at all. **Accessible transport must also mean reliable and joined-up services across the whole region.**

### ATTITUDES & CULTURE

The behaviour of drivers, the patience of staff, and the attitudes of other passengers can make the difference between a journey being possible or impossible. Accessibility features are often designed without disabled people's input, creating new barriers. By contrast, organisations like ARC Stockton and Little Cog Theatre Company show how much better access can be when disabled people are involved from the start. **Co-production should be the standard across transport and planning.**

### INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION

Booking apps, inaccessible websites and onboard announcements being switched off stop people from travelling independently. Uncertainty about obstacles ahead makes journeys stressful. **Operators must meet accessibility standards and keep alternatives like staffed helplines and counters open.**

### SENSORY & NEURODIVERGENT ACCESS

Quiet carriages aren't always provided, noise can be overwhelming, and long queues can be unmanageable. Nationally, 87% of autistic people report sensory discomfort or overload when using public transport (National Autistic Society, 2025). **Accessibility must include consistent, sensory-friendly travel.**

# Getting from A to B

## What Needs to Change

### TOILETS

Standard accessible toilets are required by law in new and refurbished public buildings, but they are often poorly designed or unavailable. For the 250,000 people who need Changing Places facilities, provision remains far too limited (Changing Places Consortium, 2025). **Better design and wider availability of toilets are essential so that disabled people can travel with confidence.**

### NEW BUILDINGS

Steps, steep gradients and heavy doors mean new buildings are still being built with barriers. Minimum standards are not enough if buildings remain difficult or impossible to use. By contrast, arts venues and community spaces that embed accessibility from the start show what's possible. **Stronger enforcement and better standards are needed so that new developments don't continue to exclude disabled people.**

### BUS PASS RESTRICTIONS

Time restrictions on disabled bus passes, including before 9:30am, shut people out of work, education, healthcare and caring responsibilities. These restrictions assume disabled people do not have jobs, school runs or appointments like everyone else. **These limits should be lifted so disabled people can use their pass whenever they need to.**



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## Transport and access remain some of the biggest barriers to everyday life.

But disabled people told us it's not only about physically getting from A to B, the way people are treated matters just as much. The next section looks at respect, rights and dignity.

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# Being Respected

**Disabled people told us respect matters in every part of daily life.**

In this section we look at how disabled people described experiences of disrespect, what they said would improve respect, and the barriers faced for in work.

**“We need to be centred in every decision that impacts us.” Linda, 42, Hartlepool**

# Being Respected

## Disabled People's Voices

### Facing prejudice

"I remember going to a pub once, he wanted to ban me going in because I had a speech impediment." [Laura, 48, Gateshead](#)

### Feeling judged as a parent

"When my daughter had her teeth out, the woman said to me I can't be a responsible adult because I'm in a wheelchair. I've been with her for general anaesthetics for years. But I can't look after my own daughter because I'm in a wheelchair?" [Rachel, 50, Darlington](#)

### Treated like an inconvenience

"You feel like you're just a burden. Like you're causing hassle by even asking. That's the attitude you get." [Noor, 45, Hartlepool](#)

### Feeling unsafe because of disrespect

"Sometimes it's not the place that's unsafe it's the people. It's the comments, the stares, the attitude. That's what makes you not want to go." [Lee, 38, Hartlepool](#)

### Being stared at

"People stare at you all the time. You can feel it, you walk in and people just look at you. It makes you feel out of place before you've even done anything." [Maya, 42, Stockton-on-Tees](#)

# Being Respected

## Case Study

Paul, 54, Gateshead

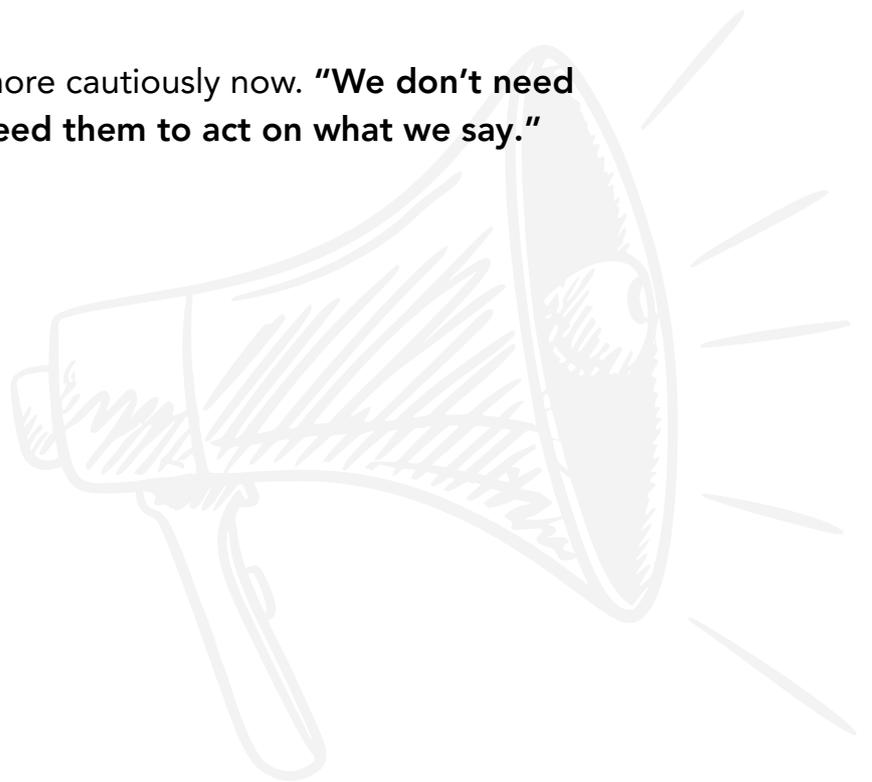
Paul describes himself as **"a fixer"**. Since becoming disabled, he's used his skills to advise his local council on accessibility improvements. But his optimism is fading.

**"They came, they listened, they took notes,"** he recalls. **"Then they did the opposite of what we said."**

When he asked why, officials told him the plans were already signed off. **"No one came back to check if it worked. You might as well talk to the wall."**

Paul believes that disabled people's insights are often treated as optional. **"We give our time for free, share our experience, and they still go ahead with something that doesn't work. It's like consultation theatre."**

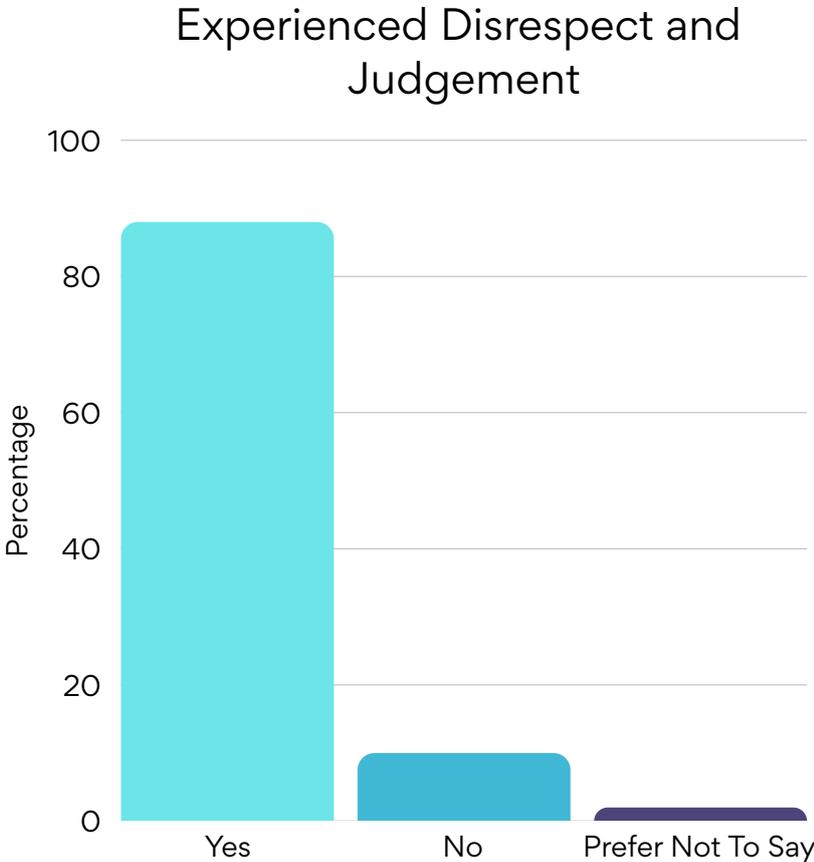
He still volunteers, but more cautiously now. **"We don't need another meeting. We need them to act on what we say."**



# Being Respected

## Disrespect and Judgement

A total of 88% of disabled people said they had felt disrespected, judged or dismissed in the last year.

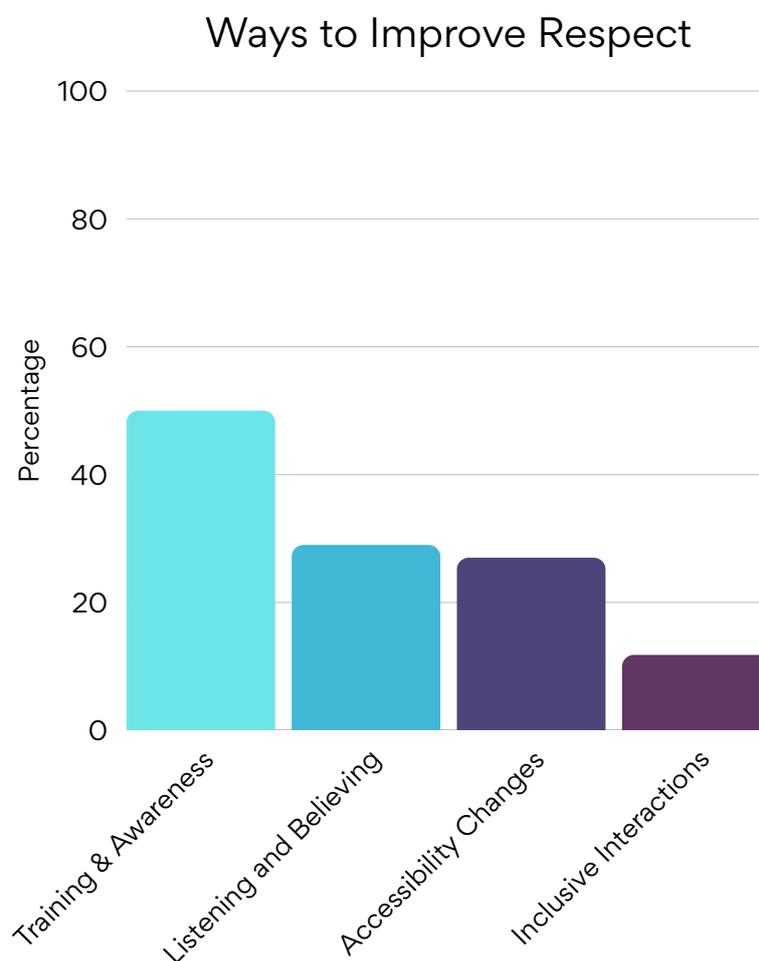


“Living with a disability or long-term health condition in the North East often means feeling invisible to the very systems meant to support us.” Nicky, 51, Middlesbrough

# Being Respected

## What Would Improve Respect?

When asked what would make the biggest difference, 50% of respondents called for training, awareness and culture change, 29% said listening and believing, and over a quarter (27%) said accessibility changes.

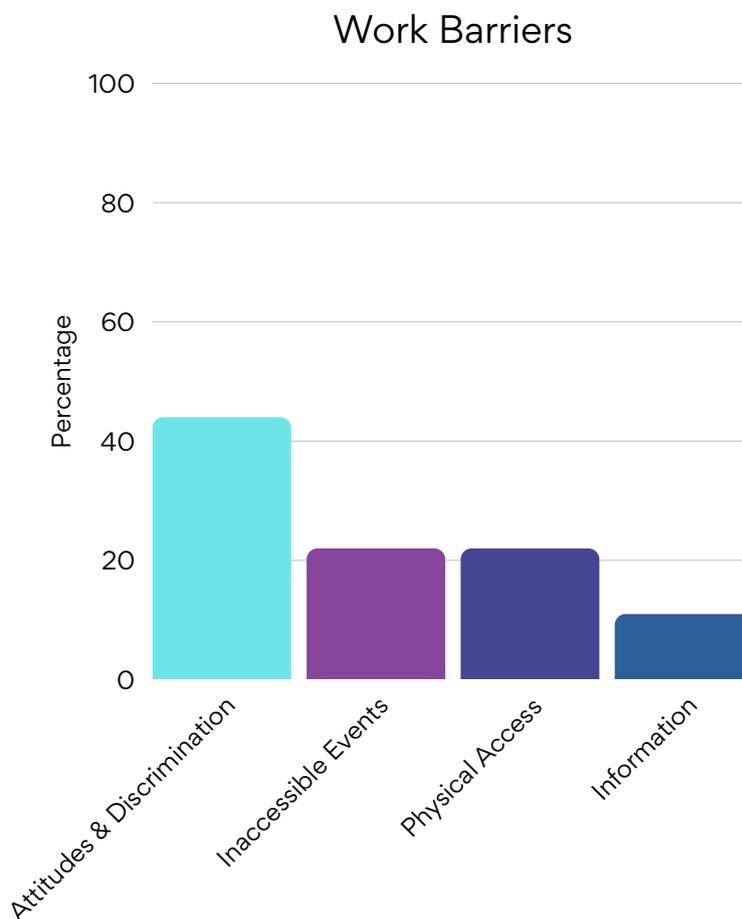


“Have Disability Equality Training based on the Social Model of Disability... and hold organisations accountable for change.”  
Mary, 64, Redcar

# Being Respected

## Workplace Barriers

Among those in work or seeking it, 65% said they had faced barriers in the last year. These included inaccessible venues, lack of adjustments, dismissive attitudes and inaccessible toilets. With 44% of respondents naming attitudes and inaccessible toilets. With 44% of respondents naming attitudes and discrimination as their biggest barrier to work.



“I can’t go to lots of work events as they hold them in inaccessible venues... I have a right to be there.” Joan, 56, Northumberland

# Being Respected

## What Needs to Change

Nationally, attitudes towards disabled people remain a serious barrier. Scope's 2024 survey found that two-thirds of disabled adults experience negative attitudes in daily life.

At the same time, reforms such as the Universal Credit Act 2025 and changes to Access to Work have been introduced without meaningful consultation, leaving disabled people feeling ignored.

The Government has launched the Timms Review to examine whether the PIP assessment is fair and fit for the future, and its success will depend on genuine co-production.

Our survey results show how disrespect and exclusion continue to shape disabled people's everyday lives. These recommendations are a starting point for what needs to change.

### WORKPLACE INCLUSION

Respect in the workplace means designing jobs, policies, and environments that work for everyone. Recruitment is often the first barrier so adjustments should be offered as standard, not only when people feel confident enough to ask. **Employers should carry out regular accessibility audits and co-design workplace inclusion plans with disabled staff, including accessible recruitment and adjustments as standard.**

### ATTITUDES & CULTURE

Training for staff across councils, health services, and employers must go beyond awareness sessions. It should be rooted in the Social Model of Disability and led by disabled people. A rights-based culture should shape how organisations think, act, and treat people.

**Organisations should embed mandatory, disabled-led training and publicly report how learning has changed practice.**

### REPRESENTATION

Disabled people should not have to fight to be heard. This means creating permanent structures where disabled people shape priorities, not one-off consultations. **Every public body should create co-production panels where disabled people have power to influence the policies that impact their lives.**

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**Feeling respected is also about being given the right information at the right time.**

Our findings show that many disabled people still struggle to get clear, consistent information from services. The next section looks at the theme Getting Better Information, and what needs to change so people can get the support they're entitled to and make informed choices with confidence.

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# Getting Better Information

**Disabled people told us good information makes everyday life easier.**

In this section we look at what disabled people said about getting information and support, and what needs to change so communication is clear, consistent, and accessible for everyone.

**“Services meant to support us shouldn’t be torturing us” Zain, 32, Redcar**

# Getting Better Information

## Disabled People's Voices

### No one explaining things clearly

"They talk to you in jargon, like you're supposed to know what any of it means. I just want somebody to explain it in plain English." [Helen, 56, Hartlepool](#)

### Information overload

"It's too much information in one go, my brain just shuts down. I can't process it when they fire it all at you." [Jake, 33, Stockton-on-Tees](#)

### Inconsistent information

"I don't know who to ask half the time. You get told something different depending on who you speak to." [Elliot, 41, Gateshead](#)

### Too much paperwork

"Forms, forms, forms. And if you fill it in wrong by one line they send it back. It's like a full-time job just trying to keep up with their system." [Pat, 58, Darlington](#)

### Finding information

"Nobody tells you what help is actually there. You have to find it out yourself." [Sarah, 49, Stockton-on-Tees](#)

# Getting Better Information

## Case Study

Amina, 39, Stockton-on-Tees

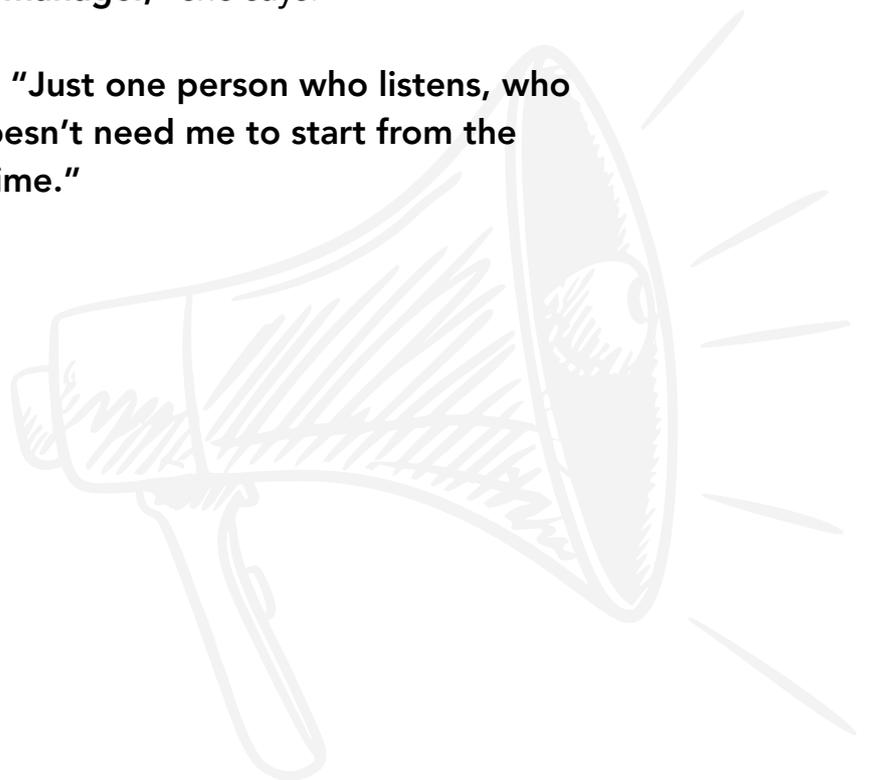
Amina lives in Stockton-on-Tees with her teenage daughter. She has spent years trying to get consistent help from health and social care services and has learned just how hard that can be.

**“Every time I ring, they tell me it’s the wrong department,”** she says. **“I’ve filled the same form three times and they still said they couldn’t find it.”**

When she finally gets through, it’s usually to someone new. **“You have to start your whole story again. It’s like shouting into a void.”**

She keeps a notebook of names, dates, and reference numbers, but the responsibility of chasing everything still falls on her. **“I shouldn’t have to be my own case manager,”** she says.

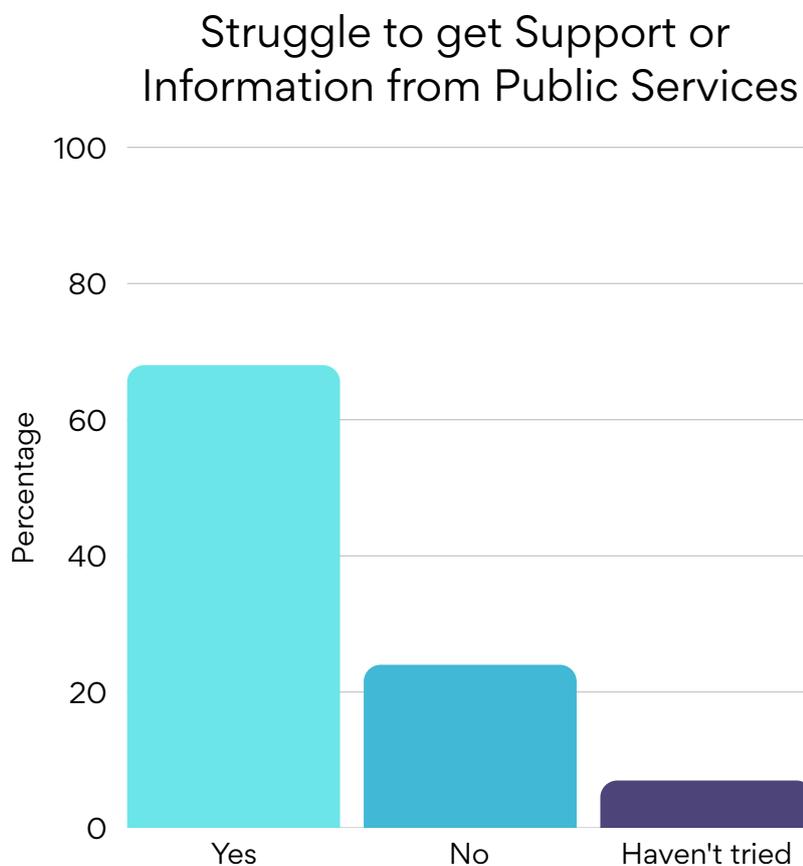
What she wants is simple: **“Just one person who listens, who knows my name, who doesn’t need me to start from the beginning every single time.”**



# Getting Better Information

## Support from Public Services

A total of 68% of respondents said they had struggled to get the support or information they needed from public services in the last year.

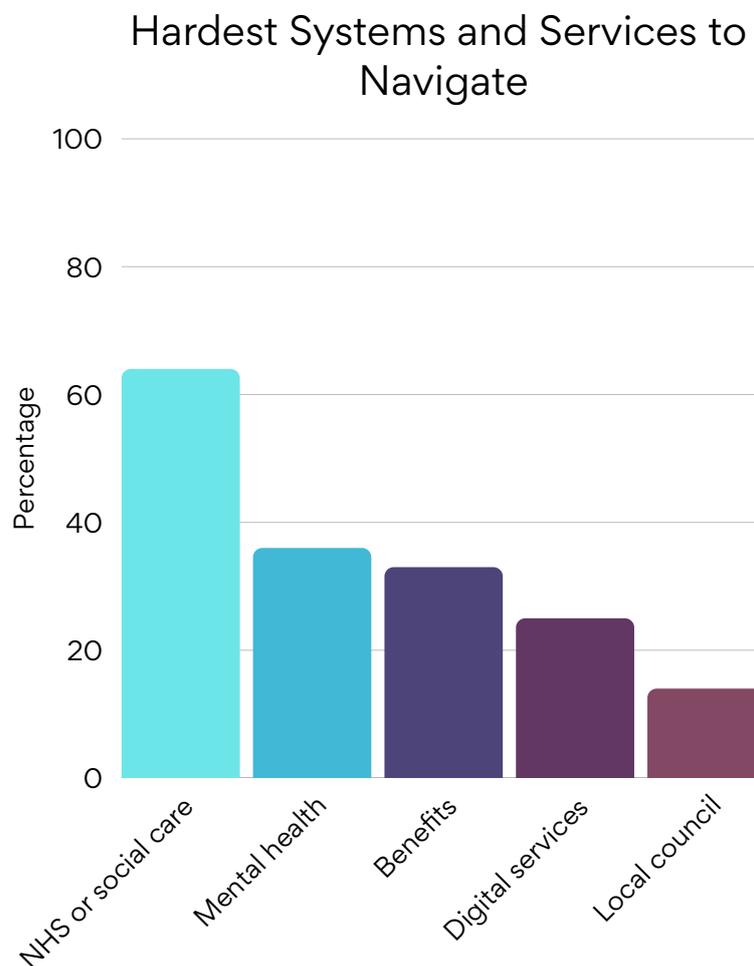


“We’re not asking for special treatment, just to be listened to. The systems meant to support us should not make us feel small.” David, 35, Sunderland

# Getting Better Information

## Hardest Systems to Navigate

When asked which systems or services were hardest to navigate, the NHS and social care came out top (64%), followed by mental health services (36%) and benefits (33%). Digital services (25%) and local council services (14%) also stood out.

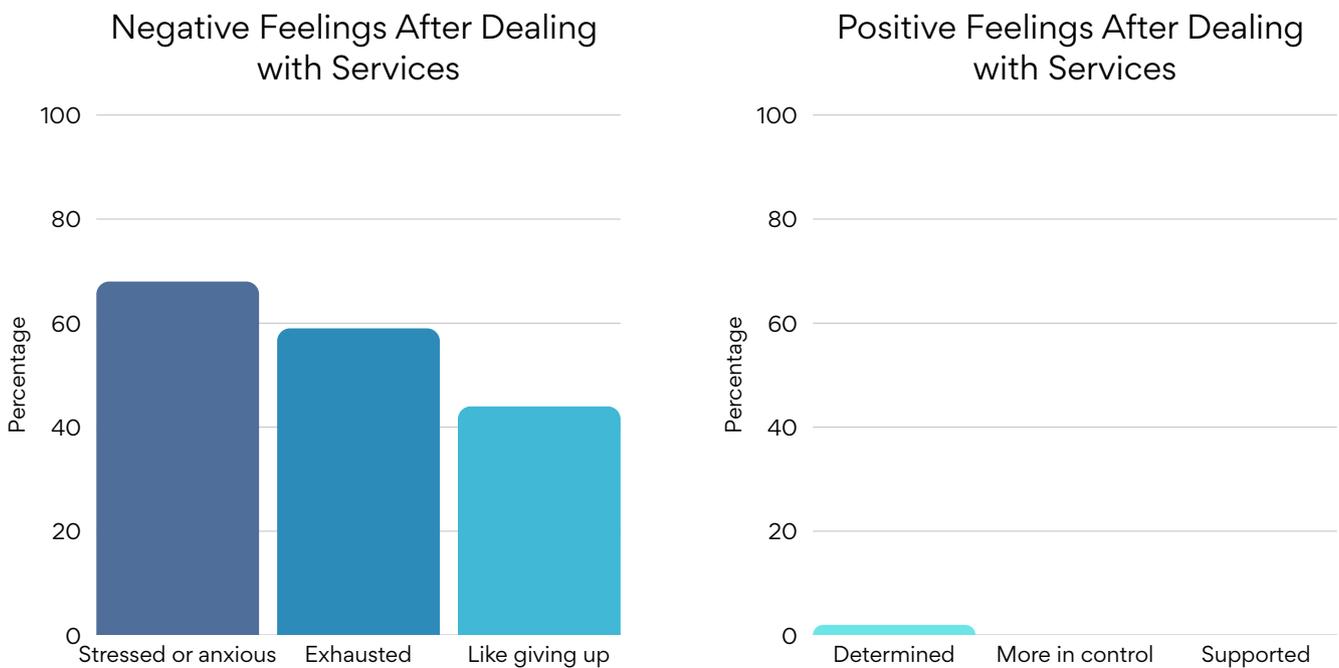


“Trying to get help feels like a full-time job. Every system wants a different form, a different number, a different story, and none of them talk to each other.” Marty 51, Durham

# Getting Better Information

## How Dealing with Services Makes People Feel

Dealing with services left most people stressed (68%) and exhausted (59%). Almost half (44%) said they felt like giving up. Not a single person said services left them feeling supported or more in control.



“It’s not just the forms or the waiting, it’s how small it makes you feel. Every time I try to get help, I come away more exhausted than before.” Micah, 27, Durham

# Getting Better Information

## What Needs to Change

National research shows that poor communication and inaccessible systems remain major barriers for disabled people (House of Lords Library, 2024).

The Office for National Statistics found that disabled adults face greater barriers than non-disabled adults when accessing services, including online information and digital systems (ONS, 2022).

At the same time, public bodies are moving more services online, risking further exclusion for those without accessible formats, digital skills, or assistive technology (House of Lords Library, 2024).

Nationally, some local authorities are piloting specialist advice hubs to help disabled people navigate benefits, housing, and health systems, but provision remains inconsistent (GLA, 2024).

Our research show how poor communication and inaccessible systems leave disabled people feeling exhausted and excluded. These recommendations are a starting point for what needs to change.

### TRAINED ADVICE SPECIALISTS

Local and regional advice hubs should include staff with disability expertise, so people get the right help first time. **Government and councils should fund and expand specialist disability advice hubs.**

### ACCESSIBLE COMMUNICATION

Letters, booking systems and websites must meet accessibility standards, with phone and face-to-face options kept open. **Public bodies should make sure everyone can get information in a way that works for them, whether that's online, by phone, or face to face.**

### CO-PRODUCTION IN SERVICE DESIGN

Disabled people must be involved in testing how information is provided, from hospital appointment letters to council forms, so that systems work in practice. **Public services should co-produce communication systems with disabled people to make them practical, accessible and respectful.**

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## Disabled people know what needs to change to make fair access to the everyday a reality.

The final section of this report shares what respondents most want people with power and influence to hear, and the priorities that would make the biggest difference to daily life.

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# Priorities for Change

**Disabled people have been clear about what needs to change.**

This section looks at what disabled people want decision makers to hear. The messages are clear: focus on the basics that make everyday life possible, listen to lived experience, and act on what disabled people say.

**“Listen and consult with individuals and disabled people’s organisations before making any decisions.”  
Ivy, 72, Sunderland**

# Priorities for Change

## Disabled People's Voices

These voices come directly from our survey. Disabled people were asked what they want decision makers to hear, and these are their words.

### Ask us

"Ask us about barriers and stop making travel more difficult than it need be." **Angie, 65, Newcastle**

### Provide support

"We are people, and need a range of support so that we can play a full part in society." **Kate, 66, Stockton-on-Tees**

### Be understanding

"We are judged as being drunk when really a little understanding is all we need to maintain our sense of worth." **Luke, 35, Darlington**

### Invest in disabled people

"Invest in access to speech and language, physiotherapy, educational support and work schemes... Give disabled people back their dignity and self-worth by creating a level playing field for opportunity to grow and prosper." **Simon, 38, Darlington**

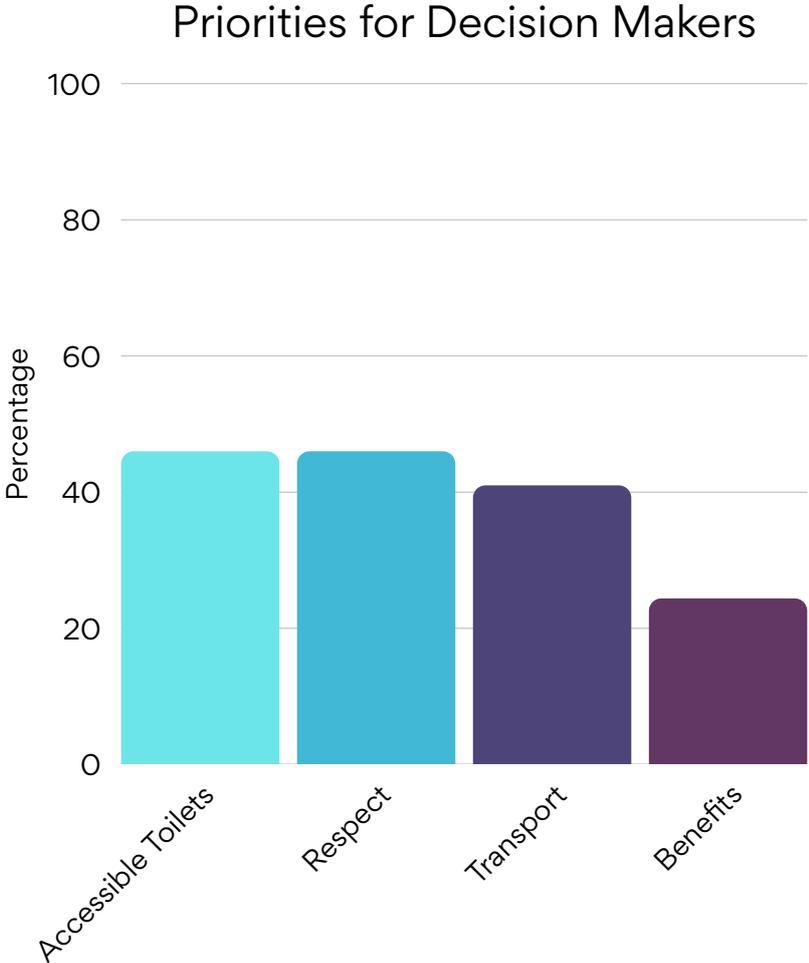
### Restore respect

"They don't fully know or understand disability. They are working to an outdated model of disability... respect for disabled people as human beings needs to be restored." **Hope, 55, Redcar**

# Priorities for Change

## Top Priorities for Decision Makers

Accessible toilets and respect came out joint top as priorities for change (46%), followed by transport (42%) and benefits (24%).

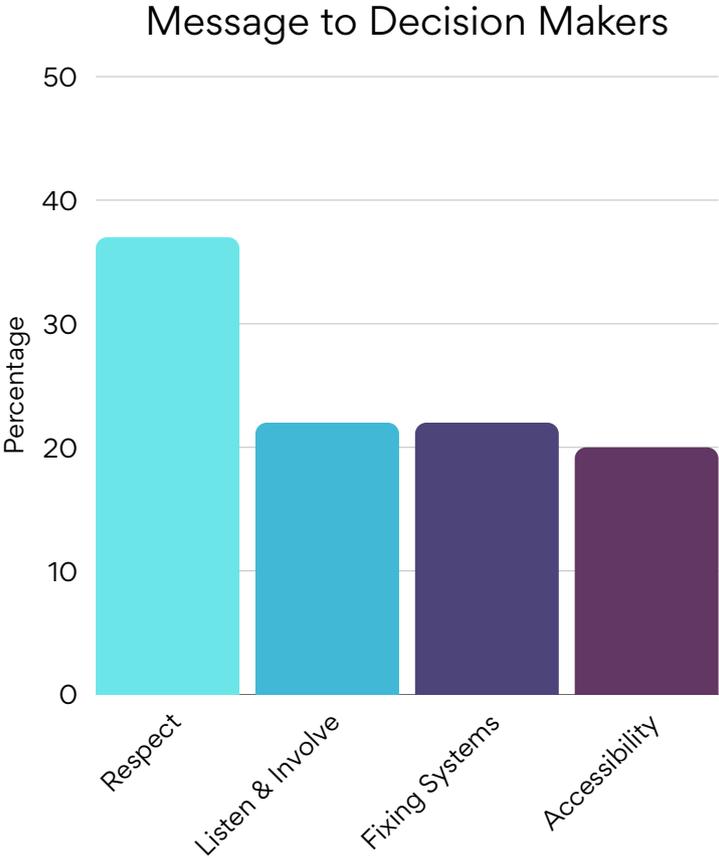


“Work with me and use creative thinking to get the best outcome, don’t just say no.” Lesley, 69, Northumberland

# Priorities for Change

## A Message for Decision Makers

When asked to share a single message to decision makers, the most common responses were about respect and understanding (37%), listening and involving disabled people (22%), fixing broken systems (22%), and improving accessibility (20%).



“This is not something we choose and it can happen to anyone at any time. Helping disabled people helps others.” Natalie, 56, Northumberland

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# Appendix

## Methodology

This research was carried out between January and October 2025 using a mixed methodology with a qualitative focus. There were several stages to the research consisting of:

1. In depth and detailed discussions with groups of disabled people across North east;
2. Primary analysis which created headings which we then took to wider consultation with disabled people and allies, using a survey;
3. Secondary analysis combining both primary research data sets, including the development of quantitative metrics;
4. Face validation [taking your findings back to the initial groups for reality and fact checking] through further membership consultations to check our findings.

Starting in spring 2025, Difference embarked upon a consultation process with groups of disabled people across the North East including Amble, Darlington, Gateshead, Hartlepool, Newcastle and Stockton-on-Tees. This enabled detailed discussions which used the following questions as prompts:

Do you think people treat you differently?  
What do they do?

Is it easy or difficult to get to places you need to go?

What do you need to live a good life?

Do you get tired of having to explain yourself?

What are the things you need?

How can people treat you better? What can they do? What do they need to know?

What needs to happen so you can get around the North East freely and safely?

How does communication need to change across the North East so you can be included fully?

What do you need to happen, now or in the future, to live your best life?

The discussions were recorded and transcribed. The data were then coded and thematically analysed, using grounded theory (1). Grounded theory was used as a theoretical framework as it allows for a participatory and a bottom-up approach and it permits a broad level of explorative research. In particular, it allows for in-depth exploration of social issues which produces conclusions that have been led by findings.

# Appendix

## Methodology (continued)

Within this broad approach, the evaluation employed a mixed methodology, using both qualitative and quantitative techniques and methods. Qualitative methods included focus group and individual semi-structured interviews with disabled people who were both members of Difference and those who were not.

The qualitative information produced by the research was formatted into manageable data using framework analysis (2) and constant comparative methods (3) were used to analyse the data to clarify meaning and examine, compare and contrast associations. Common themes became apparent and the report is structured in agreement with these.

Themes were quantified and presented in numerical format which allowed distribution on prevalence to be quantitatively examined amongst the data set.

Throughout the research, we present anonymous verbatim comments from disabled people with whom we have consulted to illustrate points raised in this report. Any names presented in the report are fictitious.

## Data

In total, 77 disabled people took part in this project. This includes 36 people who joined in-depth discussions (as described in the methodology) and 41 people who completed a survey in spring 2025.

Most survey respondents were over 35, 78% were women, and 88% identified as White British. While this provides a snapshot rather than a complete picture, the findings give a consistent view of some of the barriers disabled people face in everyday life.

Some of the graphs in this report are scaled to 100%, others to 50%, so differences between responses can be seen more clearly. In some cases, similar categories such as “yes, sometimes” and “yes, often” have been combined for clarity.

## Language

This report is written using the Social Model of Disability (Oliver, 1990). We focus on the barriers disabled people face in everyday life and not on people’s impairments.

When we refer to disabled people, we mean people who experience disabling barriers in society, including those with visible and non-visible impairments, chronic illness and neurodivergence.



## Acknowledgements

Difference North East would like to thank everyone who contributed to this report, the disabled people who shared their experiences and ideas, our members who continue to shape our priorities, and the organisations who helped share the survey.

## What happens next

**Disabled people's voices should guide every stage of work to improve access to the everyday in the North East.**

Difference North East will continue to campaign on the priorities that disabled people have identified: **fairer transport and access, better communication, and greater respect for disabled people's rights.**

We invite disabled people and allies across the region to join us in that work.

Add your voice at: [www.differencenortheast.org.uk](http://www.differencenortheast.org.uk)

# Difference North East

## Get in touch

For more information about Difference North East, or to join us as a member or ally, please visit [www.differencenortheast.org.uk](http://www.differencenortheast.org.uk)

You can also email [info@differencenortheast.org.uk](mailto:info@differencenortheast.org.uk) or find us on social media:

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