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House of Commons  
London SW1A 0AA

25 March 2025

The Rt Hon Liz Kendall MP  
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions  
By Email

Dear Liz,

I am writing with initial questions and concerns following the publication by your department of the Green Paper, Pathway to Work, which I believe will be harmful to Disabled people and those unable to work due to health concerns.<sup>1</sup>

When I asked a question in the House following the publication of the Green Paper, I stressed how vital it is for the voices of Disabled people to be reflected in any proposals for changes to Personal Independence Payments (PIP) and disability benefits.<sup>2</sup> I asked for co-production of any reforms, and cited a powerful letter sent by 25 Disabled people's groups and charities ahead of your statement, which begged for their views to be reflected in plans to fix the flaws in current welfare policies and processes, not just consultation as an afterthought.<sup>3</sup>

With over 100 groups and charities having now signed this open letter, Ministers need to provide meaningful opportunities to engage for these hugely respected organisations and offer assurances that the Government is willing to amend the Green Paper proposals. An equality impact assessment (EIA) should have been published alongside the Green Paper. I understand it will be published this week and believe it will show significant negative impacts on many young and Disabled people, as well as those with mental health issues.

**Could you set out a clear timeframe for the next steps?**

**Could you give me concrete details of how and when you will talk with the signatories of the open letter and take steps towards the co-production of any welfare changes?**

**If the proposals are assessed as harmful to Disabled people, young people and those with mental health issues, could you confirm that the plans will not proceed?**

In response to my question, you invited me to write to you with particular issues and concerns and offered a meeting with your ministers. I look forward to that meeting and will respond to the consultation once I have discussed the plans further with constituents and representative groups, but I would also like to provide some initial observations here.

## **1. Young people**

The context for any changes to how young people can claim benefits is very important. Young people have been let down by multiple failures of multiple previous governments, coupled with the legacy of disruption caused by the pandemic.



Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) is often impossible for children and young people to access, with figures from 2022-2023 revealing that 6,300 children waited over two years, with an average wait of more than three years before finally receiving treatment.<sup>4</sup> This must be addressed before your Government makes any moves to remove vital financial support.

I fear that the proposal to delay access to the health element of Universal Credit for those under the age of 22 will be very harmful to vulnerable young adults, preventing them from accessing the support they need to thrive. **Could you confirm which organisations representing young people you will be engaging with and that, if the proposals are assessed by the planned consultation to be harmful to under 22's, the plans will not proceed?**

## **2. Accessibility and engagement**

The failure to publish the Green Paper in an accessible format at the same time as presenting plans to Parliament is concerning. This approach to accessibility is not good enough. **Will you firmly commit to publishing any further information about welfare changes in formats that can be accessed by Disabled people from the start?**

**Will you also set out what further steps you will take to enable and encourage individual Disabled people to respond to the consultation?**

## **3. Increased resources for advocacy and community advice services**

After 15 years of local authority austerity, including cost pressures on the third sector exacerbated by recent changes to National Insurance, advocacy support to help people complete benefit applications is becoming harder to access for many people.

A leading advice charity in Brighton and Hove which helps Disabled people to access work and welfare benefits has explained to me that:

“Employment and Advice services are cut to our knees. Year-on-year cuts in funding through local government, cuts in support services through central and local funding, and grant bodies moving away from advice support. This upcoming year we will need to reduce our staff again by half. We are currently only able to open three days a week, but the number of enquiries is higher than when we were open every day.”

**Will you confirm that, if and when changes are progressed, advice services will be given additional resources to cope with the likely increased demand for support and independent advice?**



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#### 4. Divisive and stigmatising language

All people, irrespective of their health and subsequent ability to work, have the right to feel hope, dignity and self-respect. There has been a significant volume of loaded language in the lead up to the publication of the Green Paper which has concerned me greatly.

Ministers have a moral responsibility to not stoke division and tensions in our communities but, in recent weeks the language used has exacerbated stigma and fear. Accusations of people being ‘trapped’ on benefits and the ‘overdiagnosis’ of mental health issues, in my view serve to stigmatise those who struggle to work.

Instead, we should be rebuilding confidence in our social security system. Welfare reform pushed through under a cuts agenda to reduce national spending by £5 billion will not rebuild this confidence.

Going forward, I acknowledge the current work capability assessment (WCA) for Universal Credit and Employment Support Allowance (ESA) is not fit for purpose, we do not suggest a do-nothing approach.

**There are alternatives and many people have been clear that the Government could and should consider a simple wealth tax to provide the investment in people that is sorely needed.** A 2 per cent tax on assets over £10 billion would raise £24 billion a year; a measure supported by 68 per cent of the public.<sup>5</sup> This popular and fair tax option must be on the table alongside other measures which would increase the income generated from those most able to contribute to the welfare of society, and I hope that you will advocate for it within Cabinet.

I look forward to your response to my questions above and further clarity on the next steps from your department on these policies.

Yours sincerely,

Siân Berry MP  
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