



Glasgow Disability Alliance
Confident Connected Contributing



Dear First Minister,

We, the Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) movement in Scotland, urge you to use the imminent new parliamentary session to reset your relationship with disabled people and our organisations. More importantly, we are asking you to prioritise disabled people in Scotland by asserting your valued Leadership to drive forward an Immediate Priorities Plan, to tackle the poverty and inequalities which are blighting lives, eroding rights and leading to poorer life outcomes for disabled people including dying in higher numbers. Critically, this Plan, which was due for publication in June, must outline specific and resourced actions with accountability measures including political oversight at Cabinet level and we ask that you outline your commitment to this in your Programme for Government.

We collectively support the evidence presented to you at your recent visit to Glasgow Disability Alliance on Monday 14th August and we collectively and wholeheartedly agree with the points that were raised during this listening event. First Minister, disabled people in Scotland are facing a human and social catastrophe and there is abundant evidence to demonstrate this: the recent Scottish Human Rights Commission Report to the United Nations; Scottish Independent Living Coalition's response; a recent report from Glasgow Centre for Population Health and Glasgow Disability Alliance about impacts of cost of living on disabled people and a Policy Briefing from Inclusion Scotland's about Disabled People, Poverty and the Cost of Living to name a few. These are in the context of warnings from Joseph Rowntree Foundation about the deeply concerning numbers of disabled people in deep poverty and SCOPE's work highlighting the extra costs disabled people and their families face which on average total £975 per month. All of this evidence outlines a clear case for action.

Around 22% of the population in Scotland is disabled and this is a conservative estimate with numbers of those reporting or diagnosed with mental health conditions doubling since 2012 and numbers with Long Covid as yet unknown. 48% of all people who live in poverty, live in a household where someone is disabled and 40% of all children in poverty in Scotland live in a household with a disabled person. Despite the fact that disabled people have always been a large part of Scotland's people, we have never been a priority for the Scottish Government. It is fair to say that successive policies have not only failed to tackle disabled people's poverty, inequalities and poorer life outcomes but have widened these.

Even well intended policies such as Child Poverty and Self Directed Support have widened inequalities. This is because of a massive implementation gap between policy intent and delivery and a notable lack of Accountability for decisions made at local levels. It is for this reason that we have serious concerns about the Verity House agreement because, left to making decisions about policy priorities and how money is spent, local authorities will not prioritise disabled people over their wider communities. This is despite the high number of

disabled people within those communities which should make a compelling case to centre us in policy priorities and planned actions to enable better outcomes for our communities, cities and country.

There has also been an evident gap in political leadership when it comes to disabled people and we have repeatedly fallen through cracks from the financial global collapse to the pandemic, the Ukraine War and now the cost-of-living crisis. There has been a systematic failure of plans and absence of actions to specifically tackle disabled people's poverty and inequality and a related failure to involve DPOs in the planning and design of the many policies which most likely start with good intentions and end by making life worse. There is no end to these – Place Based approaches, 20 minute neighbourhoods, Active travel to name a few which demonstrate an absence of disability competence in their development.

First Minister, it should shock and shame us that the position of disabled people has deteriorated since the UN described our lives as a 'human catastrophe' in 2017, highlighting 'grave and systematic violations' of our human rights as a consequence of welfare reform and cuts to public services. Six years later, the fate of disabled people is in greater peril. A lack of focus and attention, combined with no accountability or political leadership and a genuine gap in disability competence politically and in your Government, has resulted in disabled people and our DPOs feeling dehumanised and deprioritised.

We appreciate that Covid, the cost of living crisis and the Ukraine War have taken Scottish Government attention and indeed have taken their toll on everyone. However, the disproportionate and catastrophic impact of these events on disabled people is clear: over 60% of people who died from Covid-19 in Scotland were disabled, with many facing increasing poverty, worsening health, social isolation, and cuts to essential social or health care supports that we rely on. And as you know, disabled people suffer more when public services like social care are cut because we are disproportionately more likely to need or use such services.

This is illustrated in one shocking example in Glasgow, where £21+m was cut from the Social Care budget despite the acknowledgement by public officials that this would result in a failure of their statutory public duties, leaving many without essential support to shower, eat or go to the toilet. This again highlights the lack of prioritisation of disabled people and our rights at local levels and we had hoped that a National Care Service would transform standards, accountability and delivery at local levels. But despite promises of this being 'co-designed' with those with 'lived experience' of services, we are now concerned to learn that, outwith this 'co-design' process, agreement has been made with local authorities, to maintain the status quo and that the needs of the people who use social care have been diluted or are in fact missing in negotiations and decision making.

It is alarming that disabled people are going without food and essentials due to rising cost of living and the already additional costs disabled people face. Our members cite going without essential social care due to eligibility criteria or rising care charges; they tell us they are not charging electric wheelchairs or other essential equipment and cutting back on food to try to cover heating or medical expenses. They also report reduced opportunities to socialise due to not being able to afford taxis and not having support to get out: this removes the protection of peer support, access to friendships and vital lifelines.

As Scotland's leading DPOs we urge you to intervene, using your Leadership to stop more disabled people dying and instead, create conditions which enable officials to focus on disabled people's equalities cross Government. Disabled people are aware that we need the same type of recognition as other equality groups but because of additional barriers, we also need redistribution of resources. We acknowledge that this will require resources but point out that over £45billion is being spent in public spending and ask you to make disabled people a priority and a political choice. This has costs for sure, but the costs of not doing it are much higher.

Your policy prospectus, talks of Equality- tackling poverty and protecting people from harm, Opportunity- a fair, green and growing economy including a Wellbeing Economy and Community- prioritising our public services and protecting and advancing rights. These priorities are defining characteristics of DPOs and we embody them. We can absolutely help your mission and these priorities. Indeed, you cannot achieve your mission without us – because there are simply too many of us. So, if disabled people are left out- the whole thing fails!

We urge you to exercise political leadership and properly resource the Disability Equality Strategy's Immediate Priorities Plan: this will empower and enable your Government to take real action to tackle the poverty and inequalities disabled people are facing, right now. An immediate action would be to include this commitment in your Programme for Government. This would signal your commitment to disabled people and our DPOs.

We would welcome a meeting with you soon to discuss taking forward a meaningful Plan and actions which will improve the lives of disabled people and we look forward to your response to our well founded and significant concerns.

Yours sincerely,

Disabled People's Organisations of Scotland

Disability Equality Scotland

Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living

Glasgow Disability Alliance

Inclusion Scotland

Lothian Centre for Inclusive Living

People First Scotland

Self-Directed Support Scotland