Written evidence submitted by Jacqueline Barnes-Jones (ATW0044)

1. Background:

As a Deaf professional working and residing in the North East, I have been receiving AtW support for many years. To date, I have valued this support, which has played an integral part in securing and ensuring continued employment. My experience has been expansive and my development such, that in recent years, I felt confident in establishing my own business. This has proven successful and business has shown steady growth; quite an achievement in the current financial climate. I have always praised AtW and past government forward thinking in relation to creating inclusive, anti-discriminatory laws, acts & policies protecting disabled people living in Britain. I believe this has ultimately saved public money by ensuring D/deaf people have opportunity to gain and remain in employment and away from welfare claims. With D/deaf people being more likely to be unemployed than their hearing peers, AtW is an essential and critical service.

2. Concerns over recent and proposed changes:

I currently receive 15 hrs a week communication support split thus: - 13 hrs CSW provision and 2 hrs Interpreter support. Past AtW provision has always been flexible and has predominantly concentrated on ensuring the annual agreed budget was not exceeded. This enabled a degree of flexibility with unused support in one week to be carried into following weeks. I believe this to be a sensible approach and works well for me. It has allowed the natural ebb and flow of business to take place, i.e. some quiet weeks, others busy, training days requiring full day support etc. The current inflexible and rigid approach proves impossible in sustaining basic business needs. Unused hours in a week are no longer carried to be utilised at a later date when needed, but are simply lost. This, in my opinion, is untenable for the following reasons:

- Business meetings and opportunities can be spasmodic in nature, as are some training opportunities.
- Current rules mean any extra weekly hours have to be applied for in advance, going through the process from call centre, awaiting forms, completing forms, awaiting decision and then the appeal process if applicable, a process, which can take in excess of 7 days and must surely result in extra admin costs and processes by already busy AtW personnel.
- If application is still being processed at the time of the requested support date, applications cannot be sanctioned in retrospect.

The above can result in: -

- Lost opportunities
- Lost revenue
• Barriers to both organisational and personal advancement
• Feelings of discrimination, exclusion, imposed barriers, loss of confidence and possible loss of job

3. Personal Impact:

As a self-employed service provider, my current workload incorporates both front-line, direct service provision to clients and also backroom administrative, office functions, which includes securing funds for the sustainability and growth of the business.

I recently had an opportunity to apply for a ‘Social Entrepreneur’s Programme’ Grant. I was successful in negotiating round one and invited to the next stage, which was to be a 4-hour meeting of presentations and one-to-one interviews with myself and other organisations. This invitation gave me little notice to arrange support. I currently take full advantage of my allocated CSW hours and, where possible, will use CSW support as opposed to Interpreter support, keeping costs down. However on this occasion placing a CSW in such a position would have been detrimental to me and completely unfair on the support worker. For this type of work a qualified professional interpreter would be required. Success of the grant application could secure funding of £4-5,000, going some way to keeping me in employment.

To date I have under-utilised my Interpreter support, however I now have a growing need for this. I felt there would be no problem in securing the extra 2 hours I would require for this meeting and duly completed the process of application with AtW. I awaited response, but in the meantime had to book and secure an interpreter for the date and time. Due to the shortage of qualified Interpreters, securing provision at short notice is problematic. The decision from AtW was to decline the support. The reason given was the support would benefit the business not me. I appealed and again waited response. This too was declined, as was a second appeal.

As a self-employed worker, benefit to me directly and benefit to the business are inextricably linked. I cannot undertake my job role effectively without benefiting the business. I am now left paying for support out of company coffers; an expense I can ill afford as a small business and which immediately disadvantages me against my hearing peers and competitors.

The above example, in my opinion, is proof of the extra time, stress, workload and costs put onto AtW through the new rulings. I am sure I am not the only one to apply and appeal etc. It personally disadvantages and restricts me in my job role, and creates barriers to my own growth and professional development, and that of my business. I do not feel I received equal opportunity on this occasion and have great reservations about the future should AtW continue with these changes.

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