Written evidence submitted by Claire Jones (ATW0081)

Introduction:

I am a qualified social worker for Bedford Borough Council. I am profoundly deaf. I work for the Multi Agency Support Hub (the best way to explain my job is that I work in a type of call center the details with enquiries re: protecting vulnerable children) Due to my deafness I need a qualified experience interpreter who has a few years post qualifying experience to enable me to do my job and be part of the team. The type of job I do is very sensitive as I am dealing with very vulnerable children and families. The interpreters I need to use must be confident in their job and are able to cope with the demands of my role.

The AtW application and assessment process, from the perspective of employees and employers:

1. I have been claiming ATW for over 9 years now. When I first joined Children Services there was always an allocated ATW assessor who I could contact on a regular basis. This person knew and understood my needs therefore I was able to have consistency with the process of my ATW. I think an assessment needs to be carried out on each person on a regular basis to monitor their needs instead of just stopping the claims. I have repeatedly asked for a face to face discussion with ATW in order to explain my needs and the needs of the Local Authority. This has been denied because this service is only offered in “exemptional circumstances”, I have asked for the meaning of this and was given no response. I have always been very keen to have a good relationship with ATW as I feel it benefits me having my needs met. We should be assessed on an individual basis, not treated generically.

2. Due to the recent ATW changes re employer’s contribution, this has an impact on the budget of the Local Authority. As you are aware there are several cuts happening in the Local Authority. I have been told by ATW that it is the Local Authority’s responsibility to support me in the work place, however, this was not the case when I joined 9 years ago meaning this change has not been included in the Local Authorities budget.

The adequacy of ongoing support, both in terms of the aids, adaptations and support workers provided through AtW, and the help and advice offered by DWP:

(Is AtW support for Deaf and disabled people good enough, and does it meet your needs? This is for both the help and advice they offer you and your employer, and the support they offer – interpreters, other support workers, aids and adaptations.)

3. When the changes were made to my contract, it affected me finding interpreters that would take the lower rate of pay. The interpreters I work
with are brilliant and professional and provide a very good service. Due to ATW changes I had a few problems finding someone who would take the reduced rate of pay until Bedford Borough Council agreed for me to continue with my freelancers as they have seen how professional they are in order to keep me safe as well as my vulnerable families. Before the changes I had no problems and things were running smoothly. We did advertise for 2 sign language interpreters, however, two applicants came forward and one was level 3 and the other was trainee level 6. The risk of employing someone who has less than 2 years post qualifying level 6 experience would have an enormous affect on me as the current interpreters I use have got years of experience of social care and court bookings.

4. When the changes happened, it affected my mental wellbeing as I found that I was doing additional work trying to sort out the mess I was forced to deal with. It also affected the interpreters as they had their own issues to sort out. I also want to raise that if an interpreter is employed by the Local Authority, they cannot be impartial, e.g. team meetings etc, therefore I would need to book another freelancer to cover these types of things, however, I was told by ATW they would not fund this which caused me a lot of distress as I did not know how I was going to be part of a team meeting. There are other issues that arose, i.e. how would the interpreter fit in within my role if they were to become “employed”?

The effectiveness of AtW in supporting people with mental health conditions and learning disabilities:

Not relevant to me so cannot answer the above question

AtW’s effectiveness in terms of helping disabled people to: secure a job, stay in employment, and develop their careers:

5. Without my ATW I CANNOT work in the job that I am qualified in. I would have not taken the job if I had known my needs could not be met. The government keep promoting the importance of disabled people being in employment. The only way I can stay in my job is to receive full ATW support. I do a lot of training and can only do this if my interpreters are freelancers as the Local Authority would expect the employed interpreters to be part of the training, therefore, I would be without communication support.

The steps taken so far by DWP to extend AtW, including its marketing and funding of the scheme:

6. At this stage I am sorry to say that there is no support. You cannot get hold of anyone to talk to these days. I feel taking the personal assessor role away has damaged a lot of the relationships between ATW and clients.
My Recommendations:

7. ATW needs to go back to the original set up. I also think the personal assessor should be replaced. There needs to be more on spot checks where possible to ensure the disabled person's claim's are being appropriately used. I use to have 3 yearly contracts but had to sent a yearly diary of 2 weeks of what support I had. This needs to be reconsidered. I want to chose my own interpreters within the allocated budget that I originally had, £40 an hour as my interpreters I use now HAVE never claimed that amount.

8. Disabled people have a right to decide what meets their needs best NOT ATW as they have never met us or seen us in the work place therefore they should find a way of maybe speaking to the claimant's employment manager to check the required need and, to ensure that the claim is genuine. I do not want someone telling me how to work. One of the worst things I get upset about is when I am renewing my claim or asking for changes, ATW will always ask me if I am still “deaf” and will my deafness continue. I produced a Doctors report when I first claimed ATW and it confirms that I am profoundly deaf due to injuries at birth. The way of questioning needs to be improved as we face barriers and discrimination on a daily basis.

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