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The Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP caroline.nokes.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Caroline,

National Disability Strategy

On 25 May 2023, I provided a response to your question in the House regarding progress on the commitments in the National Disability Strategy (NDS) and I promised to provide you with a further update in writing.

The 2021, NDS set out an ambition to improve the lives of millions of disabled people in the UK. In January 2022, the High Court declared the strategy to be unlawful because the UK Disability Survey, which informed it, was held to be a voluntary consultation that failed to comply with the legal requirements on public consultations. The DWP Secretary of State has been granted permission to appeal from the Court of Appeal. The Appeal was heard on 28 June and we await the decision of the Court.

As the NDS was found to be unlawful, and to comply with the High Court's declaration, we do not centrally track commitments included in the NDS. Despite this we are and will continue to be fully committed to supporting disabled people in the UK through creating more opportunities, protecting their rights and ensuring they fully benefit from, and can contribute to, every aspect of our society. The Government has made significant progress in delivering this aim.

This includes the Government support for the passage of two landmark pieces of legislation over the last year: the British Sign Language (BSL) Act and the Down Syndrome Act. In other key achievements, the Government has:

- delivered an additional £1 billion in 2022 and 2023 for the education of children and young people with more complex needs;
- launched an online advice hub on employment rights for disabled people;
- delivered improvements to the Access to Work programme;
- introduced a new Passenger Assist app supporting thousands of rail users;
- strengthened the Victims' Code with enhanced entitlements for disabled people;

- updated the National Design Guide and published the National Model Design Code to set out the characteristics of well-designed places and to help local planning authorities to prepare their own local design codes;
- made the King Charles III England Coast Path as easy as possible for disabled people to use - over 2,000 miles of the path has now been approved, with 850 miles open; and
- seen 1.3 million more disabled people in work now than in 2017 - delivering a government commitment 5 years early.

In addition to these achievements, I am attaching in the annex details of the huge amount of work the Government has undertaken to improve the lives of disabled people over the last 12 months.

I am sure you will agree that these are significant achievements but as a

Government we are keen to go further. On 2 December 2022 I announced our intention to produce a Disability Action Plan. The plan will go further in areas where we think joint action across Government departments can make a tangible difference to disabled people's lives in the immediate term - or where we can make meaningful progress towards a longer term goal, for example by improving disability data and evidence.

Ensuring the voice of disabled people is properly heard is a priority for this Government. To that end we will shortly be publishing a full public consultation on the Disability Action Plan which will run for 12 weeks. The consultation will be accessible to ensure all disabled people who want to take part can do so.

I look forward to working with you and colleagues over the coming months to ensure we deliver meaningful change to improve the lives of disabled people in the UK.

I will place a copy of this letter in the library.

With best wishes,

Yours ever,



Tom Pursglove MP

Minister of State for Disabled People, Health and Work

Annex

Government achievements over the last year

Highlights of some of the UK Government's main achievements to improve the lives of disabled people in the last 12 months.

Disability Unit (DU)

DU has:

- been implementing the British Sign Language (BSL) Act 2022, and set up the [BSL Advisory Board](#); the first dual-language board advising the UK Government.
- worked to raise the profile of disability inclusion internationally. For example, actively participating in successive [United Nations Conferences of State Parties on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (including 2022 and 2023), and the first-ever [G7 Disability Inclusion Summit](#) in September 2022.
- expanded the [Disability and Access Ambassadors](#) programme to include more sectors.
- continued to build an evidence base founded on the experiences of disabled people.
- worked with other government departments to better understand the impact of the cost of living on disabled people, including establishing a new UK panel survey to fill evidence gaps to better inform policy.

Cabinet Office (CO)

CO has:

- continued to improve the accessibility of its GOV.UK One Login system.
- worked with under-represented groups, including disabled people, to encourage them to apply for public appointments; the new Apply for a Public Appointment system has been developed to be as accessible as it can be.
- via the Government Property Agency, an executive agency of CO, published guidance on inclusive design of government property, such as in the Workplace Design Guide and technical annexes.

Department for Business and Trade (DBT)

DBT has:

- published plans in December 2022 to update the right to request flexible working legislation as part of the government response to its [consultation on flexible working](#), and committed to launching a call for evidence to develop understanding of non-contractual flexible working.
- been progressing important legislative changes through parliament via the [Carer's Leave Act](#) and the [Employee Relations \(Flexible Working\) Bill](#).
- made significant progress in cooperation on digital inclusion through trade agreements, which can help identify barriers and increase participation of disabled people in international trade.

Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)

DCMS has:

- worked - through the [Volunteering Futures Fund](#) - to make volunteering more accessible, including for disabled people.
- used capital funds it operates - including the Public Bodies Infrastructure Fund and Museum Estate and Development Fund - to support upgrades and projects aimed specifically at improving the accessibility of cultural venues.

Sport England:

- used £1 million of specialist disability investment as part of its ongoing 'recover and reinvent' work which scales up successful interventions that engage disabled people in physical activity.
- provided 47 grants through the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Activity Fund to projects benefiting autistic people.
- used £40 million in the 2 financial years to March 2023 through its [Together Fund](#) (a continuation of its Tackling Inequalities Fund) reaching 1,900 projects directly supporting disabled people.
- Birmingham 2022 had the biggest integrated para sport programme in Commonwealth Games history; this built on the Commonwealth Games' track record of inclusive para sport medal opportunities.

Arts Council England:

- increased investment in disability-led organisations; they increased the number of disability-led organisations in their portfolio to 32, compared to 2 between 2018 and 2022.
- allocated £4 million in grants from the [DCMS and Wolfson Museums and Galleries Improvement Fund](#) to 33 projects that aim to make museum collections more accessible for all visitors, through upgrades to displays, access points and interpretation.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund has been driving heritage to be more accessible:

- supporting employment for disabled people in museums and galleries through the [Curating for Change](#) programme.
- working with Vocal Eyes to improve digital access and information on cultural sites for blind and visually impaired people.

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

Defra has:

- in accordance with the National Trails and [By All Reasonable Means](#) quality standards:

- progressed work on the King Charles III England Coast Path, with over 850 miles now open to the public. At 2,700 miles, it will be the longest waymarked and maintained coastal walking route in the world.
- approved proposals for a new National Trail on Wainwright's coast-to-coast route across the north of England; this will see the existing 197 mile route upgraded to National Trail Standards. £5.6 million has been committed to upgrade the path and it is expected to open in 2025.
- supported nature recovery and mitigations for climate change through projects funded by the [Farming in Protected Landscapes](#) programme fund. A range of these projects will also improve accessibility of sites.
- established the [Preventing and Tackling Mental Ill Health through Green Social Prescribing Programme](#) in October 2020, which ran until 31 March 2023. The programme was successful, achieving around 8,000 referrals to green social prescribing.

Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ)

DESNZ has:

- been improving energy efficiency and tackling fuel poverty for low income and other vulnerable households through the ECO4 scheme, valued at £4 billion and running from April 2022 to March 2026.
- established a £3.8 billion Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund over a 10year period to improve the energy performance of social rented homes in England, on the pathway to net zero by 2050. The fund will offer considerable benefit to social housing occupants, who are more likely to be fuel poor, disabled, or have a long term illness.
- through the Sustainable Warmth Scheme, awarded £500 million in funding to local authorities in England, enabling local authorities to help low income households with energy efficiency and heating upgrades and improve health and wellbeing.
- set up the Energy Price Guarantee, Energy Bills Support Scheme, Energy Bill Relief Schemes, Energy Bills Discount Scheme and Alternative Fuel Payment Funds (Domestic and Non-Domestic) to support domestic and non-domestic consumers with the rise in energy prices, to reduce disadvantages caused by the increase.

Department for Education (DfE)

DfE has:

- published the SEND and AP improvement plan, in response to the Green Paper, in March 2023. The Improvement Plan establishes a single national system and sets out new national SEND and alternative provision standards.
- announced increased high needs funding, which includes:
 - an increase bringing local authorities' high needs budgets to over £10 billion in the financial year 2023 to 2024.
 - over £1.4 billion of new capital investment through High Needs Provision Capital Allocations (HNPCA) to deliver new places and improve existing

- provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or who require alternative provision (AP).
 - plans to build up to 60 new special and AP free schools.
- launched the [Universal Services Programme](#) in May 2022, helping the school and further education workforce to identify and meet the needs of children and young people with SEND earlier and more effectively.
- in 2023, trained staff in around 150 mainstream schools to use assistive technology and commissioned an impact evaluation to understand how assistive technology training can support wider SEND continuing professional development.
- been investing £18 million in the Supported Internships Programme, supporting more young people with SEND to prepare for and move into employment.
- continued to involve children, young people with SEND, and their parents and carers to improve the quality of policy development and implementation within the SEND system; their 3-year contracts with the Children’s Disabled Council (CDC) and Contact are worth £18.39 million.
- launched the £30 million [Short Breaks Innovation Fund](#), which tested approaches to the delivery of short breaks for children and young people with SEND. Year 1 of the 3 year programme started in April 2023, with funding for 7 local authority projects totalling £4.35 million.

Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC)

DHSC has:

- supported the Down Syndrome Private Members Bill, which became an Act in April 2022.
- published the first and second [Rare Diseases Action Plan](#), which sets out specific actions to improve the lives of people living with rare diseases, including those with a physical or learning disability.
- continued to incentivise the supply of supported housing for older people and adults with a physical or learning disability, autism, or mental ill-health through the Care and Support Specialised Housing Fund.
- continued to support disabled people on low incomes to adapt their homes to better meet their needs, through the £573 million Disabled Facilities Grant, which provides grants for around 50,000 people annually.
- published the [Building the Right Support Action Plan](#), which aims to reduce the number of autistic people and people with a learning disability in mental health hospitals.
- carried out Independent Care (Education) and Treatment Reviews for people with a learning disability and autistic people in long-term segregation in a mental health inpatient setting, to help move people in the most restrictive settings towards discharge.
- introduced a requirement that all Care Quality Commission registered service providers ensure their staff receive learning disability and autism training appropriate to their role through the Health and Care Act 2022.
 - To support this, DHSC has begun to roll out [Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training](#) on autism and learning disabilities.

- published the draft bill to reform the Mental Health Act in June 2022. The reforms will give people more of a say in their care and treatment, access to increased support from independent advocates.
- ran a call for evidence on what can be done to support mental health, wellbeing and suicide prevention; responses will influence the development of the Major Conditions Strategy, announced in January 2023.

NHS England (an executive non-departmental public body of DHSC) has taken steps to improve care for people with a learning disability and autistic people, including:

- publishing updated [Dynamic Support Register and Care \(Education\) and Treatment Review](#) guidance to prevent unnecessary hospital admissions for people with a learning disability and autistic people.
- publishing a national framework for assessing autism.
- conducting reviews of deaths of autistic people in the Learning from the Lives and Deaths of people with a learning disability and autistic people ([LeDeR - Learning Disabilities Mortality Review](#)) programme.
- publishing the third national collection of data on NHS trusts' performance against the 4 learning disability improvement standards.
- delivering annual health checks and health action plans for people with a learning disability, and piloting a new health check for autistic people.
- producing educational and video resources to support appropriate use of antipsychotic medicines for people with a learning disability.

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)

DLUHC has:

- set out a proposal to mandate the M4(2) higher accessibility requirement in Building Regulations as a minimum standard for all new homes. Updated [How to Let and How to Rent](#) guides were published in March 2023, including new information for landlords and tenants on adaptations.
- made the new model of shared ownership available to disabled people buying a home under the Home Ownership for People with Long-Term Disabilities (HOLD) scheme.
- announced, in February 2023, the outcome of the second round of Changing Places Funding, including providing funding of around £7.4 million to be shared across 64 local authorities, to assist in developing 120 new Changing Places Toilets.
- funded the Local Government Association to run a programme to increase the representation of disabled people in local politics. This includes:
 - a campaign to attract more disabled candidates
 - a disabled councillors leadership programme
 - one-to-one coaching for disabled councillors
- brought forward improvements in the support given to disabled voters at polling stations through the Elections Act. This came into effect at the local elections in May 2023.

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT)

DSIT has:

- introduced the Online Safety Bill. This will introduce vital new protections to improve the online experience for disabled users. All companies likely to be accessed by children will need to specifically consider children with 'a certain characteristic or members of a certain group', including disabled children. Companies will need to:
 - conduct regular risk assessments
 - take proactive, preventative measures to tackle priority illegal offences that could affect children
 - protect children from harmful content and activity, such as legal selfharm content and online bullying
- established the £30 million Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Data Science Conversion Course programme to address the lack of diversity and supply of talent in the UK AI labour market, funding:
 - universities to develop master's level AI or data science courses suitable for non-STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) students
 - up to 3,000 scholarships for students from backgrounds underrepresented in the tech industry. The programme is already having a positive impact, with 26% of scholarships having been awarded to disabled students.

Department for Transport (DfT)

DfT has:

- continued to make good progress on the commitments in the Inclusive Transport Strategy (2018), with the majority completed.
- published the Aviation Passenger Charter, a single point of information for consumers on their rights and responsibilities at each stage of their journey, was published in July 2022.
- following a consultation on Aviation Consumer Policy Reform in January 2022, committed to a range of both legislative reforms and non-legislative measures to ensure passengers have the right protections in place and receive the best possible service, including:
 - Legislating when parliamentary time allows to:
 - Provide additional powers to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to enforce consumer rights (including fines)
 - Mandating membership to an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) body for all airlines operating to, from and within the UK
 - Removing the compensation cap for damage of wheelchairs and mobility aids on domestic UK flights
 - working with industry to encourage voluntary uptake of these measures ahead of legislating.
 - working with the Disability and Access Ambassador for Airports, published a new training module on handling powered wheelchairs and the impact of damage on the passengers.
- Made improvements to the accessibility of rail, including:

- ensuring that all heavy rail passenger rolling stock is now compliant with accessibility standard.
- supporting the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) to develop an online model of stations to enable passengers to familiarise themselves with the layout and environment before they travel
- making Passenger Assistance booking easier through a RDG app, and reducing the booking window from 6 hours to 2 hours
- completing an accessibility audit of all stations in Great Britain, which DfT expects to make publicly available in 2024
- relaunched the Inclusive Transport Leaders Scheme, which incentivises transport operators to make accessibility improvements to their services.
- supported the passage of the Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (Disabled Persons) Act 2022, introducing measures to help disabled people to travel by taxi and private hire vehicle with the confidence that they would not be discriminated against.
- introduced the Public Service Vehicles (Accessible Information) Regulations (AIR) in May 2023, requiring audible and visible route, location and diversion information on local bus and coach services across Great Britain.
- Requirements will apply from October 2024, with most services expected to be up to date by October 2026.
- announced £4.65 million in funding to support smaller operators of local bus and coach services to provide audible and visible information.
- given £450,000 more in funding to Muscular Dystrophy UK for accessible toilets; this will extend the Changing Places Toilets scheme beyond motorway service areas.
- made over 100 updates to the Blue Badge digital service since 2019 - aiming to make the online application process as easy as possible - and introduced a new facility to allow Civil Enforcement Officers to check the validity of Blue Badges at the roadside.
- together with disability charity Motability, co-sponsored the publication of [PAS \(Publicly Available Standard\) 1899](#) to meet the need for standardised guidance on accessible electric vehicle public charging points.
- run its latest activity on the [it's everyone's journey](#) campaign for 6 weeks from September 2022.

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

DWP has:

- published [Transforming Support: The Health and Disability White Paper](#) in March 2023. This sets out how DWP will:
 - support more disabled people to start, stay and succeed in work
 - improve people's overall experience of the benefits system
- made changes which mean that people with less than 12 months to live can now use special rules to claim: Universal Credit; Employment and Support Allowance; Personal Independence Payment; Disability Living Allowance; Attendance Allowance.
 - This follows an evaluation where DWP heard from clinicians, stakeholders and people nearing the end of life. Before this, people could only use the special rules if they had 6 months or less to live.

- reduced the average new end-to-end Personal Independent Payment (PIP) customer journey to 14 weeks in January 2023, compared with 26 weeks in August 2021.
- launched new policies to support disabled people to start, stay and succeed in work, including:
 - a new information and advice service.
 - working with DHSC to increase the number of employment advisers in NHS talking therapies services in England.
 - a local supported employment programme helping people with learning disabilities and/or autism to find and stay in work.
 - a joint fund with DHSC for new ideas to boost health and welfare at work for small and medium-sized enterprises and self-employed people.
 - extra work coach support for people claiming Universal Credit and Employment Support Allowance - this is already live in two-thirds of Jobcentres and will be available nationally by 2024.
- successfully delivered over 6 million Disability Cost of Living Payments of £150 each to disabled people receiving certain benefits in 2022 and in June 2023.
- worked with DHSC to announce schemes designed to help disabled people start, stay and succeed in work. Through Spring Budget 23, they secured investment to support commitments including:
 - Universal Support: to introduce a new supported employment programme which will support economically inactive disabled people and people with long-term health conditions in England and Wales and with additional barriers, into sustained work
 - additional Work Coach time: expanding an existing programme in Great Britain that provides increased one-to-one personalised Work Coach support to help claimants of Employment and Support Allowance and the health component of Universal Credit to move towards, and into, work
 - WorkWell Partnerships Programme: piloting integrated work and health support for disabled people and people with health conditions who want help to remain in, return to or take up work
 - Vocational Support in Musculoskeletal Conditions (MSK) service pathways: introducing employment advisers in MSK service pathways in England, helping individuals with MSK conditions to return to or remain in employment
 - occupational health (OH): expanding the funding for the forthcoming subsidy pilot for OH services and launching a consultation in conjunction with the Department for Business and Trade on increasing uptake of OH
- rolled out the [Health Adjustment Passport](#) in May 2022, after a successful trial across the Jobcentre Plus network in 2021. In the financial year 2022 to 2023, applications to the Access to Work scheme went up significantly, and DWP has responded to that increase, reducing all waiting times and improving processes.
- initiated an [Adjustment Passport pilot](#) supporting disabled young people to transition from education programmes into work started in February 2023.
- worked with DHSC to deliver the Mental Health Productivity Pilot (MHPP), which has been running since 2019 to improve and support the mental health of employees. Over 800 businesses with an approximate reach of up to 650,000 employees have been involved.

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)

FCDO has:

- launched the [FCDO Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy](#), setting out the UK's approach to disability inclusion internationally until 2030, and published internal guidance for its staff consulting with DPOs on FCDO diplomacy and programmes.
- published the [International Women and Girls Strategy 2023-2030](#), which includes action for disabled women and girls. As part of this, FCDO aims to put women and girls at the heart of everything they do.
- announced a £31million uplift to the AT2030 programme at the Conference of State Parties (COSP) in June 2023. AT2030 works to improve access to affordable assistive technology (such as wheelchairs, hearing-aids, prosthetics and orthotics, spectacles, and digital devices) for people with disabilities in developing countries.

HM Treasury (HMT)

HMT has:

- collaborated with other departments to support delivery of disability policies, including sources of financial support to alleviate cost of living pressures on disabled people. At Spring Budget 2023, the government announced a suite of policies aimed at supporting people with long term health conditions to access the services they need, effectively manage their conditions and feel supported to return to, or remain in, employment. This included a HMT-led consultation on tax incentives for occupational health.

Home Office (HO)

HO has:

- also reviewed and revised their commercial arrangements for BSL. This led to a new commercial contract with a specialist BSL provider that ensures a simpler process for accessing services.
- used radio, TV advertising, social media and digital tools in its Police Uplift Programme to tell the stories of different police officers, including neurodiverse officers.
 - This has helped forces recruit a more diverse police force – data to 31 March shows that out of almost 60% of police officers who shared their disability status, 8.7% identified as having a disability.

Border Force, part of the Home Office, has:

- undertaken a number of initiatives to improve the travelling experience of disabled passengers, including launching its support for the Hidden Disability Sunflower Scheme, at ports and airports around the UK.
- ensured that accessibility needs are key requirements in the latest tendering exercise for its replacement e-Passport Gates.

Ministry of Defence (MOD)

MOD has:

- announced a Cyber Pathfinder scheme to increase inclusion in defence in 2021, as part of a commitment to become a more modern and inclusive employer. This is now open, and trains and assesses military personnel joining the National Cyber Force.
- taken over running Access to Work for people working in the MOD in April 2022; this change to disability and health-related policies ensures that disabled people have a more positive experience of working in defence.
- removed the barrier to entry to the armed forces for people who are HIV positive and taking pre-exposure prophylaxis medication to prevent HIV infection in June 2022.

Ministry of Justice (MOJ)

MOJ has:

- amended the law to allow d/Deaf people needing a BSL interpreter to serve on jury.
- invested over £1 million to recruit more diverse magistrates in England and Wales, including more disabled magistrates.
- published a [6-month update on the Neurodiversity Action Plan](#) which shows improved support for neurodiverse people including:
 - neurodiversity specialist services in 4 probation regions
 - the rollout of the Neurodiversity Support Manager role in prisons

HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS), an executive agency of MOJ, has:

- supported digitally-excluded users of courts and tribunals, including people with disabilities, to access online services through a partnership with We Are Digital.