

A BETTER FUTURE FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

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FOREWORD

The twelve million disabled people in Britain today have a huge contribution to make to our country, and a right to be treated on equal terms with any other citizen. But too many feel left behind by our economy and left out of our politics – at worst, stigmatised and threatened by negative language and a worrying rise in disability hate crime.

Former Remploy employees have spoken of their sense of betrayal when the help they were promised to find new jobs never came. Families hit by the Bedroom Tax talk of the desperate choice they face between sinking into debt or losing their home – despite needing all the space they have for carers or medical equipment. Disabled people who excel at difficult and demanding jobs, who are doing all they can to find appropriate work, or who need the protection of our social security system, have told us how angry they feel about sensational media stories that paint those who cannot work as ‘scroungers’.

Labour is determined to turn this around and make this a country where the voices of disabled people are heard, their contribution is valued, and the right to live a full and fulfilling life is made a reality.

We are proud that Labour has worked closely with disabled people to identify the issues that most affect their lives, and develop the policies we need to address them. This manifesto sets out our plan to continue that work in government.



Ed Miliband



Rachel Reeves



Kate Green

Introduction

Labour believes that Britain will only succeed when everyone has the opportunity to achieve their potential, and where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. We are proud of the progress we made under the last Labour government to remove barriers to equality and to improve the life chances of disabled people.

We took action to support disabled people's aspirations in education and in paid work, to promote the ability to live independently through our education, health and care services, and to stamp out the discrimination and outdated attitudes that too often hold disabled people back.

But over the last five years, many disabled people across the country feel that this progress has been put at risk. The disability employment gap has flatlined after falling consistently throughout the last Labour government. Disabled people have experienced a cost-of-living crisis, with energy and housing costs leaving their budgets increasingly squeezed. Thousands have had their incomes hit further by the cruel and unfair Bedroom Tax. And there has been a worrying rise in the incidence of hate crime against disabled people, creating a climate in which it is harder for disabled people to make their voice heard.

It will be the task of the next Labour government to turn this around, with a better plan to support disabled people to live independently, and to help them to fulfil their potential. We will restore the concept of independent living to the heart of our public services, tailoring our health, education and care systems to disabled people's needs.

We will ensure that our social security system always treats disabled people with dignity, and does more to support those who can to work. Our plans to address the cost of living crisis will raise the living standards of disabled people across the country. And we will take action to realise the long held goal of the disability movement of 'nothing about us without us', ensuring that disabled people can participate more fully in public life.

Labour's plan for a better future for disabled people

- Ensure young disabled people have the same chances as non-disabled people to study for the vocational or degree qualifications that lead to decent jobs.
- Give mental health the same priority as physical health, ensuring that all NHS staff have mental health training.
- Integrate health and social care, and offer disabled people an entitlement to a personal care plan, the option of personal budgets where appropriate, and a single named person to coordinate care.
- Overhaul the Work Capability Assessment and ensure that sick and disabled people are involved in reviewing its effectiveness.
- Introduce a specialist Work Support programme to provide tailored support to disabled people who want to work.
- Abolish the Bedroom Tax.
- Toughen up the law on disability hate crime.
- Ensure disabled people have a voice at the heart of government, inviting disabled people to sit on the cross-government committee that develops disability policy.

1. Putting independent living at the heart of public services

Public services can play a vital role in supporting disabled people to live independently, and the last Labour government's strategy for Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People set out a clear plan to give disabled people more control over their lives.

But in the last five years action on this agenda has stalled, and under the Tory-led government the proportion of disabled people who say they have choice and control over their lives has fallen. Meanwhile many disabled people are concerned by the fact the NHS they rely on is in crisis.

It will be the task of the next Labour government to ensure that our education, health and social care systems are supporting disabled people's ambitions and their ability to make their own choices about their lives.

Labour will make sure that our education system gives every young disabled person the opportunity to learn and gain new skills. We will work with teacher training providers to ensure teachers receive better training in working with disabled children or those with special educational needs. We will ensure our reforms to vocational education work for young disabled people, and that they have the same chances as non-disabled

students to go to university. Labour challenged the last government's plans to axe the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) and we will review support for disabled university students on coming into government.

Only Labour will protect and improve the NHS, with a costed plan to invest £2.5 billion, raised from a mansion tax, a levy on tobacco companies, and by cracking down on tax avoidance. This will pay for a new Time to Care fund, with 8,000 more doctors, 20,000 more nurses, and 5,000 new homecare workers. We will increase the priority given to mental health by introducing new training in mental health for NHS staff, giving people the same rights to psychological therapies as they have to drugs and medical treatment, and increasing the proportion of the mental health budget spent on children.

We will integrate our health and social care systems, taking a "whole person" approach to meeting needs. Disabled people will have an entitlement to a personal care plan designed with them and shaped around their needs, the option of personal budgets where appropriate, and a single named person to coordinate care. We will ensure that people in Assessment and Treatment Units spend as little time as possible in

these institutions, and end the disgraceful situation where some people remain in them for years.

We are committed to enabling disabled people to live independently. The next Labour government will work to develop a strategy for supporting the long term care and support needs of all disabled people. And we will protect users of the Independent Living Fund, working with disabled people to develop clear guidance to Local Authorities on how the funds that will be transferred to them should be spent.

Labour will:

- Protect the NHS and ensure that it focuses on mental health with new training in mental health for all staff.
- Give teachers better training on working with disabled children or those with special educational needs.
- Offer disabled people an entitlement to a personal care plan, the option of personal budgets where appropriate, and a single named person to coordinate care.

2. Ensuring the social security system treats disabled people with dignity

Labour has a proud tradition of ensuring that the social security system is there to support people when they need it, providing security to those who cannot work, support with the extra costs of disability and tailored help for those who want a paid job.

The system has fallen short of these expectations in the last five years. The flawed operation of the Work Capability Assessment, delays in processing vital benefits, and the rise in unfair sanction decisions at Jobcentre Plus have left many disabled people feeling let down and left behind. The Tory-led government's failing Work Programme has seen less than one in ten of those on disability benefits helped into work, and the vital support offered through the Access to Work programme has failed to reach all who could benefit.

Labour are determined that the social security system will always treat disabled people with dignity and respect. We will get a grip on the delays in Personal Independence Payments that have left thousands of disabled people waiting months for support, and guarantee that cancer patients are assessed within nine weeks. It is right that the social security system requires those who can work to take steps to find a job but these rules must be applied fairly and

proportionately. We will abolish targets for sanctions within Jobcentre Plus, ensure that hardship payments are always available swiftly, and put limits on how long people must wait when they challenge a decision.

The operation of the Work Capability Assessment has left many disabled people doubting that the system will provide support when they need it. Labour will overhaul the test to make sure that it focuses on helping disabled people who could work to access the support they need. We will provide everyone who goes through the assessment with a statement of how their condition may affect their ability to work, and the support that is available to help manage this. We will ensure that those carrying out the assessments are held to account with tougher penalties for wrong decisions, ensure that all premises where assessments are conducted are fully accessible, and that interviews are recorded. And we will give sick and disabled people a central role in monitoring the assessment process, with an independent committee playing a key role in the annual review of whether assessments are being carried out fairly.

Helping disabled people who can work to fulfil their potential in employment will be a priority for the next Labour

government. We will work with local authorities to deliver a new specialist Work Support programme to replace the Work Programme, which has helped fewer than one in ten disabled people who access it into work. And we will ensure that Access to Work funding is widely publicised, working with disabled people to ensure that everyone who needs it can get the support they need to take up, stay in or progress in a job.

Labour will:

- Overhaul the Work Capability Assessment and give disabled people a key role in monitoring how it is delivered.
- Ensure there are no targets for sanctions in Jobcentre Plus.
- Commission a new specialist Work Support programme, working with local authorities to give disabled people more support in employment.

3. Tackling the cost-of-living crisis for disabled people

Britain has experienced a cost-of-living crisis during the last five years, with energy costs rising, wages stagnating, and affordable housing increasingly out of reach. As the report of the Independent Taskforce on Disability and Poverty chaired by Sir Bert Massie made clear, the burden of rising costs can bear particularly heavily on disabled people, who often need to spend more on housing, energy and transport.

Since 2010, energy bills have risen by over £300 and we have seen the lowest level of peacetime housebuilding since the 1920s. Thousands of disabled people have seen their incomes hit by the Bedroom Tax, costing families on average over £700 a year.

Labour's first priority will be to abolish the Bedroom Tax. It is cruel and unfair, and hits disabled people disproportionately.

We will take action to build the homes we need, ensuring that by 2020 we are building at least 200,000 homes a year. We will unlock a new Future Homes Fund by requiring that the billions of pounds saved in Help to Buy ISAs are invested in increasing housing supply prioritised for first time buyers. And we will legislate to help those in the private rented sector get a better deal, by making three-year tenancies the norm, and ending excessive

rent increases by putting a ceiling on rent increases during the new three-year tenancies.

We will freeze energy bills until 2017, ensuring that bills can fall but not rise, and we will give the regulator the power to cut bills this winter. During the freeze, we will reform the energy market so that it delivers fairer prices. We will bring down energy bills by making homes more energy efficient, delivering a million interest free loans for energy home improvements in the next parliament. And we will offer at least 200,000 free energy efficiency improvements a year to households in or at risk of fuel poverty.

We know the difference accessible transport can make to disabled people's opportunities, and the extra costs they face when it is not available. We will require firms bidding for rail franchises to set out how they will ensure access for disabled people, expect all bus drivers to be trained in disability awareness, and work with the aviation industry to improve services for disabled travellers.

Labour will:

- Abolish the Bedroom Tax.
- Freeze energy bills until 2017 while we reform the market, and give the regulator the power to cut bills this winter.
- Require all operators bidding for rail franchises to set out how they will ensure access for disabled people.



4. Promoting the participation of disabled people in public life

We will only improve the life chances of disabled people when they are fully included in the decisions made about their lives.

But at present, disabled people's participation in public life is held back by a climate of increased fear and hostility, with a worrying increase in the number of people reporting disability related hate crime.

Labour will never tolerate discrimination, scapegoating or abuse of disabled people. So we will introduce a new offence of disability hate crime, sending a clear message that abuse of disabled people must be stamped out.

Unlike the Tories, who have pledged to 'abolish' equality impact assessments, we will ensure that all of our policies are assessed for their impact on disabled people. And we will involve disabled people directly in the development of policies that affect them, including through the creation of a new cross governmental committee, with membership jointly consisting of ministers from all relevant government departments and disabled people themselves, so that ministers and disabled people work alongside one another to set out future strategy, and steer priorities for change.

Labour will:

- Introduce a new offence of disability hate crime.
- Ensure disabled people have a voice at the heart of government, inviting disabled people to sit on the cross-government committee that develops disability policy.

